

ADDRESS**12 June 2022****Trinity Sunday**

Proverbs 8 1-4, 22-31	Wisdom
Psalms 8	O Lord, our Sovereign
Romans 5.1-5	Justified by faith
John 16.12-17	The Comforter

Lord God, make us loving enough to serve you without counting the cost. and wise enough to follow you without knowing all truth.

As we heard again this morning, Paul tells us that we are justified by faith, God's love has been poured into our hearts, through what we believe in, but what exactly are we to believe in? In the God revealed in many ways over many generations, as revealed in the Scriptures and in the sacrificial life of Jesus.

But how do we express the nature of the being of God we believe in in human words? For some people, it is a puzzle not worth trying to solve. But there have been many attempts, many analogies and many images, like the ones in today's *Connections*.

The first creed of the infant church may have been simply *Jesus is Lord*. If you know Jesus you know God. St Paul may have been referring to this first creed when he wrote to the Corinthians, *No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* (1 Cor.12.3)

By the 2nd century, this simple sentence had developed into a statement of faith for all new Christians, by the 4th century into the trinitarian version of the Apostles Creed which is still included in baptismal services, and into the version of the Nicæan Creed which is part of our liturgy of Holy Communion.

None of these creeds specifically affirms God as Trinity, so in the 5th or 6th century the church in southern France began to use a longer confession of faith which tried to fully express the three-fold unity of God. The confession was attributed to bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, who lived in the 4th C. The actual author is unknown.

Today being Trinity Sunday, instead of saying the Nicæan creed, we shall follow the tradition of reciting this so-called Athanasian creed,-- actually it is not a creed, we are not asked to say 'we believe-- -- it is a statement of faith which both affirms Paul's teaching, that we are justified by faith, and also tries to define what that saving faith is. It is belief in the Being of God as Trinity, one God in three persons, co-equal and co-eternal.

As you see from your service sheet, in its 1662 Prayer Book translation, the confession begins:

*Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith.
Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
And the Catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;
Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance.*

We must not confuse the Father with the Son, or with the Holy Spirit; they are three distinct Persons; but we must not in our thoughts and prayers divide the one Being, the one God. Three in One, and One in Three.

The church has been celebrating the mystery of the Trinity since the 9th century, but has always had the problem of finding human words to express the divine mystery, one beyond our understanding, much less beyond verbal definition.

The Trinity is not spelled out anywhere in the Bible, but it is evident throughout. From the beginning the Scriptures show God as working with his people in three ways, as Creator, as Redeemer, and/or as Guide and Counsellor, often personified as Wisdom.

The Father is the Creator, but we can see Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the Genesis account of creation as well. We worship Jesus as the word of God, and it was the Word of God which created the universe – *and God said, let there be light; let there be a dome in the midst of the waters; let the waters be gathered together in one place; let there be lights in the sky; let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures* and, on the 6th day, *God said, let us make humankind in our image . . .*

We see the Holy Spirit in the creation story, too, in the Hebrew phrase which most English versions translate as *the spirit of God which swept over the face of the waters*, initiating the creation of all things. Other translations translate the phrase as *a wind from God swept over the face of the waters* or *a mighty wind swept over the face of the waters*. The spirit of God is the Person who manifests the power of God in human lives.

Today's reading from the book of Proverbs personifies the Spirit of God as Wisdom and confirms that it pre-existed before the Creation of the universe. We know that the only thing which existed before the creation of the universe was the divine Being we call God, so the Spirit must also be God. Our Gospel reading records Jesus' telling his disciples that the Spirit would continue his work of imparting divine wisdom until his return in glory.

In the writings of the apostle John, among the last books of the Bible to be written, we see the three persons of the Trinity personified in different ways --*God is love* (1 Jn 4.16), *God is Light* (1 John 1.5), *God is Spirit* (John 4.24).

John also records Jesus' saying that "*the Father is greater than I*" (John 14:28). This leads some theologians to reject the notion of the Trinity as spelled out in the Athanasian creed: they argue that the Son and the Spirit are subordinate to the Father, lesser divinities.

The Athanasian creed resolves the dilemma by saying that Jesus is *equal to the Father as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father, as touching his Manhood*

Other theologians warn against confusing 'nature' and 'role'. They argue that the Bible reveals the Son and the Spirit as equal in nature to the Father but subordinate in role. Just as the persons who wipe the table at McDonalds are as much truly human in nature, as truly as the prime minister or the Queen, but obviously not equal in role, in their position in society.

And there are many, many other attempts to explain the nature of the being of God. As John's Gospel prophesied, *the world itself could not contain the books that would be written* (Jn 21.25).

This is not simply an intellectual exercise. We are trying to discover more about our saving God. So how does understanding God as Trinity help explain the mystery of our salvation?

Last month I came across an exposition which made sense to me. It is based on verses in the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul had a personal experience of the risen Jesus, unlike any other, and this enabled him to bring together what he had learned from the first disciples, and from the proto-Gospels which were beginning to circulate in the young churches around the Mediterranean, and from his own conversion experience.

First, salvation is the work of the **Father**. *He chose us before the foundation of the earth.*(v.4) He adopted us as his children (v. 5) but not everyone accepts his Fatherly love. Verses 4 and 5.

Second, salvation comes **through** the Son. *He chose us in Christ. (v. 4); in him we have redemption through his blood (v. 7) Verses 4 and 7.*

Third, salvation is **known** through the Spirit. *Those who had heard the word of truth were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit (v. 13). This is the pledge of our inheritance (v. 14).* Through the Holy Spirit, the salvation which Christ won for us on the Cross becomes a present reality, shaping both our beliefs and our behaviour. Verses 13 and 14.

So as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all active in our redemption, the Trinity is the heart of our faith. The more we study this great mystery the closer we come to our creating, redeeming and sanctifying God. As a number of writers have said, 'The Trinity is not a puzzle to be solved, but a relationship to be entered into'.

This is the 11th time I have preached on Trinity Sunday in this church, thousands and thousands of sermons on the Trinity will be delivered today in other churches, but there is much, much more that could be said. The world itself would not contain the sermons that could be written. **#**

We praise you, O God; we acknowledge you to be the Lord,

All creation worships you, the Father everlasting,

Father of infinite majesty, ,

Your true and only Son, worthy of all praise,

*And the Holy Spirit, Advocate and Guide. **AMEN***

Sermon theme

The Trinity and our salvation

'Salvation is the work of the Father, comes through the Son, is known by the Spirit'

Images of the Trinity

