

## Sermon - pondering the Trinity

Based on: Proverbs 8.1–4, 22–31; Rome 5.1–5; John 16.12–15

In the name of God our Creator, God our Redeemer, and God our Life-Giver. Amen.

### Comprehending the Trinity

- From time to time it is worth reflecting on our comprehension of the God we worship, and who loves us.
- God is a mystery: not a mystery to be solved, rather a mystery to ponder.
- The feast of the Trinity is an annual opportunity to do exactly that, even as we sing hymns of praise to and about our triune God, and this sermon is such a pondering.
  
- At one level we can comprehend quite simply that we pray to God the Father, through God the Son, in the power of God the Holy Spirit.
- It might sound odd, but we are fundamentally praying to God, through God, and enabled to do so by God.

### God our Creator

- The reality is that our creator God is beyond our comprehension.
- This is why God's law forbids images of God, because such images limit our understanding of God, and limit God's engagement with us.
- While the Israelites were nomadic they had a tent tabernacle within which their priest or leader would meet with God.
- When they settled in Canaan or Palestine, and built the temple in Jerusalem, it followed the same design.
- Within the inner sanctuary was the Holy of Holies, which contained the Ark of the Covenant, behind a curtain.
- The Ark was clearly understood as not being an image or representation of God, but was symbolic of God's relationship with his people, as it contained the scrolls of God's law for his people, which described God's covenant with his people.
- And the Ark itself could not be seen, as it was behind a curtain.
- Therefore, as a worshipper in the temple, one did not see an image of God, but rather one understood that God could not be visually comprehended, as his manifest presence was behind a curtain and associated with a symbolic representation of his relationship with us.
- While this incomprehensibility of God is valid, it can also make God appear to be completely removed from our daily lives, and thus irrelevant to us.

### God our Redeemer

- This is where God coming amongst us in and through his Son Jesus becomes so important.
- Jesus himself helps us comprehend God's purpose by saying:  
*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 (John 3.16) - or, may have life in all its fullness.*
- In Mark and John's Gospel accounts, they thought it was enough to affirm Jesus being the Son of God when they simply describe Jesus being anointed with God's Spirit.
- For them this was sufficient for Jesus to be able to state:  
*'The Father and I are one.' 'If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and believe that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.'* (John 10.30, 37-38)
- Jesus reaffirms his relationship with God the Father a number of times in John's Gospel.
- In one instance:  
*Philip said to Jesus, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.'* (John 14.8-9)
- In contrast, Luke and Matthew's Gospel accounts provide miracle stories of the conception and birth of Jesus, to help us comprehend better both the humanity of Jesus - being born just like us, and the divinity of Jesus - being conceived and born through the power and activity of the Holy Spirit.
- John affirms the divinity of Jesus as pre-existing his human state, when he recounts a prayer Jesus makes after the Last Supper.  
*Jesus prayed: 'Father, I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.'* (John 17.4-5)

### God our Life-giver

- In the same way we are reminded, especially in the Old Testament scriptures, that God's Spirit was with God before the world was created.

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- For example, in today's reading from Proverbs, the writer has God's Spirit personified as Sophia or Wisdom, who then states:  
*The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,  
the first of his acts of long ago.  
Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning of the earth. (Proverbs 8.22-23)*
- And reading through the New Testament scriptures there are continual references to the function, the presence, and the activity of God's Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles and in all the letters written by Paul, Peter, James and others.
- For example, from the passage from Romans read earlier:  
*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Romans 5.5)*
- In this we are reminded of the Pentecost outpouring of God's Spirit that we celebrated again last Sunday.

### God is relationship

- One of the fundamental aspects of our Trinitarian God that I find vital in my own comprehension of how God has created us to be, is the concept of perfect relationship as an aspect of the nature of God.
- This is implied in the creation poem of the first chapter of Genesis:  
*Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness ...'  
So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them. (Genesis 1.26-27)*
- So we have right at the beginning of the Bible the notion of God referring to himself as 'us' and talking about 'our image', and then creating men and women collectively as a revelation of God, together.
- So within God there is relationship, and God then creates us to likewise be in relationship.
- This makes sense when we reflect on God being, or embodying, love.
- For love to be present and meaningful, there needs to be two people, and a relationship between them.
- Love is only present when it is given from one person to another.
- Love compelled God to create us in order to be able to love someone other than himself, and - being created in God's image - we too are under the compulsion of love to be in relationship with others.

### Jesus' relationship with the Father

- Now our relationships are interesting and messy, and are often flawed - but still worthwhile.
- However, when we reflect on the relationship contained within God - the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit - that relationship has to be perfect.
- I think this is demonstrated in the interactions Jesus has with others.
- Don't forget that Jesus was fully human, and in his humanity was tempted to follow his human desire, his human will.
- Jesus was tempted at times to do something that was not in alignment with God's will because he was human, like us.
- The key difference is that, through God's Spirit within him, Jesus had the perfect relationship with God the Father.
- I suggest that every time Jesus was tempted, he ensured that he was right-wisely aligned with God so that he could discern the divine perspective - and then respond from that divine perspective.
- At all times Jesus maintained his faith relationship with our heavenly Father, intentionally praying and listening to God, and regularly just being present with God.
- I reckon that Jesus was taught how to do this by his own parents, and then kept practising that discipline for himself as he matured.
- When he was thirty, he was then able to respond to what he was called to do, and was anointed to fulfil his role as the Messiah.
- By the time he was reaching the end of his three years of ministry, he was able to share with his disciples - and through them with us - the nature of that active relationship that he had with the Father, through the Spirit.
- What Jesus tells us in today's Gospel reading is how we can have the same kind of faith relationship with God the Father.  
*Jesus said to his disciples: 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.' (John 16.12-15)*

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- Here Jesus makes it plain that in the three years they've had with him, they have not learnt everything.
- They've learned enough to be able to receive and engage with the Holy Spirit, but they will then need to keep engaging with God's Spirit to learn further.
- What Jesus tells those first disciples applies to us too.
- The ongoing faith relationship Jesus enjoyed with our heavenly Father is the model for our own faith relationship with God.
- We too are encouraged to keep on intentionally praying and listening to God, both together with other Christians and when we are by ourselves - just as Jesus did.
- As Paul writes: *we are justified by our faith* - that is, we are made right-wise with God through our faith relationship with him.
- We do not do this in our own strength, but we do this in the power of God's Spirit.
- And when we do this - when we practise our faith relationship with God, then as the writer of Proverbs says, God's Spirit delights in us.
- May you delight in God, and enjoy God delighting in you. Amen.