

## Reflection for Trinity Sunday

### Isaiah 6.1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.' 4The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. 5And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!' 6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.' 8Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'

### Romans 8.12-17

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' 16it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

### John 3.1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' 3Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' 4Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' 5Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." 8The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone

who is born of the Spirit.’ 9Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’  
10Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?’  
11 ‘Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?’  
13No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.  
16 ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.  
17 ‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

## Reflection

I had thought that I would stop these reflections for the time being, but I saw these wonderful passages for this Sunday and I couldn’t resist! Also, it’s Trinity Sunday, and I love this seemingly strange doctrine, which makes no sense, and yet without it Christianity itself makes no sense! So here goes..... The Trinity.

Today is Trinity Sunday, a popular day for vicars to invite a guest preacher to give the sermon! The idea of One God in Three Persons — three-in-One — is a concept we have great difficulty getting our heads around, to say the least! It just doesn’t add up. How can one plus one plus one plus one equal one? It’s quite perplexing! The Bible does not mention the word “Trinity.” But the idea of the Trinity is so ingrained in Christianity that it is assumed throughout the Bible. Our Gospel Reading, for example, presents the Trinity as a fact, without explanation. Jesus talks about “God sending His Son” and “being born from above..by the Spirit”. We can sympathise with Nicodemus who said, “*How can these things be?*”

The word, “Trinity,” comes from the Latin word, “Trinitas,” which means “three”. It has come to stand for “three in the unity of one,” or “Tri-Unity.”

God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and yet there is one God. This doctrine was the outcome of long prayerful reflection and often heated discussions by the early Church Fathers. To be clear, the Trinity is not three gods in one, but one God manifested in three persons.

While this may sound confusing and more like a contradiction, what we’re not saying is that God is three persons and yet only one person at the same time. Rather the Trinity says that there are three persons in one nature. The Father, Son and Spirit live and act in perfect love and perfect community. What one person of the Trinity knows, they all know. The actions of one person of the Trinity are the actions of all the persons of the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, exist and act in perfect harmony and perfect love. They are so united in love that they are one in Being, and this Being is God, and while this may go beyond our

reason, it doesn't go against reason. This may make our brains hurt, but there is a clear logic to this doctrine.

This idea of the Trinity, is difficult to grasp. And it has been difficult for Christians right from the early days of the church. Many attempts have failed miserably to capture the three-in-oneness of God completely. And we never will. God always ultimately remains a mystery, but not a *total* mystery. But if we don't have a balanced view of all three persons of the Trinity, we can get a very wrong picture of God, and our faith will be based on a falsehood.

Here are some examples of how people have tried to explain this idea, but they are all flawed in one way or another. In fact, these attempts to define the Trinity became early Christian heresies.

There are two primary heresies about the Trinity, which have some very grand names. They are known as Modalism and Arianism or Subordinationism.

First Modalism, where people said that God was One God who just appeared in three different roles — or modalities — as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For instance, think of water, which can exist in three forms, liquid water, gaseous steam and solid ice. But no state of water is ever all three at once. Another example is St Patrick who used the example of the shamrock, a type of clover. Each leaf is made up of three smaller leaves.

Or how about a man who is a farmer, a parish councillor and a husband. Here is one person in three roles. But while this sort of shows one aspect of the Trinity, it is saying that there is one god, like an actor, playing three different parts.

In other words, God shows up in a form that best suits the situation at that time; sometimes the Father as in the Old Testament, sometimes the Son as in the Gospels, sometimes as the Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles.

But this doesn't fit the experience of the Bible, as in the readings above. It is especially clear in the account of Jesus' baptism.

*"And when Jesus was baptised, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased"*"

So here we have the Father speaking from heaven, the Son being baptised and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove, all in one episode at the same time!

Then there is Arianism and Subordinationism which see Jesus and the Holy Spirit as being somehow inferior to the Father, in other words less than God. This is the belief of Mormons, Jehovah's Witness', Islam, Scientology, and Christian Science. They all deny the Deity of Jesus, they over-emphasise His humanity, believing that He is not fully God. Christianity insists that Jesus is both 100% human and 100% God.

