

Junior Church: Young Peoples' Group
Some Thoughts for the Week Beginning 7th June 2020

Hello Again,

Every week when I begin to write to you, I have to go through my diary to count the weeks and remind myself just how long it has been since we were all told to stay at home. It has been eleven weeks spanning the late winter, spring and now the beginning of summer. This week was a little bit different, however, as the rules have been relaxed and we are not able to meet outside with up to six other people. So I met up with three friends in their garden in what was the first meaningful face-to-face interaction with people for three months, other than neighbours over the fence or the person at the Sainsbury's checkout, or on a screen.

In these situations, numbers matter, just as we count the number of sleeps to Christmas or a birthday. Numbers also matter so far as the rules of social distancing are concerned. We stay 2 metres apart. The 'R' number, or reproduction number, is a measure of the ability of the virus to spread and the calculation determines how safe it is for us to relax the arrangements to meet up with friends and family. I imagine a team of very clever mathematicians producing their complex models to create the figure daily. But would have no understanding of how they do it. I know enough to understand that when the $R=1$ the infection rate stays the same. If it is below 1 infection goes down and above one the infection increases. That's all I need to know.

I watched a programme recently during which they showed a visual representation of the model. Dots, representing people, moved randomly around the screen colliding with one another and it was possible to see how one dot coloured red, representing an infected person, passed the infection to others.

When I was looking at the reading for this week ([Matthew 28 verses 16 – 20](#)) I was reminded of that virus model. These are the last verses of the Gospel and the last physical encounter the disciples had with the risen Jesus. He instructs them to 'make followers of all people in the world'. It ought to be possible to construct a mathematical model showing the spread of the Gospel as each of the disciples did as they were asked and travelled to various parts of the world 'colliding' with individuals who themselves encountered others and so the message spread. Paul's travels to modern day Greece, Cyprus, and Italy for example would have resulted in small centres of early Christianity being established which gradually grew in size and strength. We might not understand how such a spread model was constructed but we could appreciate the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit as it inspired those early followers. Against all the odds they did as Jesus asked 'baptizing ... in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit'.

Three is a magic number according to the words of a song designed to teach young children the basics of mathematics. The song goes on to justify this statement. So, it

takes three legs to make a table stand, three wheels to make a tricycle, three sides to a triangle. It also says:

'Somewhere in that ancient mystic trinity
You'll get three
As a magic number'.

This Sunday is Trinity Sunday where we celebrate God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is central to our faith. It is also something that great theologians discuss at length, much of which is difficult to understand and I am no more a theologian than I am a mathematician. Much of my understanding is based on faith and knowing that God still loves me whether or not I understand the deep theology that lies behind the concept of the Holy Trinity.

I remember going to the theatre once and watching the silhouette of a dancing man begin the performance. A second man, also in silhouette, and then by a third man, joined him. It took some time before I realized that the three dances were actually one man, By means of clever lighting the audience was seeing this one man in different perspectives and separated out.

Perhaps that is a good visual model for God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, 3 in 1 and 1 in 3. In can't understand much of the theology but I can see that God is so great that there are different aspects of Him. In God the Father we have the creator, the still small voice, the carer who gives us strength. In God the Son we have Jesus the storyteller, the companion along the road who walks with us, who shares our sorrows because He experienced those sorrows and more himself. The one who comes to greet us, the calmer of storms, the healer. In God the Holy Spirit we have the mover and shaker, the source of inspiration, wisdom and justice. Three is indeed a magic number.

If all this is a bit mind-blowing then I'll leave you with an extract from a poem by Ruth Burgess entitled simply "God".

The three in one
the one in three
(I was never good
with numbers).

Enough to know
you care
you challenge
you make me holy

and you circle me
with love.

Have a lovely week all of you.

Rodney