

## Trinity

### Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2020



#### Readings:

Isaiah 40:12-17, 27-31

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand  
and marked off the heavens with a span,  
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure,  
and weighed the mountains in scales  
and the hills in a balance?

Who has directed the spirit of the Lord,  
or as his counsellor has instructed him?

Whom did he consult for his enlightenment,  
and who taught him the path of justice?

Who taught him knowledge,  
and showed him the way of understanding?

Even the nations are like a drop from a bucket,  
and are accounted as dust on the scales;  
see, he takes up the isles like fine dust.

Lebanon would not provide fuel enough,  
nor are its animals enough for a burnt-offering.

All the nations are as nothing before him;  
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,

‘My way is hidden from the Lord,  
and my right is disregarded by my God’?

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.

Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;  
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

### **Reflection**

Next week, we begin a sermon series on the five events that made Christianity based on a book by John Pritchard. As I said last year, soon after the book came out, he does not reference Trinity because it is not technically a Biblical event although I think it has played an important part in shaping Christianity; it is a feast day invented by the Church to mark one of the central tenets of our faith – that God is one and God is three, as symbolised in the Triquetra, the Celtic Trinity Knot like the one above. I suppose it is a sort of theological Venn diagram and this one simply has the three interlaced arcs but sometimes a circle is also woven amongst them bringing an added unity.

There is never, of course, going to be any adequate way to explain the Trinity, no matter how many pretty diagrams and ingenious analogies we use. It is, to use Churchill's phrase, "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma." It is the embodiment of a paradox; two completely contradictory statements which are both true. Instinct tells us that is illogical. But life is full of paradoxes. I am told the bumble bee is an aerodynamic impossibility and yet it flies. The buzz phrase of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, "Less is more;" is also paradoxical. Other ages and cultures have had no difficulty in accepting paradoxes and early in the Church's history it had to come to terms with perhaps this most mysterious paradox of all.

The Jews had always been fiercely monotheistic, a trait which put them on a collision course with their polytheistic pagan Roman rulers. And we have to assume that Jesus followed the Jewish teaching. And yet he made frequent references to God the Father, God the Spirit and called himself the Son. He never preached a doctrine of Trinity as we would understand it but did use a paradox himself when he said that "I and the Father are one." (John10:30) So, the Christians of that early church somehow had to reconcile these sayings with their Jewish heritage which taught them that "I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other gods before me."

So why should we accept the idea of the Trinity. There three main reasons for accepting any doctrine –

1. The Bible teaches it
2. Christians have always believed it
3. It makes sense

Does the Trinity fulfil these requirements?

As we have seen, the Bible does not teach the concept of Trinity overtly, but there are references throughout the Bible from Genesis onwards that make it clear that the Godhead has three persons. For instance, we are told that “The Lord” appeared to Abraham but as the story unfolds, we find that he had not one but three visitors. (Genesis 18) I think we are safe in saying Trinity has Biblical authority.

And all three persons get frequent mentions in the New Testament so early Christians also accepted the Trinity. The theology was being worked out as early as the second century and was officially adopted as a doctrine by the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. So we are following established church tradition and the Anglican church has always been Trinitarian, invoking Father, Son and Spirit in its prayers.

And not only does it make sense, it is the only explanation that does make sense. Think not so much  $1+1+1=3$  but  $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ . God does not expect us to be illogical. He tests our faith, not our credulity and I think the Trinity gives us a beautiful symmetry.

But it is still hard to understand. Someone once said “If you try to explain the Trinity, you will lose your mind. But if you deny it, you will lose your soul.” That is probably a bit over the top, but it does highlight both the complexity and centrality of the belief. Far more important, however, than understanding the Trinity is actually experiencing them. Last week I described how each person of the Trinity played a part in Pentecost and the nurture of the early Church as a community. But they also play a part in all our lives. When we look at the Trinity, we see a family united in love and fellowship which inspires us to love each other in the same way. And we must welcome each of them and the gifts they bring but accept the responsibility that goes with them. We enjoy the love and Fatherhood of God but accept his authority over us; we thank the Son for the sacrifice he made for us but accept the commission he gave us to make disciples of the nations; we embrace the power of the Spirit but accept the responsibility it brings to work for the Kingdom. The Trinity will always remain a mystery to us, but we don’t have to have all the answers in order to be good Christians. The infinite God is inevitably too complex for our comprehension and yet all we need to follow him is the simplest of faiths – and there is another paradox!

Amen

## **Prayers**

### **Today’s Collect**

Almighty and everlasting God,  
you have given us your servants grace,  
by the confession of a true faith,  
to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity  
and in the power of the divine majesty to worship the Unity:  
keep us steadfast in this faith,  
that we may evermore be defended from all adversities;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

Amen

### **A Prayer for Trinity**

Almighty and eternal God,  
you have revealed yourself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
and live and reign in the perfect unity of love:  
hold us firm in this faith,  
that we may know you in all your ways  
and evermore rejoice in your eternal glory,  
who are three Persons yet one God,  
now and for ever.  
Amen

### **A prayer for love**

*'Love...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.  
Love never ends.'*  
(1 Corinthians 13:7-8)

Loving God,  
strengthen our innermost being with your love that bears all things,  
even the weight of this global pandemic, even the long haul of watching for symptoms,  
of patiently waiting for this to pass; watching and waiting, keeping our gaze fixed on you,  
and looking out for our neighbours near and far.  
Instil in our shaken souls the belief and hope that all things  
are possible with your creative love,  
for strangers to become friends, for science to source solutions,  
for resources to be generously shared so everyone, everywhere, may have what they need;  
for your perfect love that knows no borders to cast out any fear and selfishness that divides.  
May your love that never ends be our comfort, strength and guide  
for the wellbeing of all and the glory of God. Amen.

### **Blessing**

To God the Father, who loved us,  
And made us accepted in the Beloved:  
To God the Son, who loved us,  
And loosed us from our sins by his own blood:  
To God the Holy Spirit,  
Who spreads the love of God abroad in our hearts:  
To the one true God be all love and all glory  
For time and for eternity.  
And the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always.  
Amen