



Revd Ro's Reflection on Trinity Sunday Year C 2022

Romans 5.1-5

John 16.12-15

I have always wondered with awe at the trinity, ever since I was a little girl and had to learn part of the 'Great Commission' given to his disciples by Jesus at his ascension. I can remember learning that passage and can still recite it to this day. It was a well-chosen passage too,

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,' (Matthew 28).

After the ascension the disciples went back to Jerusalem and waited as instructed for the promised Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

⁷'I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.' (John 16)

Last week we celebrated Pentecost and today Trinity Sunday. The trinity is wonderful; I wonder how many learned tomes have been written on the subject? Yet we can never fully understand the nature of God. Jesus of course knew this and spoke in figures of speech, parables or word pictures. We can only comprehend dimly now. Maybe we should take a leaf out of the book of the Celtic Christians. Their prayers are infused by the trinity. They saw God as 'High King of Heaven' but also with them at all times, in the prow of their boat, at milking, at weaving, at work on their farmsteads. Think of these words, 'God is with us, we are not alone, thanks be to God.' Their images of the trinity as a folded napkin, three folds, one cloth, or a clover leaf, or one finger three joints might be simple illustrations but they are not simplistic, they make a point. I think that it is wonderful that we can have a relationship with our God, the creator of all that is yet near as our own breathing, the God, who loves us, died for us and rose again.

Think back again to the wonderful words at the beginning of St. John's gospel,

¹ 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing

came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.'

God is three persons, one God, a communion. That word communion is so important; the trinity of the Godhead, the three persons, are in complete communion with one another. The Father is in the Spirit and the Son, the Son is in the Father and the Spirit, the Spirit in the Father and the Son. The theological term for this is perichoresis, the interpenetration or communion of relationship within the Godhead. I once heard it described as, 'the divine dance of love,' a community of three in one in perfect harmony, which I think is beautiful. It is of course our pattern for our own communities. The trinity is a mystery and one that is so profound that we cannot ever really comprehend it but it is the foundation of our belief. The trinity, three persons in one God, is the basis of our faith; we affirm it every time we say the Creed. Think of our baptism service centred in belief in the trinity. Godhead as trinity is the foundation of everything. The trinity is wonderful because it is rooted in relationship and our God; the God who at the incarnation came to be with us and sent the Spirit at Pentecost, has a continuing relationship with us. There is nothing remote about the triune God; every time we turn to him he is there. The words, 'God is love,' are so very apt. His love surrounds us at every step of our lives. We therefore should reflect that communion of love in our relationships. Trinity Sunday therefore celebrates not only our God as three in one but the Christian's wonderful relationship with the God who loves us and cares for us.

We looked last week at the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to those first followers and at how they are not only emboldened and strengthened but authorised to go out in Jesus' name with the power of the Spirit. We are told of the doings of the Apostles inspired and authorised by the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. Here are accounts of men and women transformed as indeed we can be too.

Our gospel reading is from St. John's gospel, it is once more part of the 'farewell discourse' of Jesus. Jesus is teaching his disciples but he is giving them reassurance too because after his departure he assures them they will not be left alone for long. They will soon understand the meaning of, 'God with us.' Indeed the passage from Matthew's gospel I mentioned at the beginning concludes, 'I am with you always, until the end of time.' But at the moment it is just too much for them to grasp. There will be trauma ahead, Jesus will be executed, and they will run away and fail him. All will seem darkness and grief. But with that fight at Calvary, with the resurrection something momentous is happening in the world. Jesus defeats evil and wins salvation for us. On Easter morning death is defeated. These events can never be repeated. God incarnate has done what only God can do and the beginning of the new age has dawned. This newly perfected creation will come in God's time, but it will be Jesus who comes in glory to rule at his second coming.

All this is too much for the disciples to understand as Jesus speaks to them in that room. No one can fully comprehend holy mysteries.

¹² 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.'

There is so little time, in a few short hours he will be arrested and Jesus' task, the plan of God will be set in motion. There is no time to teach them much more now and they simply could not understand anyway. This is the job that the Holy Spirit will perform.

¹³ '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.'

These are simple men, fishermen and so on. They are not theologians, they are not intellectuals. Compare these men after Pentecost with the men listening to Jesus' words in that room after the Last Supper. Think of them in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. These are men transformed, not just in courage but in intellect, in understanding. It is the Holy Spirit who infuses them with this new understanding of exactly who Jesus was, exactly what he did and what he achieved for all believers. It is in the power of the Holy Spirit that they will perform signs and healings just as Jesus said they would. But 'he will not speak on his own' Jesus is referring to the community of the Godhead, three in one.

¹⁴ 'He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.'

