

## Sermon - Trinity: God for us, with us, in us

Based on the readings: Isaiah 6.1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8.12-17; John 3.1-17

### Worship of God, fundamental to our faith relationship

- Our Old Testament readings today - from Isaiah and Psalm 29 - are a reminder not only of the centrality of God in our faith, but the need for worship to be at the heart of that faith.
- Worship describes a fundamental aspect of our faith relationship with God.
- We might be familiar with the action of worship in our liturgy - the action of acclaiming who and what God is for us, and acclaiming what he has effected through his Son Jesus Christ, and what he continues to manifest through the work of his Spirit.
  
- Nevertheless, it is helpful to be reminded of what worship is.
- And for this, I going to shift from the relationship we have with the Divine, to the relationships we have with each other.
- Let's for a moment think of a new romantic relationship, where one might say of a couple: 'He worships the ground she walks on', or 'She is completely devoted to him.'
- Yes, there is the notion of someone being besotted or infatuated with another which can be either endearing or sometimes tiresome for their friends, who wait for that initial blind passion to become less overwhelming and a bit more balanced.
- Nevertheless, the concept of being completely focused on how lovely another person is, and how much one wants to be with them, provides an insight into what worship is all about.
- In a romantic relationship one is focused on who the other person is for oneself - how important they are, how one looks to fulfil their desires, how one is blessed by their love and their presence.
- And every time one acknowledges all this about the other person, through words and actions, one is effectively worshipping that person - that is, one is acknowledging the worth of that person to oneself.
- Worship is active worth-ship - the action of acknowledging another's worth.
  
- So in our faith relationship with God, it is the same thing - the action of acknowledging God's worth to us.
- Not as a cerebral or theoretical action, but as a relational dynamic.
- This is why when Isaiah is caught up in his vision of the Lord sitting on the throne in the midst of the active worship of seraphs, he is not indulging in academic theology.
- Rather, he is fully present in this divine vision, so that he expresses a gut response of holy fear, and then experiences the sensation of one of the seraphs cleansing his mouth with a live coal that burns away everything that makes him unworthy to come into the Lord's presence.
- And this is so real for him that he hears the Lord saying '*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*', and he cannot help responding, '*Here am I; send me!*' (Isaiah 6.8)
- And Isaiah then goes on to provide 66 poetic chapters of God's word, speaking that not only into his own time, but also into later times, especially as we Christians see so many apparent references to Christ in what Isaiah has written.
  
- Psalm 29 picks up on this worship of the Lord:
  - <sup>2</sup> *Ascribe to the Lord the honour due to his name:  
O worship the Lord in the beauty of his holiness.*
  - <sup>9</sup> *... the Lord sits enthroned as a king for ever.*
  - <sup>10</sup> *The Lord will give strength to his people:  
the Lord will give to his people the blessing of peace.*

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### God is both 'I am' and 'We are'

- One of the clues as to why this Isaiah passage is chosen for celebrating Trinity Sunday comes in the reference that the Lord God makes to himself when he calls out: *'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'* (Isaiah 6.8)
- *'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'*
- There are a number of occasions in the Old Testament scriptures where the Lord God refers to himself both in the singular and in the plural.
- So it is interesting when Jesus, in his night-time conversation with Nicodemus, does exactly the same thing.
- Jesus says: *'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.'*
- *'I tell you, we speak of what we know ...'* (John 3.11)
- It doesn't make sense that Jesus might be including his disciples in his reference to 'we', as this is only chapter 3 of John's Gospel account, not long after the start of his ministry.
- At that point his disciples were still too new, and had too much yet to learn to be able to testify about what they had seen.
- Rather, the 'we' that Jesus is referring to seems to be himself and God's Spirit within him.
- Jesus is speaking as someone who has been anointed with God's Spirit to not only speak the word of God, but also to be the Word of God.
- Jesus is speaking as someone who is in constant dialogue with the Lord God through the Spirit, and so is able to have confidence in using the word 'we'.
- In our understanding of the concept of the Trinity, we comprehend not simply the idea of three Persons in one God, but the idea of active relationship - of ongoing dialogue - within the Divine community.

### The Church also has God's Spirit within

- And not only within the Divine community, but also from the Divine community.
- Because not only do we acknowledge God's worth to ourselves, God also acknowledges our worth to Godself.
- God is also for us, and with us, and wants to be in us.
- Last Sunday we celebrated the feast of Pentecost, when we remembered the birth of the Church, when the same Spirit that anointed Jesus at his baptism also anointed the first disciples fifty days after the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- That was the moment when God's Spirit starting manifestly inhabiting the first Christian community.
- And while no individual is bold enough to regard themselves equal to Jesus in the way that God's Spirit was manifested within him so profoundly and uniquely, nevertheless we should have confidence that God's Spirit is manifested equally profoundly in the Church, the collective Christian community, to at least the same degree.
- After all, Jesus says to the disciples elsewhere in John's account: *'Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.'* (John 14.12)
- Jesus has such confidence in us as the Church - such confidence in the effectiveness of God's Spirit anointing us and being manifest in us - that he effectively tells the first disciples: Do you think that God has done great things through me? Well, God is going to do even greater things through you!

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- And Paul, in his letter to the church in Rome, explains how this works.
- Paul reminds us that as a community of believers, of people who have chosen to follow in the Way of Jesus, we have been anointed by the Spirit.
- The consequences of this are that we do not need to be subject to the ways of the world, ways of selfishness and greed, in that we are tempted to put our own wants and desires ahead of God's desire.
- Instead, when we worship God truly and are able to cry, '*Abba! Father!*' in acknowledging who and what God is to us, we are doing so because it is *that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God*, - and as Paul continues to state - *and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. (Romans 8.15-17)*
- Heirs of what?
- Heirs of life in all its fullness, unaffected by time - and achieved through the manifest indwelling of the Holy Spirit; therefore heirs who inherit God's Spirit.
- We sang about this in our last hymn:

*Son of God, enthroned in glory,  
send your promised gift of grace;  
make your Church your holy temple,  
God the Spirit's dwelling-place.*

*(James Quinn, SJ © Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 1969)*

- I'm going to end by reading the passage from Romans again, except this time from The Message - an interpretation of the Bible in contemporary American English, by the Biblical scholar Eugene Peterson:

*So don't you see that we don't owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent.*

*There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all.*

*The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life.*

*God's Spirit beckons.*

*There are things to do and places to go!*

*This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life.*

*It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?"*

*God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are.*

*We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children.*

*And we know we are going to get what's coming to us - an unbelievable inheritance!*

*We go through exactly what Christ goes through.*

*If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him! (The Message: Romans 8.12-17)*

- And it is this wonderful affirmation that our Trinitarian God gives that inspires us to offer up praise and worship:
- that the Father is *for* us, the Son is *with* us, and the Spirit is *in* us,
- the sacred Three, our holy and blessed Deity. Amen.