

Tarves Parish Church - Sunday 7 June 2020 – Trinity Sunday



“When they saw him (Jesus) they worshipped him but some doubted.” (Matt 24:17)

INTRODUCTION

It is now almost 3 months since we ceased to hold formal services of worship in the Church because of the coronavirus pandemic. From all that we have learnt about this virus it seems unlikely that we will be able to return to worship in the Church for some weeks yet. What have we learnt in this time about God? About ourselves? About worship? What might help us to continue to worship God in our own homes over the next weeks and beyond?

One suggestion might be to set apart a special space – perhaps a small table, on which you might like to place a candle or a cross or flowers or something that you find a useful reminder of who God is. If possible make it a space that you can visit not only on Sunday mornings with your laptop or ipad or written worship materials, but also a space where you can come to spend time with God during the week too. You might like to place upon it your bible or any book of prayers or any other devotional aid.

Over the next few Sundays I will make some suggestions about activities you might like to do and place on your table to prepare for (or reflect upon during and after) Sunday worship.

This Sunday is Trinity Sunday when we celebrate the being of God: Parent, Friend and Advisor; Creator, Brother, Wisdom. You might like to come up with your own three words to play on the characteristics of God, words that describe who God is for you. You might want to create something visual. Place the words or what you come up with on your table space.

Praise CH4 111 Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty

1 Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to
thee.

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

2 Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around
the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before
thee,
God ever living through eternity.

3. Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness
hide thee,
though the sinful human eye thy glory may
not see,
only thou art holy; there is none beside
thee
perfect in power, in love, and purity.

4 Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name in earth
and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

The Word of God: St Matthew 28:16-20

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'^a

Reflection

That bible passage is one of the few places in the Bible in which reference is made to the Trinitarian nature of God in a format that we use all the time. Jesus tells his disciples to go and make disciples and baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. So how does the Trinity help us to understand who God is and what difference does or should this make to us in the Church and in the world?

A picture that people have found helpful in reflecting on the Trinity is Rublev's icon. At the beginning of this Order of Service I have included a picture of that icon. Dating from the 15th century, the icon shows the three angels who visited Abraham at the oak of Mamre. (You can read that story for yourselves in the Bible in the Book of Genesis Chapter 18). It was common in Rublev's day, to use that story of Abraham's encounter with God as an illustration of the Trinity. And Rublev's icon is full of symbolism that is designed to lead the viewer to meditate on the Trinitarian God. I've included an explanation of some of the symbolism that is contained in the icon at the end of these materials for those who are interested. In brief that symbolism points to the differences in the angels pictured around the table but also to the unity of love that exists amongst them. And that is what the doctrine of the Trinity is about - the diversity and unity of love that is God's nature.

One Christian monk writes that "Rublev's icon gives us a glimpse of the house of perfect love". This is what he writes "Andrei Rublev painted this icon not only to share the fruits of his own meditation on the mystery of the Holy Trinity but also to offer his fellow monks a way to keep their hearts centred in God while living in the midst of political unrest. The more we look at this holy image with the eyes of faith, the more we come to realize that it is painted not as a lovely decoration for a convent church, nor as a helpful explanation of a difficult doctrine, but as a holy place to enter and stay within.

As we place ourselves in front of the icon in prayer we come to experience a gentle invitation to participate in the intimate conversation that is taking place among the three divine angels and to join them around the table. The movement from the Father toward the Son and the movement of both Son and Spirit toward the Father becomes a movement in which the one who prays is lifted up and held secure”.

Rublev created his icon for people who were struggling to remain focussed on God in a period of political unrest. But still today the icon continues to speak to people. As we struggle to remain focussed on God in the midst of a coronavirus pandemic, violent unrest in many parts of the world, suffering and grief closer to home, or even the petty quarrels and major struggles that daily life holds, here is a picture that is capable of drawing our eyes towards God. And it does so because it points us to the doctrine of the Trinity – the truth which gives expression to the human experience of God as one-in-three and three-in-one.

But why should this be important? And what has this to do with the way we live our lives. Well first of all the doctrine of the Trinity is a reminder to a Church, of the diversity which exists within the very nature of God – the one- in- three. The Church has always been made up of people of different views and understandings - some filled with doubting questions, others not seeking to question anything, others comfortable that their questions and wondering are part of their faith. From the very outset, as we heard earlier there was a mixed response to Jesus among the community of faith - “they worshipped him but some doubted”

A Church which is not diverse in its thinking and practice fails to take into account the diversity within the heart of God, who is not only Creator, but also redeemer and sustainer. But are there limits to that diversity? – you might be asking. Well I think there are limits. But they don't take the form of a set of legalistic rules. They are the constraints of a love that always seeks another's good.

