

Trinity Sunday: Offenham
12.06.2022

Readings: Proverbs 8: 1-4, 22-31
Romans 5: 1-5
John 16: 12-15

Today is, of course, Trinity Sunday, and this day seems to have a special significance for me. Back in 2002, when my family were about to move from Stourbridge to Sedgley, where I was to serve my title, our last day at the church we had attended since moving to Stourbridge 15 years earlier, the church where Mark and Nick had been confirmed, the church where I had served as a Reader and where we had all been members of the choir, was Trinity Sunday – and I was invited to preach, it being our last Sunday there.

Another important Trinity Sunday for me was in 2006 when my induction as vicar of Eckington and Defford cum Besford took place. I didn't have to preach on that occasion – that was left to the Archdeacon!

So Trinity Sunday has a special place in my heart – even though it's the most tricky day of the year to preach on!

One of the diarist in the Church Times is David Winter, who once wrote that when he was considering his first parish someone wisely advised him to avoid a 'Holy Trinity', because he'd either have to grapple in the pulpit every year with the mystery of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, or listen to a reluctant visiting preacher doing the same!!!

So today is indeed Trinity Sunday- and today it's my turn once again to grapple with the theme!

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My training incumbent gave me similar advice....avoid Holy Trinity, open churchyards and a robed choir....not that I have a problem with robed choirs...I was a member of one for many years!

All the other festivals and seasons of the Church year relate to events that happened....Advent, leading to the birth of Christ; Epiphany, Lent leading to Passiontide and Easter, Ascension, Pentecost. These all concern specific events. Only Trinity Sunday refers to a reality that has no date.

There must be an answer to the question, 'When was Jesus crucified?', even if we don't know what that answer is...but it would be ridiculous to ask, 'When did God become the Holy Trinity?'

That God IS always Father, Son and Holy Spirit excludes the idea that at some time or other he began to be so. The Trinity is a very difficult concept for us to grasp but we cannot possibly understand everything – if anything – about God. Otherwise we make our God too small.

The belief in the Trinity is not just something we accept or not, it is central to the Christian faith. Many of our hymns are concerned with the Trinity.....for example.... 'God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity'. And in a few minutes, when we recite the Creed, we shall profess belief in one God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Among the statements we shall make are that.....

We believe.....in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth....
God as the Creator.

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.....in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
of one being with the Father.....
God as Redeemer.

.....in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and Giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
.....God as Enabler.

Our whole lives as Christians are surrounded by the name of the Trinity. We were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We married in church in the same name and in many Christian churches we shall be buried in that same threefold name.

If the last few decades, with the rise in the importance of psychology has taught us nothing else, it has shown us that we human beings are very complex characters. And the Bible tells us that we are made in the image of God. Humanity is a reflection, or a model, of the nature of God. It is a small model, a limited model and all too often a distorted image due to human faults and failings.

If we are complex beings, how much more complex is God?

We have, in the Trinity, a mystery which is beyond all human thought and language....God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity. How are we to explain it?

The word, person, is misleading. It is totally inadequate.

In the 1st century the word was a neutral word, pointing to a personal relationship. Today a 'person' is a self-

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conscious, autonomous individual...so it can sound as though we are talking about 3 gods.

Maybe a better way of expressing it would be to speak of 3 modes of existence...the One God existing in 3 different ways. There are not 3 personalities but one

Personality, which contains a threefold distinction. This one Personality exists in three different PERSONAL ways.

God not only reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God IS Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three names indicate three genuine distinctions within the one personal God and these three distinctions are themselves fully personal.

This is borne out by the personal experience of Christians. We know by experience that we are children of the Father, redeemed by the Son, and that the Holy Spirit is present in our lives...and that all these relationships have to do with the one and the same God.

It is a constant moving to and fro – from the Father through the Son to the Holy Spirit in our lives and then again from the Spirit in our lives through the Son to the Father. In and through the Spirit, which lives in us, Jesus Christ is present with us and in and through Jesus we have fellowship with God the Father.

In our everyday lives we want to manage our own affairs, domestic, financial and so on, and this desire is useful and necessary for an ordered life....but we also want to manage the religious aspect of our lives. This is not possible.

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Trinity Sunday, coming round once a year, is a reminder that we cannot manage God. We can't even imagine him. A god whom we could hold in our minds, like multiplication tables, would not be God.

All the statements we make about God are only childish things that will have to be put away, according to St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, and it is necessary to remember that they will have to be put away, when we eventually see, face to face.

In church, in theology, in reading the Bible, teaching R.E., preaching....we are always dealing with more than we can cope with. It has to be so, if it is God we are talking about. An important part of the religious attitude has to be....I don't understand this...this is beyond me. We are dealing with things too wonderful to know and we speak of things we do not understand.

We cannot hold God in our minds or control him. He is unlike all the other ideas that we shall ever have. They are ideas of this world.....he is NOT of this world.

We need Trinity Sunday to remind us that our God is too big to be managed! We need to shake off the overconfident and over-familiarity with the Maker of all things.

We need to stand in awe of a God who is too wonderful to be imagined.

We need to be silent.....before the unimaginable and unmanageable Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.