Another fancy term for this is the "Hypostatic Union", and yes, again it does not add up, it is another mystery!

But ask the question, "Who died on the cross?" The answer is "God died on the cross!" He did the unthinkable, the impossible! The God who Isaiah saw who is so majestic and awe-inspiring cannot do this. God cannot die! But He did, in the Person of Jesus.

You see, if Jesus was not fully both God and man, He could not be both our Lord and our Saviour.

What we believe about Jesus, what we believe about the Trinity affects how we see our relationship with God, and how confident we are of our salvation. For instance, if we decide that Jesus is inferior to God in some way, then He is not God. Then we come away with a picture of a god who is distant and unapproachable, who feels little compassion for wayward humankind. We are then left with the impossible task of making ourselves acceptable to this demanding, judgmental god. We have to try to “save” ourselves!

But thank God, the true God is not like that, and with the Doctrine of the Trinity, each of the persons is not just a separate part of God, each person is fully God. God the Father is exactly revealed in Jesus the Son through the work of the Holy Spirit. And it is only because of this that we can experience God, as the Bible promises, as the “*God (who) is love*”.

So let’s look at the nature of love, which is so tied up with the nature of God. Love is not “a thing in itself”. You can’t buy a bottle of love. Love only exists in a relationship. Love only can happen between persons. So what is the purest experience of human love we know?

It must be one of the most amazing experiences a human being can have. And I have had the privilege of experiencing it three times! There is nothing like holding your new born baby in your arms for the first time. That overwhelming, indescribable sense of love we have for that little person. It’s probably love in its purest human form. We would do anything to protect that baby. It’s a totally self giving love, we would gladly devote our lives, give our lives for that beloved child. Nothing is more important than that tiny scrap of a person. Love, of course, involves feelings and emotions, but fundamentally it’s about giving of ourselves.

That love of a parent for their child is but a reflection of God’s love for us, the God who gives of Himself so completely:

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*

*17 ‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.’ John 3:16*

Love needs a giver of love and someone to be loved. There needs to be a relationship between persons. Before the Creation of the universe, when there was only God, so if “*God is love*”, there must have been that relationship in the nature of God Himself. The nature of God is perfect love. The Father loves the Son and the Spirit and they each return that love in an eternal circle of love, a community of love. In this perfect circle of love the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit exist in perfect community. In this perfect love God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have existed before the beginning of time, and that’s why we can say “*God is love.*”

This idea of this relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit has been likened to a dance, an eternal dance of love. Christian scholars love making up terms for things, and describe this idea using the term “perichoresis.” That’s a Greek word which means, literally, “dancing around.” Think of the picture of God — Father, Son, and

Spirit — in a divine dance, interacting with one another, expressing love for one another, and working together in perfect harmony in the work of sharing the dance of love with each other which then overflows into the rest of creation. For love, by its very nature, has to give, has to flow outwards. So the creation itself becomes part of the overflowing love that is the community of God, The Trinity. That dance of love is the reason behind the Creation. *“For God so loved the world”*. God, the Trinity, invites all of creation to join in the dance of divine love.

Through the Trinity, One God, in three persons, the God who is love, is revealed to humanity, to you and to me. God the Father is revealed in Jesus the Son through the work of the Holy Spirit.

So who is God?

He is our heavenly Father who made us and sustains the universe, who takes care of us and calls us His dear children. Who is God? He is Jesus Christ who gave His life on the cross to restore our relationship with God. He reveals God's love for us and shows us how God's children should live. Who is God? God is the Spirit in us strengthening our faith in God and sharing our lives and guiding us in our daily walk as a Christian.

That's how we experience God in our lives.

Do we understand this doctrine fully? No. Will we ever understand it fully? No. Many theologians have tried to explain it, but the Trinity will always be a mystery. God will always be a mystery, a truth beyond the capacity of our human minds.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Three persons, one God. Three persons, united in one fellowship so close as to be one. Three persons with a nature of love, unconditional love. A love so deep, a love so rich, a love so forgiving, that God sacrifices God's own self for us.

