

Trinity Sunday – Sermon by the Bishop of Huddersfield

Readings: NT 2 Corinthians 13: 11-end Gospel Matthew 28: 16-20

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It is very good to be with you today as we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Trinity.

It used to be said that Vicars got their curates to preach on Trinity Sunday, so that they didn't have to try and explain what the Trinity was all about. Well, this year, for good or ill, you're getting the Bishop instead!

Our Bible readings immediately raise some problems for us, given the current situation. In 2 Corinthians, for instance, Saint Paul tells us to "greet one another with a holy kiss". Well, that would certainly break the lockdown rules for a start!

Having said that, there are some wonderful themes for us to consider here, that can help us understand more about what God is like and about how he calls us to serve him, even in these strange times.

And the first thing is this: that the God who has revealed himself to us in and through Jesus Christ is above all else a *divine community of love*. That is what we see throughout the ministry of Jesus, beginning at his baptism, at which he is affirmed as God's Son by the voice of his heavenly Father and is anointed for his ministry on earth by the Holy Spirit. *Nothing about Jesus makes sense unless we see and understand him as part of the Holy Trinity.*

Saint Paul sums up this central understanding of who God is in the closing words of 2 Corinthians, using the words that we know as "The Grace":

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

What the first Christians found as a result of their experience with Jesus during his life on earth, and with the Holy Spirit after the Day of Pentecost, was that they could only make sense of who God is by speaking of God as *both one and three* – or as the theologians would later say, three persons in one God.

Now in a very real sense the *theology* is less important (for them and for us) than the *experience*. What matters is that we should experience God in this same way – as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and as a divine community, who invites us to be part of that fellowship of love.

Whoever we are, wherever we come from, we are *invited* to be part of that divine community, sharing in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God our Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This is for everyone – and no one needs to be left out. That's the first thing about the meaning of the Trinity.

The second thing is this: just as we are invited to be part of this divine community, so we are also *called* to reflect that community in the way we live, and especially in our relationships with each other.

In 2 Corinthians – apart from the bit about greeting one another with a kiss, which we can't do at present – Paul says to the Christians two things: *agree with one another*, and *live in peace*.

What Paul is saying is that how we get on together as members of God's family, should reflect the same kind of self-giving love that exists between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Right now, this is something we really do need. It's the kind of loving care and compassion that people need in a time when many of us are feeling anxious and afraid. And it is the sort of loving community that many people are longing for when they are feeling isolated and alone. This is the kind of fellowship that we should be trying to create in our church communities, even though we cannot actually meet together physically in the same time and place.

And as I am in touch with clergy across our area, this is precisely what I am seeing happening time and again in different ways. We may not be able to greet one another with a kiss – but we can reach out to others and embrace them through a phone call, or even practically through some act of kindness. We are called to reflect God's divine community of love in the way we go about our lives and the life of the church.

Finally, and yes I know this isn't easy at present, we are *commissioned* to draw others into this divine community of love. Jesus says "Go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Well, you might say, how can we do that when we are stuck at home and can't even gather at church?

But in fact what I am seeing and hearing time and again is the way in which churches are finding new ways of connecting with people and of drawing them into the fellowship of the church. Through online services, on Sundays and during the week, through keeping in touch with people on the phone, through sharing messages of encouragement, of joy and of laughter, on social media – which has got to be better than the nasty stuff that so often flies around on the internet!

How we go about this *now* will lay important foundations for how we are able to do it once we can welcome people back into our buildings as the lockdown finally begins to ease.

So three things (what else?) about the Trinity and what it means for us:

- We are *invited* to join in the divine community of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- We are *called* to reflect that community of love in our relationships with one another
- We are *commissioned* to draw others into that community of love – both now and after the lockdown

Thank you for all that you are doing, and may God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love, now and always. Amen.