

Trinity Sunday

The earth shakes. Smoke rises. Bizarre flying creatures burst into song. The sound of thunderous voices and an altar with glowing coals; and at the centre of all this – an over –dimensioned figure who asks, ‘whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’

This highly dramatic scene, with its mysterious imagery that struggles to describe the indescribable holiness of our creator God, might seem like a strange choice for Trinity Sunday, but I can see at least two very good reasons why it is included in the lectionary for today.

Firstly, we see God as part of a community, he asks ‘Who will go for us?’ Is the us God plus the seraphs? It isn’t clear. Although the writers of the Old Testament understood God as one, they also wrote about God’s breath or spirit, and of wisdom personified. In the first creation account in Genesis, God says ‘Let us make humankind in our image’. In our passage from Isaiah, there is, at the very least, the concept of some sort of community in the throne room of God.

Secondly, we see that God wants to communicate with his creation, to reach out beyond himself into the world. Here he chooses Isaiah to take his message to the Israelites, and similar acts of commissioning also take place in the lives of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel whose writings follow hot on the heels of the book of Isaiah.

Moving on to our New Testament reading, again at first glance perhaps the link with Trinity Sunday is not obvious, but there are some pointers in the conversation that we get to listen in to.

Nicodemus is thirsty for God; he sees something deeply attractive in Jesus and wants to know more. Jesus presents him with the startling image of re-birth, telling him that he needs to be born again by the Spirit, that he needs to go back to the very beginning and experience life from a totally different perspective. This is something that only the Holy Spirit can accomplish – and so Jesus introduces the third person of the Trinity. He then goes on to say that ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son’ and here we see Jesus identifying himself with God through the relationship of Sonship – the Trinity is complete. Or at least this is how we can interpret it in the light of church history, at the time I imagine that it was deeply confusing for Nicodemus and that he left Jesus with more questions than he came with!

At that point in history, instead of sending more prophets, God sent his own Son to be born as a human being, to communicate his love to us in a way that we might be able to understand. The last line of our passage is deeply hopeful 'God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him'. The desire of the Godhead is to communicate love.

So, we have this developing understanding of God the father who creates and sustains, God the Son who shows us the way to the Father, and the God the Spirit who brings new life. We understand the Trinity as one God, in three persons who are distinct and yet of one nature, but this was not immediately obvious to the early church. The doctrine of the Trinity developed as early Christians attempted to understand the relationship between Jesus and God, and wasn't formalised until the 4th century at the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople. So we now understand God as three in one, a perfect community of love that reaches out to communicate that love to humanity.

But how then does the Trinity do that? Firstly, through the beauty and majesty of nature, secondly through the scriptures, thirdly and most fully through Christ – God in human flesh, and now also through the church.

The early church was quite remarkable if you think about it. In it we see Jews and Gentiles eating together and worshipping together, something that would previously have been unthinkable. They called each other brothers and sisters, their new identity in Christ replacing the old ties that were based on kinship and observance of the law. Perhaps we can identify with this as many of us have left our natural family behind or they have left us, and so we live here in a reconstituted family. We have connections with each other that are not based on family but on our unity in Christ, joining us with people whose paths we might otherwise never have crossed.

On 13th June it will be our giving Sunday. In preparation for this, over the next two weeks we will be hearing from members of our church through short video clips that will come by email. There will also be the opportunity to pray our way around stations in the churches at Divonne and Gingins that take their inspiration from the lives of the people in the videos. On giving Sunday we will celebrate our community and thank God for how it has helped us to get through this last year in particular. However, we must recognise that since we have not been able to meet in person, our community has been under strain, and that although online church has

strongly united some, others, for all sorts of reasons, have felt rather disconnected.

When working well, we have a strong united community at La Côte that is a wonderful example of the outworking of the love of God. We express our gratitude, and treasure and support it, by offering our time, our gifts and our money.

But, we mustn't start thinking that our community is an end in itself. The church is both a community and a means of communication. Our earthly community is a reflection of the heavenly community and just as the Trinity is a loving community which extends that love outwards to the world, so our church has a calling to reach out and communicate the love of God to those beyond us. Our community resources us in our worship and fellowship to join in with what God is already doing in love in the world, this is our 'mission': but what does that really mean?

How are we to go about it?

And isn't the idea of mission rather daunting?

Well, the good news is that the most natural way for us to reach out to the wider world is through our ordinary lives. To be authentically who we are, deeply loved by God, and strengthened by the Holy Spirit to share the love and grace revealed in Christ with the people who cross our path. The videos that I mentioned earlier will hopefully give us a little insight into what that means for us as a community. These 'windows on our world' will give us glimpses into the different worlds that various members of our community inhabit, to help us to see a little of their everyday Monday to Saturday lives. These videos are a prompt to pray for them and others in similar situations, as they seek to share the love of God as part of whatever is going on in their lives, and to share a little in their joys and in their struggles. There will also be the opportunity to take some focussed time to pray using prayer stations in the church buildings.

The Anglican communion has taken this idea of mission – of our reaching out into the world with the love of God – and broken it down into five different areas. Interestingly for us, these five marks of mission include the following:

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Perhaps you may have noticed that Jean Mayer has started to write a blog on the church website on the theme of creation care. This fits perfectly with this mark of mission. Do read and engage with it as it unfolds, and I know that she would be delighted to hear from you if you would like to get involved.

The marks of mission also include:

To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation.

Our church council and ministry team met two weeks ago to discuss the diocese of Europe's response to the question of racial justice. This comes in the light of the Black Lives Matter movement and gives us the opportunity to see how we can be part of making our church, and the other communities we are part of, fairer and more open places for everyone.

The marks of mission also include evangelism, discipleship and service, and I trust that God will help each of us to see how He is calling us to be involved in this.

This is a humble calling, not one reserved for especially talented people: we are all called to share God's love in whatever ways He shows us. Thinking back to our passage from Isaiah, like the prophet whose lips were touched by the live coal, we have all been purified and commissioned by Christ to share the message of divine love. On this Trinity Sunday, as we reflect on the loving community of the Trinity reaching out to the world, may our church also be a community that communicates divine love.

Amen