

This is Trinity Sunday. I wonder what difference that makes to you? We have a strong emotional and spiritual response to Christmas and Easter and Pentecost last Sunday was special. But Trinity Sunday?

I might feel obliged to have Trinity Sunday in the annual round of services (and we are Holy Trinity after all...) but if you think about the particular difficulties you are facing at the moment...maybe family or work related, or finances or health...does the fact it's Trinity Sunday make any difference to those difficulties? So what, if God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

If Trinity Sunday has any relevance, then it must somehow speak directly into our lived experience and whatever it is we're going through now.

Trinity Sunday can lead down two pathways – I know because I've tried them both.

The first is to try and explain the Trinity in simple terms. The great Augustine of Hippo who died in 430AD tried his best with his example of a tree.

The roots are wood.
The trunk is wood.
The branches are wood.
One wood, one substance but three different entities.

How does knowing that impact upon whatever it is you're facing?

The second is to explore how the doctrine of the Trinity was developed and how we think it works and what it means. There's perhaps a little more merit in that approach.

The disciples who were instructed by Jesus to go and make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and

the Holy Spirit, they hadn't a doctrine to go with the words...they just did as they were told.

Working out the doctrine came later, much later and there were some severe controversies on the way.

Emperor Constantine called the first council of Nicea in 325AD to wrestle with the problem of Arianism.

Arius believed God was singular and Jesus was created.

Athanasius of Alexandria defended Trinitarianism teaching that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are co-eternal and co-equal?

It's the kind of thing that can induce a nap. Bearing in mind these things were settled long ago, why is this relevant??

It's relevant, because Arius had God as remote, and unapproachable. Athanasius knew that God was relational, and loving and approachable.

And so to the real value of Trinity Sunday.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in a unity of love. God is self-giving, the Father gives all authority and power to the Son, the Son sends the Holy Spirit, the Spirit continually seeks to draw us deeper into the love of the Father through the Son. Each person of the Trinity is bearing witness to the love of the other two persons and that love is overflowing to us.

God is not remote and unapproachable and distant and uncaring; God is very present in our need.

Let's explore this another way. What if there was no Trinity?

If we baptised someone just in the name of the Father? It would deny the work of Jesus Christ and it would ignore the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. It would leave God as remote and unapproachable and lead in all probability to a mysticism of a detached God.

What if we baptised someone just in the name of Jesus? We would miss out on God the father, maker of heaven and earth...the part of God that is larger than what we see or understand, beyond logic and reason. We would miss too the Holy Spirit, present with us, interacting within us day to day.

And what if we baptised just in the name of the Holy Spirit? God would be present to us, but we would miss the awesomeness and creativity of the father and the redemptive work of Christ – God with us, Immanuel.

The same God who is God over us as God the Father and creator, is God with us and for us in the incarnate Word and Son and is God in and among us as God the Holy Spirit.

Trinity Sunday reminds us that God is relational and our baptism draws us into the life of God, we are enfolded into God.

Jesus our Immanuel, the Father loving us as his own, the Spirit descending on us in life and power.

Let's hear again the call of Jesus words at the end of Matthew, the Great Commission to go to all nations to make disciples enfolding them too in the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What a truly impossible task. I do like the fact that in this final moment there were some there who doubted – I'll come back to that.

Thomas Long says this.

Most congregations are small in number, have mixed motives and have uncertain convictions. It would be like saying go into the world and cure cancer, clean up the environment, evangelize all the unbelieving and while you're at it establish world peace.

The point is, it IS utterly impossible, and it means that we throw ourselves on God's generous mercy and his incomparable strength.

All authority does not belong to the church and its limited resources, but in God's wild investment in Jesus the Son and the willingness of the Son to be always present by His Spirit in the church.

We have our own impossible task. It seems to be our task, our responsibility to transform this church for the next generations who will follow. We certainly need God's mercy and strength to tackle the project and our mustard seed of faith to accomplish the work. It's easy to doubt the whole thing...isn't it?

I do appreciate the line in our gospel reading...¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

Doubt is not the total absence of faith, it's the absence of certainty. Where you have certainty there is no need for doubt, not even from the most pessimistic person.

When Jesus calmed the storm and they worshipped him in the boat, some doubted.

In the room where the disciples shared the news of the resurrection we have Thomas, who doubted.

Here towards the close of their time with Jesus, some still doubt.

Life certainly has its challenges, whether it's our health or work or relationships or money. It's only natural that there are times we doubt and ask "where is God in this?"

In those moments if we can reflect on the love of God the Father in sending us his Son. And recall that Jesus gave his life for us for our freedom. And can recall that Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to be the life and light of the church, then slowly, often its very slowly, we start to reframe how we see and experience what is taking place.

Our enfolded into the life of God carries with it all our pain, frustration, agonies and turmoil. God is not distant from where we are but very present in our need. We learn to pray, your kingdom come, your will be done and seek him in everything we experience.

I was reminded that the growth in understanding about God was that he was relational. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Jon and Ted, and Chris, and Barry and Gilly and all the others at home today.

Here at the church of Holy Trinity we declare that the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit is our God, present with us now in all our need and in all our lives.

And we worship!

Rev. Jon Hutchinson, 4 June 2023

From the upper west Window in Holy Trinity Sunningdale, the Athanasian creed depicted.

The Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God.
The Father is not the Son or the Spirit.
The Son is not the Father or the Spirit.
The Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