What a wonderful Trinitarian speech. Jesus shows us the trinity in action in a few words. Not only is this promise wonderful for the disciples, it is wonderful for us. Re read Jesus' words again as if he is speaking to you, to every one of us. That is so powerful too in the prayer which follows on from the 'farewell discourse.' Jesus' promise is for every one of us as we believe in him, try to live in his way and take his words to others. When we feel low, as those disciples were to do, Jesus' promise is there to reassure us, 'I am with you until the end of time'. Our God is unique in his relationship and love for humanity. In our prayer we can talk to him, be with him, and rest in his presence. With the Holy Spirit within us, like those disciples we can do more than we can imagine.

As we turn to our reading from Romans five think back to Jesus' promise in John 14

²⁵ 'I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.'

Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit is followed immediately with this promise of deep peace. That is the 'peace of God which passes all understanding' a peace which heals body, mind and spirit, a peace not at all like that which the world gives. Now if we look at the first lines of our reading from Romans 5:

¹ 'Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand;'

Paul makes the point clearly his 'therefore' refers back to, ²⁴ 'It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.' (Romans 4)

The relationship of harmony with God had been broken by human sin. It is Jesus, 'the second Adam,' who by his death and passion restores humanity to a right relationship with God once more. So 'therefore' we are at peace with God because of the actions of Jesus the Christ. Jesus, won the promise of eternal life with God and forgiveness of sins to all who truly turn to him through the grace of God, freely given in love.

It is a wonderful promise. God loves us more than we can know and any break in the relationship was healed by Jesus' self-giving love. So we 'have obtained access to this grace in which we stand;'
So now, in this peace we become part of that loving relationship which is, as we have seen, reflected in the community of love within the Godhead. God's love and peace is for everyone who turns to

him in love. There is no other love deeper than the love of God and we can respond by calling him 'Abba,' Father as Jesus did.

As I have said we cannot hope to understand the nature of God and where people often fall down is to picture him in their image, to bottle the God they want to imagine. This is ridiculous but is sadly the trap so many people fall into. The God who is the creator of all that is and will be is as close as our own breathing, knows us intimately and loves us deeply. This is our faith, and faith is about trust. We have seen the face of God in the incarnate God, Jesus who walked with humans and reflected the nature of God. As Paul says

'and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.'

We can have a deep and loving relationship with God. This we know. For us there may be problems, we are sinful, we do fail him but it is not hard for the God who 'opened wide his arms for us on the cross' and longs to establish a loving relationship with his people. It is humanity that turns its back, not God.

Life is not easy; the world is in a sad state; we have only to look at what is happening today. It was similar in Paul's world. He and those early Christians were living under Roman governance and the Pax Romana was achieved by force and persecution. But, says Paul, although times are tough, although we may not feel his presence, we must remember God is there and his Holy Spirit is with us. Life is real and life is earnest and suffering may come but God will strengthen us to face whatever comes. We may not suffer persecution for our faith but a good many people do. Paul and the Apostles and those followers of Jesus certainly did. Yes you may be persecuted but it is what you do about it that matters.

Suffering is never good. That is not what Paul means when he says,

³ 'And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,'

Think of his words, 'I boast in the cross of Christ my God.' suffering must be expected, persecution must be expected. Jesus has warned of it when he says, 'the world will hate you.' We have looked at what Jesus means when he refers to the 'world' in this context. St. John does the same when he writes,

¹⁰ 'He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.' (John 1)

If you do not go the way people want you to they will turn against you and the results can be painful. That goes for any kind of situation where a person stands up for what is right against the powers that be. This then is to be expected, says Paul. We are speaking for Jesus Christ, son of God who is the way to the Father. Now then, if people refuse to accept this we are likely to suffer for it BUT, and it is a huge but, though suffering of itself is never good it brings results.

'suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us,'

I wonder how many times, looking back on an experience which though it may have been tough at the time, we come to realise later that it has, in fact, made us a stronger character, a stronger person.

Hope is so important, think of 1 Corinthians 13 ¹³ 'And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.'

The hope of the Christian is in Jesus Christ and the salvation he has won for us. Followers of Jesus down the ages may have seemed foolish in the world's eyes, but we are in a sense in the world and

not of it. We know that God is with us in all our lives and when we turn to him in prayer he is there. The hope of the Christian is not disappointed

⁵'because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.'

The Holy Spirit is poured out on all believers from the early followers in the upper room at Pentecost to us today and onwards down the ages to come. At our baptism the same Holy Spirit descends to us as it did on Jesus at his baptism.

The promise goes further too. The scriptures are fulfilled in Jesus; the new and final covenant is through Jesus. The promises of God are given to us and part of this is that the new creation of God has begun in Jesus and it is up to us to help to bring it to fruition and pray in trust for the day when he will come again in glory.

The readings both show the depth of God's love and that we are welcomed into that love; so we can truly be at peace with God and one another.

Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty. God in three persons, blessed Trinity. Reginald Heber

~~~~~