



Trinity Sunday

Sermon by Revd Margaret Place



Sunday 7 June 2020

READINGS

Genesis 1:1 - 2:4; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13: 11-13; Matthew 28: 16-20

The Trinity

A long time ago when I was facilitating a group in an Alpha course, I had some young people in my group, and I think it was a session where we discussed prayer, during one of the breaks I heard three of the members talking about how they prayed. In answer to “who do you pray to,” one said “I pray to Jesus because I know what he looks like and it feels real.” The questioner replied, “I pray to God because he’s the boss. You’ve got to go to the top if you want anything”. The third one who was listening said, “My mom prays to the Holy Spirit.” Neither of the other two knew who the Holy Spirit was. “You have to get the Holy Spirit because if you don’t you aren’t allowed to do anything in the church.” After that, they went on to talk about something else.

I think we could sympathise. We go into autopilot with the Father Son and Holy Spirit at the end of our prayers, but we all have our favourite view of God when we say our prayers, and since Confirmation, we don’t really bother too much about the Trinity. We slip into one of the other quite easily – after all they all refer to God, don’t they? It’s a bit like the many in this country who speak many languages. If one parent’s home language is Tswana and the other Isizulu the children speak both, and then they go to school and learn English and Afrikaans or another of our official languages. And children pick up other languages too. They can converse with anyone. The same goes for Swiss children who have to be fluent in French, German, Italian and Romansch. But it is only if you decide to study any of those languages and go into their idioms, their literature and poetry and songs and study their origins and development that you learn so much more. You get to see nuances and perspectives that you don’t get in everyday conversation.

So it is with the Trinity. The more you know of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, (and for the sake of familiarity I am not going to use the more modern, non-sexist way, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer), the less you realise you don’t actually know. There are the three persons in the Trinity and you get to know them, in different contexts, but in fact, even throughout the Old Testament, the implication of a Trinitarian concept is there. These three persons, father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct from one another, but they

are all one substance. To say it mathematically, it's not $1/3+1/3+1/3 = 1$, nor is it $1+1+1=3$, but rather $1+1+1=1$. The trinity is an attempt to explain why, if we worship one God, do we have Jesus and the Holy Spirit all of whom are God, but aren't the same. God who created everything comes to be with us in human form as Jesus and comes to be in us through the Holy Spirit. Three persons, are one substance and a unity which demonstrates the perfect community.

Nice for a Bible study with a good speaker and lots of material to research, but what does it say to us when we are starved of community in what seems to be a permanent pandemic and we have not the bandwidth for anything too deep at the moment?

Our instinct is to see our world as a straightforward good vs bad. Someone – and there are lots of people to blame – set this virus thing free in our world, and we have to fight it until it is defeated with prayers and fasting and motivational sermons. Given the battles fought in our hospitals at the moment, there is room for that approach, and all our healthcare workers and essential service providers need all the prayers we can give for them.

But we can also see it more holistically through the Trinity. God the Father, who created the world and saw that it was very good, saw too that his human creation kept eating of various trees of knowledge of good and evil and learnt again and again about death. God came in the person of Jesus who through his life, teaching, Crucifixion and Resurrection saves us all from sin and death, and God the Holy Spirit comes to be in and with those who are willing to become one with God in Christ.

So God the Father creates a beautiful world, and somewhere in the depths of a wetland or a forest some animal needs a virus in order to live well and God creates it. Desperately poor people eat these animals without the necessary standardization procedures. Or, if you prefer another theory, someone wants to design a vaccine for another disease and isolates or clones this troublesome Covid 19 one, but it escapes probably as a result of carelessness. Either way, the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of science and self-seeking and greed and mismanagement is eaten by humanity, and death enters into the world. God the Son comes into the world and identifies fully with the suffering people of the world, and eventually sacrifices his life for the sins of the whole world. Jesus is in every sacrifice – the medical people who are staying away from their families in order to help others; and those who have lost their jobs or who are watching their businesses go under but are still trying to find money for their employees; those elderly who have not seen anyone, not even their families for two months and it looks as though they will always be vulnerable and they wonder if they will ever see them again; and those who are working around the clock to find a vaccine or a cure, and the many who are more hungry than they have ever been. With these sacrifices come all sorts of little deaths caused by the sin of the world, and Resurrection seems very far away.

In the meantime God the Holy Spirit enters into the hearts and minds of many who are trying to feed the poor even though it is dangerous, there are those sharing the little they have with others who have less, there are those who are donating everywhere they can and there are many who are trying to be kind to the lonely, and who encourage those scared people who have to work and who are afraid because so many are careless about masks and social distancing. And God the Holy Spirit is gradually leading those clever people who are eating, sleeping, dreaming Covid 19 towards a solution, and God the Holy Spirit is hoping against hope that the people he loves so much will turn from their ways and look again at the beautiful world God the Father created and live in harmony with all things so that viruses will stay where they belong and do what they were designed to do, and people will love one another, and all will look at God the Holy Trinity and say – it is all, very, very good.

God is with us. Jesus promised he would be with us even to the end of the world. Let us take hold of this hope and live expectantly knowing that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can teach us all things, and loves us hugely. And may we all live to see the day when we look back at this time and say, it was very tough, very tough, but the Trinity was in front of us, showing how a true community works and it was with us, and we learned so much and look, our community is beginning to mirror that community vision which has been planted in us by our Father/Son/HolySpirit.