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”*

A loving relationship, a community of love, is at the heart of the identity of God. And if God is relationship, that means that we, too, made in the image of God are drawn into the the relationship too, we are invited to join the Divine Dance too. But the Dance doesn't stop there. The “dance goes on”, as the hymn “Lord of the Dance” reminds us. Others need to be drawn in. Our friends and neighbours need to be drawn in. And all those who love us. And even all those who hate us. And the trees and the flowers. And the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and the wild animals. And the earth and the moon and the stars. All creation is called to join this circle of love, the Divine Dance.

We are all invited to join in God's “dance of life”. But dancing can be a tricky process. We need to learn to dance.

I met first met Pat, my wife, at a folk dance. As you know these dances can be quite complicated and involve a lot of co ordination and skill. Now I am perhaps one of the least co ordinated people, and dancing certainly is not my forte. So it inevitably happened, that trying to impress, I tripped over my big feet and all six of us dancers ended up in a heap on the floor. It didn't go down well! The thing is we need to learn to dance, and I expect, even I could eventually learn to dance with the necessary commitment and help!

We also need to learn to “dance” in God’s dance of life, the dance of the Trinity, to keep in step with God’s Spirit, to follow His tune. We see that tune lived out by Jesus in the Gospels. And yes, it’s not easy, we will trip up many times, but, encouraged by the Holy Spirit, we will learn to dance with God The Trinity.

This pandemic, over the months of isolation, has taught us how important relationships and community are to our thriving.

We need relationships, we need community, we need to participate in this love of God. That is what we were created for..... to live as much loved children of God, as members of God’s family.

Our second reading puts it like this:

*“you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ 16it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”(Romans 8:15)*

We are God’s children, loved beyond measure. His adopted children, which makes it even more special. He chose us, each individual unique one of us, to be His child. This was no random accident of birth, but a clear decision. God loves us, He sees us as His children, He loves me and you, and wants us to know it and to choose to live in that love, for love is not completed until it is freely and joyfully returned. He longs for us to call Him “Abba”, the intimate Hebrew word for “Dad”, He wants us to know that closeness, and share in all its joys for eternity.

*“When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ 16it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”*

And it is only the truth that God exists as The Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that makes this possible. Everything depends on it! It is that important!

Finally, I don’t know if we are any the wiser in understanding this perplexing doctrine?Our understanding of the Trinity is based on what we see God has done in Scripture and is doing in the world and in our lives. It’s how He chooses to reveal Himself. It’s how we experience God. The Trinity is a way of Christians saying that God is much bigger and greater and more complicated and more wonderful than we could ever imagine. And so, it’s one of our greatest mysteries.

But it is a mystery into which we are invited, the Trinity is not a concept to be understood. It’s an invitation to each of us to be drawn into the community of God Himself; it’s a “dance of love” for all to join. The Son of God dances to the rhythm of the Fathers love. We are all invited to join hands with our partners in the dance. And the church family has a vital part to play. We are called to learn and lead the “dance”, to reflect the life of the Trinity in our relationships, our words and actions so that others will see and want to join in.

*“8Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’*

The doctrine of The Trinity reassures us that in the joys and struggles of daily life we have a God who saves, a God who loves, a God who has gone to extreme lengths to make sure that we can have a living, eternal relationship with Him, our "*Abba Father*," Our God might be the majestic and awe-inspiring God that Isaiah saw, but He is also with us here now and wants us all to "dance" with Him for all eternity.

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## The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,  
you have given us your servants grace,  
by the confession of a true faith,  
to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity  
and in the power of the divine majesty to worship the Unity:  
keep us steadfast in this faith,  
that we may evermore be defended from all adversities;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

or

Holy God,  
faithful and unchanging:  
enlarge our minds with the knowledge of your truth,  
and draw us more deeply into the mystery of your love,  
that we may truly worship you,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.