

Last week we celebrated Pentecost Sunday. This week is Trinity Sunday as we recall how God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit – three persons in one. Our all Age services over the next couple of months are going to help us think about this relationship a bit more. Last month we thought about what it means to call God as Father – the service is still available on our website so please do have a look later if you have not seen it. This month we will think about Jesus as the Son and how he shows us the relationship with God and the Spirit. With that in mind I don't want to spend a long time this morning explaining the trinity.

The passage we had read is from 2 Corinthians. It is a short passage and is in fact the very last 4 verses of the whole letter. Paul's second letter to Corinth is written during a challenging time for Paul. The church in Corinth has a few people causing trouble saying that Paul cannot be trusted in the things that he is teaching. Paul sets out in this letter to reassure the church that he can be trusted, speaking of the hardships that he has faced and reassuring them that all he wants to do is to teach and tell others of God's love for them. In closing this letter Paul wants to encourage this church.

One of the challenges that can often face us in our faith is that of over familiarity. This happens in everyday life – if we drive the same way to work each morning, there can be mornings when we miss parts of the journey because it is the same as we do every day. In our reading from 2 Corinthians 13 this morning we have a prayer which is often used by Christians. The last verse of our reading are the words that we use as the Grace which we often say in Church. But what does this prayer say? It is a prayer which highlights the Trinity but what does it say and what can we learn from it?

“May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

The Grace starts with the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

Why does Paul start with Jesus? Why not start with the grace of God? The Grace of Jesus is something that Paul has talked about earlier in the letter of 2 Corinthians. In chapter 8 Paul writes that “For you know the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” Paul starts the Grace by reminding us of the Good News that God became man in order that we can have life – that Jesus became poor “for our sake”. God became man, in order that he knows what is to walk this earth, but also so that he could die on the

cross in our place for those wrong things we have done. Grace is sometimes described as God's riches at Christ expense. That the price for the wrong things we have done had to be paid and that was through God sending Jesus to die on the cross. This is the point in which most of us come to discover our faith – it is through the good news of what Jesus has done for us. We often sing “Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch with me.” Paul is trying to encourage this church to put the troubles behind them and reminds them that the first thing that will bring them together is the reminder of what Jesus has done for them.

The grace starts with Jesus because on our journey towards faith that is often where we begin....It reminds us at the start of this prayer what Jesus has done for us.

The Love of God

This is the result of knowing what Jesus has done for us. In knowing the way that God loved the world so much that he sent Jesus to die for each one of us, to set us free, we see how much God loves us. Love is a word that if we use it too much, it can begin to lose its meaning. When we repeat this prayer and say the “love of God” – what are we thinking about? What does God really loving us mean to us.

These 4 words are trying to express something so immense, so hard to describe and even measure that it is often tricky to describe to others. One of the key messages of the New Testament is simply that God is love. John in one of his letters writes that “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them.” When we thought about God as Father a couple of weeks ago we looked at the parable of the prodigal Son where we see the father who loves his son so much that he is willing to forgive him, to do anything for his son – even if it makes him look silly in front of those around him. This is just another example of how much God loves each and everyone of us.

Paul prays for this church in Corinth that what will unite them, what will bring them together is the “love and peace of God.”

God's Love is a powerful thing – it has the power to cast our fear and when we encounter God's love for each one of us we cannot help but live our lives in response to this Love. As a hymn writer once wrote God's love is “so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life my all.”

Finally, we come to the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

As we think around this word fellowship, we have to remember again the setting of this letter. Paul is writing to a church that has gone through difficulties and is reminding them of what is going to draw them back together.

Fellowship – is looking to this church being joined back together, to emphasising through the grace of Jesus, the love of God which they have experienced they will be joined together in one family. The God who we put our trust in is God who longs for us to be in community.

The first book of the Lord of the Rings is called the Fellowship of the Ring. For those who have not read it (or spent hours watching the films!) it tells of a group of elves, dwarves and hobbits who set out on a quest to return a ring back to where it came from. The name for this group is the fellowship. Looking at the fellowship it is the most unlikely group of people – as they go along the quest, they have arguments, fall out due to the fact that dwarves, elves and hobbits would not mix together. It is the mission and the purpose that the fellowship has that unites them and brings them together.

As disciples and followers of Jesus we are united in one fellowship – empowered by the Holy Spirit we were given the great commission by Jesus. Jesus told us to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

In the same way that as disciples we have all experienced the grace of Jesus, the love of God, we are united by the Holy Spirit in this relationship. In Paul's first letter to Corinth he says, “Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives among you?”

The Holy Spirit enables us to keep walking in step with Jesus, to know his presence among us each day and empowered by the Holy Spirit we are called to be in fellowship with one another – united around a common mission to make Jesus known to others.

How does this blessing which Paul gave to a Corinthian church speak to us today therefore?

At the start of our reading Paul prays wants to encourage and pray for this

church. He has written this letter to try and help them put things write so that they may be transformed and united back around their love of God.

He encourages them in verse 11 to “aim for perfection.... to be of one mind...to live in peace.” As a result of this “the God of love and peace will be with you.”

This prayer or the Grace as some of us may know it shows us two things:

1) It shows us what is common amongst us. That as followers of Jesus who walk in step with him, we know the grace of Jesus what Jesus has done for us and the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. For this community of Corinth who were going through their difficulties, Paul was encouraging them to remember to pray and remember what they had in common with one another. In reminding themselves of this and their shared faith, they would be united around this.

2) The prayer also reminds us of how we should live.

Paul wants the church to “aim for perfection” or “strive for full restoration.” – To aim for perfection is no easy thing. We know that in trying to do this day by day we are going to fail however it is the Grace of Jesus Christ which enables us to keep going – to pick ourselves up when we fail, to seek forgiveness and to start over again.

He asks the church to “be of one mind and live in peace.” – Jesus in praying for the disciples asked them to love another and that is how the world will know that they are one. God loves each of us and in response to that love we demonstrate it others being together in one mind and living in peace with one another.

Through all this Gods Holy Spirit helps us and empowers us to know God’s presence and life with us.

As we come to a close, even though this was written to a church some 2000 years ago, it is good to remind ourselves each time we say this that it is a prayer which asks us to live in the unity that God demonstrates to us. God is a God who exists and longs for a community or people who worship him and serve Him in the world around us. As we pray this prayer, often together we remind ourselves of what is key to our faith, of our shared understanding of who God is and what he has done for us. We are also encouraging each other to live in the way that demonstrates to others the love of God and his love for them. Let’s finish this morning praying the grace together, pausing after each

of the three phrases we have thought about this morning, to reflect upon what it means to us.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.....

The love of God.....

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.....

Be with us all evermore. Amen.