

Reflection for Trinity Sunday, 2020

Isaiah 40.12-17, 27-end, Psalm 8, 2 Corinthians 13.11-end¹

What next ?

May the words of my mouth and the reflection of all our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

In Thursday Space we have been looking at the Bible, what it is, and what it means to us. Today we can ask “will the Bible help us understand the Trinity?”

Unfortunately, the word Trinity never appears in the Bible. The closest we get are various Trinitarian formulations, like that we see in Saint Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians: *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”*

So what are we to make of this brain-frying theological concept? John Wesley put it this way: “Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and then I will show you a man that can comprehend the triune God!” God is more than we can wrap our minds around and that is necessarily so. I understand now why many clergy dread preaching on Trinity Sunday ...

And how might this abstract-sounding church doctrine matter today, in the world of Covid?

¹ Inspiration and references drawn from sermons by The Rt. Rev. Frank Logue, Bishop of Georgia, and Katerina Whitley.

I think that the answer to both these questions is in the Bible – not in the sense that it is a dictionary, with a neat definition, but in the sense that when we read the bible, we find that the prophets and the first Christians alike were dealing with the same question. Certainly they were less concerned about doctrinal formulation. Certainly they were not asking the question in the same way. But as they worked toward finding God, and for the first Christians, as they worked on following the way of Jesus, they revealed the answer (or at least an answer) to our question.

When we read passages such as that from the prophet Isaiah, and great hymns of praise such as psalm 8, we see a God who, beyond His greatness and majesty... is connected. God is connected to His creation, knowing its every detail and wrinkle. Furthermore, He is connected to us – those uncomprehending Wesleyan worms that we are. Frank Logue, the Bishop of Georgia refers to an “essential connectedness”. And both the passage from Isaiah² and psalm 8 express that same surprise – all this wonder and majesty and yet God is concerned for me?

*“4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have ordained,
5 What are mortals, that you should be mindful of them;
mere human beings, that you should seek them out?”*

All this and yet He cares for me? He sent His son to me? Who left His Word and His Spirit for me?

² 28 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. YET - He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

How can that be? And that same question - what has that got to do with the Trinity?

Let me tell you - Father Richard Rohr writes that “In our attempts to explain the Trinitarian Mystery we overemphasized the individual qualities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but not so much the relationships between them. That is where all the power is! That is where all the meaning is!”

So this is my answer – the Trinity is three persons, but it is also the relationship between them. Even if I can’t fully understand the mystery of the Trinity, I can begin to understand relationships. The relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The relationship between God and His creation, revealed in the writings in the bible. The relationship between God and us, reported by generations of the faithful.

There is always more to discover, always more to improve in our understanding – but at least it is a place from which to start. The Trinity is not so much about the three persons as about the space between the three, the relationship between them, and about the relationship they have with creation and with us.

Strangely, I think that this Covid-coloured era is helpful in thinking about this.

One of the blessings of these Corona-days in Switzerland is that we can get out and enjoy the beauty of the lake, and the mountains. The weather has been pretty glorious, hasn’t it? And that storm on Wednesday night? What better

illustration of God's power and majesty? And yet I feel that something is missing, something is changed. That something is relationship. Community.

Covid provides a timely reminder that we are also social creatures. We also live in relationship to one another. This is one of the lessons of the isolation and social distancing that have come with the pandemic: being separated by the coronavirus has not broken our relationships; it has not broken my sense of communion with God – but it has brought their importance into focus. I have felt the strain of physical separation from my brothers and sisters. This is what Covid has brought home to me, this is what I miss – relationships are key, and those relationships just haven't been the same over Zoom ... I'm "Zoomed out". Although in some senses Covid has strengthened relationships - as we have found new ways to connect - I miss our community.

Jesus told us: Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus was also talking about relationships: love upward toward God and outward toward the world. And you can't do one without the other. When we love God more, we get that heart for other people that God has, and so love of God draws us to other people. Loving other people fully means seeing them as God sees them, and so loving people can also draw us to God.

On this Trinity Sunday, highlighted by our changed, socially-distanced relationships, we see more clearly how relationships are our lifeblood - our backbone. How they make us, form us, hold us together. Living this love, as Paul exhorts the Corinthians, is so much more important than understanding the intricacies of the Trinity. Love for our families, love for the members of our

church family, here in La Côte and further afield, love for all God's wonderful creation.

Where does this realisation take us? Surely the wonder we sense when we look at the beauty around us - brought sharply into focus when we know of the place that we hold in that creation and in the eyes and heart of the Creator - surely that must elicit a response from us? Surely we are called to try to reflect that in our relationships?

And yet we live in a society with great divisions. We all know of people who are alone in a time of despair and anxiety. We live in a world on the cusp of being broken beyond repair.

Maybe today, thanks to the changes imposed by Covid, we can better see that we might not always be so good at our relationships and our love for one another. In fact, maybe we can admit that sometimes we are downright rubbish: think of George Floyd, think of Amy Cooper ... to name just two examples from these past days. Look them up. Try not to cringe. And how about closer to home?

This is the other thing that has been bothering me during this Covid crisis – what next? What do we do when things “get back to normal”? What does that look like?

So I ask you, as I have been asking myself: what will happen after Covid? What will we do next? There are two simplistic alternatives:

- I) destabilised by the changes we have suffered, maybe by economic changes for the worse, we rush to catch up, throwing all caution to the winds. We can't afford to waste time with environmental regulations, we can't afford to be soft, we need to make money so we can look after ourselves. God's creation and our relationships take second place to the Unholy Trinity of me, myself and I.

Or

- II) we acknowledge that, as Covid has shown us, we can change. We can change suddenly and drastically. We acknowledge that, as the Trinity shows us, our relationships matter. Loving one another, loving all God's people, matters. On this Trinity Sunday we celebrate the relationship between Father, Son, Holy Spirit ...and us! As the COVID financial crisis has shown and will continue to show, the inequalities of our society are deep, and they matter. After confinement, after lockdown, what can you do to respond to the God who can both create the majesty and beauty of this world - and yet love each little one of us, each little worm? How can you strengthen love, enhance relationships, care for creation?

My prayer as we enter the post-COVID world is that we can each consider our relationships. Each do something differently and better, and so draw closer to our creator, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen