



Trinity Sunday 2021 Sermon Notes

Trinity Sunday comes a week after the excitement of Pentecost when we remember God revealing himself in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit came as promised by Jesus to give boldness to the disciples and to strengthen them to proclaim God's goodness and forgiveness revealed in Jesus Christ.

Many images have been used over the centuries to try to help us understand the Trinity, God's revelation of himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Some of these will be familiar to us from stained glass windows, paintings and icons, the intertwined Celtic knot symbols. These are attempts to explain in a pictorial way what the Trinity is all about. So can we explain God as Almighty and All-powerful as well as Father, Son and Spirit? Yes, but neither simply, nor briefly. What we have been left with over the centuries, apart from art works, are the definitions that we find in the creeds of the church. We are familiar with these from Church services in the forms of the Apostles', Nicene or St Athanasius Creeds. These serve to give the boundaries of what is orthodox belief about the nature of God.

So how, then, can we make sense of the Trinity? How do we come to understand God in unity and trinity without resorting to complex arguments of philosophy and theology? I don't propose to embark on an exploration of centuries of church controversy or doctrine, but simply to ask "How does it make sense for us today?"

The most important feature to remember for all the arguments over the lifetime of the church is that at the heart of the Trinity is a relationship between the three persons – a relationship of love, unity and mutual understanding. A relationship built on the intimacy of love and unity – "The Father and I are one." Jesus tells the disciples.

As we see in the glorious icon of the Trinity by Rublev, we are permitted by faith in Jesus to enter into the mystery of this relationship. The gift is to realise that we are called to inhabit the relationship and become part of it without struggling to understand how it works.

By grace and at different parts of our lives we come to appreciate the interplay of the relationship that we can have with the different persons of the Trinity. But we are especially called to join in this amazing relationship by our faith and by the grace of God Almighty creating us brothers and sisters of Christ.

So what is the Trinity for? How can we come to understand this all-powerful God in 3 persons? Put simply, despite what was said earlier, the Trinity helps us to understand an incomprehensible God. (slide 8) I think it was Anselm who said that God was "greater than that which can be understood?" Yet each of the persons of the Trinity allows us a glimpse into the nature of this unknowable, incomprehensible God. So let's look at each of the three persons for this glimpse.

God the Father – each of us has had a biological father. Sometimes this relationship hasn't worked out because of absence or abuse or some other failing on the part of our dad. But the intimacy and equality between Jesus and his heavenly father helps us to see what the relationship could be like. For in the person of Jesus we see the physical embodiment of God. As Jesus reminds the disciples "to have seen me is to have seen the Father." (John 13:9)

God the Son – Jesus was fully human and so experienced all that we do, hunger, loneliness, and difficulties. Yet the intimacy and closeness that we see between Jesus and his father shows us how we too can be loved completely.

God the Holy Spirit – brought boldness to the disciples and encouraged the early church to bear witness to the love of God made manifest in Jesus. The Holy Spirit brings healing and renewal to those who call upon God in faith and trust allowing them and strengthening them to face life's challenges. The Spirit enable us to recognise God and to call him Abba, father, Dad.

Many have tried to explain the nature of the relationship between the 3 persons and to give a formal and comprehensive understanding of how each of the persons can be both fully divine and distinct without subtracting from Gods essential being – cue a roll call of the greater theological minds of the life of the church – Aleander, Arius, Athanasius, Gregary of Nyssa, Austine, Anselm, Aquinas and Anselm.

Each person of the trinity has the same essence or being (“stuff” if you like) as God, so that each person is totally divine as well as totally separate. By coming into relationship with Jesus through faith, we come into relationship with the totality of almighty God with diminishing any of God's power or nature. In other words, we experience all the totality of God's divinity without “dividing the substance” of God's nature

Thus by faith God comes back to union with us allowing us to experience that relationship of intimacy and trust between and the Father and the Son and allows full communion between us as may sit on the throne of God's grace and power.