And that takes me onto the second practical implication of the doctrine of the Trinity. And it flows from the unity of love that exists within the very nature of God – the three –in- one. If there is community within the very nature of God, then it follows that community is also central to the nature of humanity. Community is essential to the well-being of people created in the image of God.

And that has become increasingly obvious as lock down has gone on and new on-line communities have sprung up all over the place. One of the most significant challenges coming out of lock-down is surely to think about how we might better live together in community locally, nationally, internationally – about how we can live up to our responsibilities to care for God's creation, to protect the weak and the vulnerable, to care for the sick and the suffering.

And there are and will be many different views on how we should address them. But if and when the responsibilities seem overwhelming and beyond our capacity to understand then perhaps we need to be drawn back to God – not to escape but to find our focus. As that monk I mentioned earlier puts it, it is “when we are centred on God, that we can be involved in struggles for justice and in actions for peace. We can be part of the ambiguities of family and community life. We can study, teach, write and hold a regular job. We can do all of this without ever having to leave the house of love”

And so today I offer you Rublev's icon a picture of that house of love that is God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and with the invitation to take time to enter that house and discover for yourself more about the love of the living God who is one- in- three and three- in- one.

Pointers for Prayer

- The NHS, its staff in hospitals and GP practices as well as the other emergency services and volunteers
- Scientists and others engaged in the struggle against Covid-19
- The Government and Scottish Parliament as they seek to manage the pandemic
- Those suffering from or bereaved by the corona virus
- Family, friends and neighbours, those most affected by the lock-down and those finding it difficult to move forward
- All those in education as they seek to reorganise schools for the safe return of children to classes
- Other people and situations who are in your hearts today.
- The Church that we might offer a faithful witness to Christ through this time

Praise 110 Glory be to God the Father

1 Glory be to God the Father,
glory be to God the Son,
glory be to God the Spirit,
Great Jehovah, Three in One!
Glory, glory, glory, glory
While eternal ages run.

3 Glory to the King of angels,
glory to the church's King,
glory to the King of nations;
heaven and earth, your praises bring!
Glory, glory, glory, glory
To the King of glory bring!

2 Glory be to him who loved us,
washed us from each spot and stain!
glory be to him who bought us,
made us kings with him to reign!
Glory, glory, glory, glory
To the Lamb that once was slain!

4 "Glory, blessing, praise eternal!"
Thus the choir of angels sings.
"Honour, riches, power, dominion!"
Thus its praise creation brings.
Glory, glory, glory, glory
Glory to the King of kings!

Notices

Pastoral Matters

The Minister is available to deal with urgent pastoral matters Tel 851295

Care for the Community if you are aware of anyone who needs help of any kind please contact Ruth 851887

Tuesday 11.00am Session Coffee Morning

Wednesday 7.15pm Community Bible Experience Catch Up – for more details and link to meeting contact Alison Tel 851295

Some Symbolism in Rublev's Icon

Take a look at the picture of the icon for a few moments. You will see that all three figures are wearing blue garments – blue was the colour of the heavens – signifying divinity and uniting the three figures. But the figures are also very different.

The figure on the right wears green as well as blue – symbolic of new life – a reminder of the new life the Spirit brings. This figure is touching the table – earthing the divine life of God. And in the background is a mountain – the place which in the bible is most often associated with an encounter with God. The message is clear. It is through the Spirit present with us that we are able to encounter God in our daily lives.

The figure is inclining to the left, drawing our gaze to the central figure. It is generally believed that this figure represents Jesus. The figure wears brown with a gold stripe – the brown garment speaks of the earth, of Jesus' humanity, while the gold stripe reminds us of his kingship. With two fingers – his two natures - divine and human - this figure points to the cup on the table. The cup is indicative of the sacrifice that Jesus will make to open the way for the coming of God's Kingdom on earth. In the background to this figure is a tree – one of the oaks of Mamre - or the cross – the place where death and life confront each other, the place where death gives way to resurrection and eternal life; a reference too perhaps to the tree of life in the Book of Revelation whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

Both these figures, Jesus and the Spirit appear to be addressing the figure on the left whose blue garment is covered by a shimmering ethereal cloak – God the Father – the Creator who cannot be seen by his human creatures. Behind this figure there is a house – the dwelling place of God. We are reminded of Jesus' promise that in God's house there are many mansions. And perhaps also of the other promise that Jesus makes to the disciples before he dies – that he and the Father will come and make their home with those who love him.

But by now surely we are in danger of falling into the trap of thinking of God as three persons, rather than three-in-one. How does Rublev avoid this? Well first of all there is the unity that is expressed in the blue garments worn by all. And this unity is emphasised by the identical faces on each of the three figures. Then each of the figures carries a staff – a symbol of the divine authority. And finally it is possible to draw a circle within the picture around the three figures – symbolic of the unending divine love that unites the three figures within the being of God.

Spend a few moments with that picture and let it invite you into conversation with God.