

Jane started today's liturgy with the Trinitarian rallying call: *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*. Highly appropriate because we are the family of Holy Trinity Church and today is Trinity Sunday; the day which celebrates the mystery of faith and the unity of and love in the Holy Trinity.

How best can we make sense of the concept of a Trinitarian God? During my recent training I've come across Sam Wells, the rector of St James's church in Piccadilly and I recently read this quote from him online:

*We subscribe to God being three persons in one substance. But God isn't a thing....God is a **relationship** of three persons, so wonderfully shaped towards one another, so wonderfully with one another, that they are one, but simultaneously so exquisitely diverse and distinct within that unity that they are three.'*

And the key word there is relationship.

Our opening hymn this morning was Abide with Me. It is a hymn more commonly sung at funerals, but I think it highly appropriate today because it resonates with the lesson to be taken from our gospel reading: that the secret of learning to live loved is to abide in Jesus.

Jesus says the word abide no less than 8 times. I don't know about you, but it is a word I rarely, if ever use. I do however use the word remain quite frequently and that is the word used in more modern translations. Remain in me, remain with me...that starts to make more sense.

Jesus is drawing a clear parallel between our 'remaining in him' and his 'remaining in the Father'. It is relationship between God the Father and God the Son at the very heart of the Trinity that Jesus is encouraging his disciples and us to copy and model.

Our gospel parable of the vine emphasises the communal and relational nature of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus identifies himself as the vine but immediately begins to explore the role of and his relationship with his Father as the vine grower. In fact, he is saying that that the true vine is only possible because of the vine grower, because it is the vine grower who gives life to and sustains the vine. It is a dynamic, living relationship; without it there is nothing. Without the Father, Jesus has no life, no ministry, no mission.

And it is into that relationship which we are invited, by becoming the branches that grow on the vine. I think it's no secret to say that I occasionally enjoy a glass or three of wine, but part of that enjoyment comes from having visited many vineyards and seeing the best practices of viticulture put into practice. I can say with a small degree of authority therefore that in a vineyard, the best grapes are produced closest to the main, central vine because that is where the nutrients are most concentrated, and the growth is the strongest. But they don't grow to full potential without having been diligently pruned, tended and nurtured.

If you visit a vineyard in winter the vine will look useless and dead. Yet in a few months' time the branches closely connected to the central vine are resplendent with new life and new growth. And it is the same with our faith.

Cleansing and pruning are the work of God and the words of Jesus. They have determined which branches are cut off and which are pruned. And just like the dead looking winter vines, we can be assured that if our faith is securely connected to the vine through our bible study,

our prayers, our worship and our various ministries then come harvest time we will be part of the fruitful yield.

And of course as John tells us in our first reading, we can abide or remain in Jesus because we have been blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit – the third person of the Trinity - to enable us to continue and grow more vigorously in that personal relationship with Jesus. The Holy Spirit, our helper and guide in our daily lives is the gift we received from Jesus.

But, important as abiding in Jesus is, there is also the not inconsiderable matter of the branches needing to bear much fruit:

'My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples'

That is our raison d'être. We are not simply to be the branch to Jesus' vine but be the bearers of much fruit. Fruit which is visible not only in loving Jesus and each other through the power of the Spirit but also in all works of love we reveal in our daily lives.

Love. Not only is it the definition of the Trinity but also the desired manifestation of our relationship with it. How do I know? The answer is in our first reading:

*'No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we **abide** in him and he in us, because he has given us the Spirit....God **abides** in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they **abide** in God. So, we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who **abide** in love **abide** in God, and God **abides** in them'*

All things begin in love, flow from love, are perfected through love, and return to love. And for us, the key is to abide in Christ just as he abides in us.

Amen

Rev. Terry Ward-Hall, 12/6/22