

# Sermon Notes

**St Mark's Anglican Church  
South Hurstville**

**Trinity Sunday  
3 June 2007**

**Preacher  
The Reverend Chris Albany  
Rector**

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Readings: Proverbs 8.1-4,22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5.1-5; John 16.12-15

## The Holy Trinity – Three and yet One

A few week's ago after I started my sermon with a joke a parishioner sent me an e-mail saying As I won't be in the vestry on Sunday morning to pass this on before going into church, I thought you might enjoy it now. The rest of the e-mail was a joke which read as follows:

Pastor's Business Card

A new pastor was visiting in the homes of his parishioners. At one house it seemed obvious that someone was at home, but no answer came to his repeated knocks at the door. Therefore, he took out a business card and wrote "Revelation 3:20" on the back of it and stuck it in the door. When the offering was processed the following Sunday, he found that his card had been returned. Added to it was this cryptic message, "Genesis 3:10." Reaching for his Bible to check out the citation, he broke up in gales of laughter. Revelation 3:20 begins "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Genesis 3:10 reads, "I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid for I was naked."

Remember when the funniest jokes were the clean ones? They still are!

"A cheerful heart is good medicine" (Prov. 17:22)

One of the good things about being a grandparent is that it allows one to get in touch with one's inner child. To give expression to a sense of playfulness, openness and a certain care-freeness, to become dis-inhibited. So when Genevieve, our granddaughter is around I find myself doing all sorts of things that I don't normally do – like getting down onto the floor and crawling around with her – much to her delight and the amusement of other family member.

Holidays can have the same effect. They help one to loosen up. To let go of the need to be serious, on the job constantly. They give time to relax and re-create, to be in the NOW – something children do so much better than we adults. All this is by way of lead in to what I want to say about what we are celebrating this day in the church calendar – Trinity Sunday. The one special day when we are not focusing on a historical event or person but on a Doctrine or Dogma. When we focus on God, as Christian's orthodoxy has described that reality as Three and Yet One. In thinking of this understanding forged out of the controversies of the early centuries of the Church I often wonder what to make of words like this from the little used Athanasian Creed: "The Catholic Faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity; neither confounding the persons : nor dividing the substance."

If we have to believe and understand those words in order to be saved, then, O God, what chance do any of us have of making it to heaven! You probably laughed as loudly as we did at the old joke, when as students we quoted a few lines further down from this Athanasian Creed: "The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible: and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible" – the whole bloody thing incomprehensible!

In a recent book "The Inclusive God" the authors in speaking about the Trinity have this to say: "Nowadays, despite enjoying a resurgence in academic theology, the Trinity is still regarded with puzzlement or indifference by many Christians (including preachers!). This is a pity, because the Trinity is neither an intellectual puzzle understood only by specialists, nor a dry dogma we have to force ourselves to

believe in, just because we're told it's good for us. No, the Trinity is an expression of the inclusiveness of God.

To speak of God as Trinity reminds us that there is never one and only way of defining the divine. No catch-all dogma that we can come up with can ever say all that can be said. The reality of God is always richer, always more dynamic, mysterious and alive than our fumbling words and images can tell. Far from creating another dead formula, the doctrine of the Trinity always announces the incompleteness of any theological project we might care to construct. Experiencing our way into the heart of this mystery is a way of curing ourselves of the need for possessive, dominating, exclusive idols."

How do we begin to experience ourselves into the heart of the mystery that us our Triune God? How can God be at one and the same time 3 and yet 1? Creator/Father-Mother, Jesus the Son, friend and companion and Spirit, guide, sanctified, encourager. Or to put it more glibly, "Big Daddy, the Boy and Spook!?"

You are probably familiar with some of the traditional ways of trying to describe the Trinity in Pictorial forms. Such as the diagram which is like the 3 spoked wheel (A bit like the Peace-Anti-War Sign) with Father, Son and Spirit written on the circumference each at an end of a spoke. Around the circumference between each of the 3 words is written "is not the" and along the spokes leading to the centre hub which is labelled "God" is written the word "is". The Father is not the Son is not the spirit is not the Father etc and the Father is God, the Son is God etc.

The way I find most helpful to think about the Trinity is to use the analogy of us as persons. We all operate in a multitude of ways. Transactional Analysis, which looks at the way we interact with each other in relationships helpfully describes some of these ways as those of "Parent", "Adult" and "Child". According to TA theory, in any relationship at a particular time we can be seen to be operating as a Child to Parent or Parent to Child, or Adult to Adult. Indeed we can probably quickly identify with sub-categories of these such as the subversive child or the rebellious child or the child looking for protection and nurture. Or the Nurturing Parent or the Controlling Parent. The important thing to recognise is that all of us, no matter our age operate in all these ways – We all contain within us aspects of Child and Parent and Adult.

Now when I am with my granddaughter and the little boy in me comes to the fore and is "allowed out". It is still me Chris Albany. When I am relating to someone like a Controlling Parent, it is still the same me and when I am relating to someone in mutuality, Adult to Adult it is still me. Yet there are quite discernible differences. Chris the little boy is not Chris the Parent etc. I don't know about you but that helps me in my thinking of God who is three and yet one.

A final word about the significance of this for our spirituality – for our life in relationship with God, which includes our prayer life. Just as if you never saw and knew that aspect of me that is the little child, you wouldn't really know the real and full me, so it is with God. There are some people who only seem to relate to one or two of the aspects of God and not all three.

Indeed we probably all have our preferred way of thinking about God – either as Father/Creator or as Jesus-God the Son or as God the Holy Spirit. I have no problem with that, the problem comes if we never or only rarely relate to the other aspects of God – for then our understanding of and relationship with God will be incomplete, unbalanced and we will be missing out on the fullness that relationship with God – has to offer.

So as we celebrate our Triune God this Trinity Sunday can I encourage you to work at ways of continually relating to God as God-Creator/Father-Mother the all encompassing, all compassionate one, as Jesus, friend, companion, Saviour, the one who comes to us and shows us what it is too be truly human and as God the Holy Spirit; guide; encourager: the one who sustains us and leads us into all wisdom and truth.

Blessed be our God – the Holy Trinity – 3 and yet 1.