

St. Alban's Epping, 16th June 2019

“ENJOYING THE TRINITY”

(Proverbs 8:1-4,22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15)

The Bible is not a book of doctrine; it is not a theological encyclopedia. It is a collection of all kinds of literature, which together tell the story of God, his creation and his people. There is history and parable, poetry and law, prophecy and letters, and yes, doctrine. It is not there to make us experts in doctrine, but to draw us into relationship with God.

That is important to remember as we gather on this Trinity Sunday. Sermons today all over the world will try to help people understand more about what seems a complex and confusing doctrine. And that's important to do. But the title I have given this sermon is actually “Enjoying the Trinity”. I suspect that few people feel great enjoyment when the topic of the Trinity comes up! But this word actually points us to some wonderful and joyous things about God and our relationship with him.

If the Bible were a theological encyclopedia, we would be able to turn to the appropriate section and examine the doctrine of the Trinity. Indeed the compilers of the lectionary have had to think hard to come up with the most appropriate Bible passages for today, because there is no part of the scriptures which specifically seeks to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, the **word** was first used towards the end of the second century, perhaps a hundred years after the latest books of the New Testament.

And why was the word “trinity” coined? Because it gathered together important truths about God, at a time when there was increased debate and confusion about who God is, and who Jesus is, and who or what the Holy Spirit is. “Trinity” is not a word that comes from scripture, but it sums up some beautiful truths about the God who made us, loves us and saved us.

It tells us that God is the creator of everything. He is Lord over all. We owe him our lives and all we have. And he is one God. There is no other true God.

But the oneness of God is not a solitary oneness. Most religions that hold to the idea of one God, hold also to his solitariness, his holiness, his aloofness; but the God revealed in the scriptures is not solitary and not aloof.

He walked in the garden with Adam and Eve. He revealed himself visibly to Abraham and Moses and others, though no human could ever see his full glory. But he revealed himself above all in the person of Jesus, and as his followers reflected on what Jesus did and said, they came to see that this man Jesus was not just a great human being: he was God himself, sharing their human existence and experience, and ultimately dying and rising for them. Jesus was a real human being, and yet he was God. Yet he spoke of his relationship with his Father, who was God the Father.

And, as the time drew close for Jesus to physically leave his disciples, to die and rise again, and soon afterward to ascend to his Father's side, he spoke of the Holy Spirit who would take his place. And he didn't refer to the Spirit as a force, but as a person. Jesus deliberately called the Spirit “he”: I think the point was to help the disciples see the Spirit as a person, rather than focus on “he/she” gender issues which are so prominent today.

And as the writers of the New Testament wrote their messages, their writings pointed to the reality that the Holy Spirit is truly God himself, spiritually present with God's people, and helping us to live the lives we are called to live as Jesus' followers.

So as Christians we believe in one God. It seems that Mohammed back around 600AD thought that Christians believed in three Gods: there are indications that he thought that these three Gods were the Creator, Jesus and Mary. But as Christians of course, we believe in the **one God who has made himself known in three ways: as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

God's unity involves relationship: it is not solitary. The three persons, as we call them, are bound in love, and when John wrote that God is love, he was not just telling us that we worship a loving God. No - love is at the very heart of God's being.

God did not need to create anything before he could share in loving relationship: love has always been there within the reality of God.

There are little pointers to the Trinity in the Old Testament. Many believe that it would have been God the Son who walked in the Garden of Eden, and who also spoke to Abraham and to Moses.

In Proverbs 8, part of which we read this morning, the idea of wisdom was seen by many later readers as an expression of the Word of God, and this points us towards John's great description of the Word that became flesh in the person of Jesus.

And our Psalm speaks of God the Creator who has given us humans the privilege of being in charge of the world he has made. We are made in his image, and we reflect something of God in who we are. But as the writer to the Hebrews points out, there is another who fulfils the picture of the Psalm in a new way: Jesus is truly human and yet truly God, and he had an authority in this world that we ordinary humans do not have. This Psalm points us not only to *God and us*, but towards Jesus, who is God who came among us, the true and perfect human being.

Our two New Testament readings both refer to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, although their main focus is not specifically on the Trinity.

We could actually have read those words of Jesus from John's Gospel last week, Pentecost, with its focus on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God with us, God within us, guiding us along the path of truth. His message is the same message that the Father wants us to hear, and that Jesus wants us to hear. He works in unity with them both, as he brings honour and glory to Jesus, who is God the Son.

And Paul in Romans writes of the peace with God that we have because Jesus died for us. Our translation says that we "boast" in the hope that he gives us, but "boasting" suggests that we are putting ourselves above others. It is better to translate that we **rejoice** or **celebrate** because of our hope. Troubles may come, but God will even use those to strengthen us in our character, and to assure us that he will remain true to his promises. God's love is poured into our hearts by God himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit. We cannot see God the Father. We cannot see Jesus. But through the Holy Spirit we have God himself at work in our very being, to help us walk the path of faith.

Of course we need doctrine to help clarify our understanding, and to keep us on the path of truth. But God the Holy Trinity is not just a doctrine. God is personal, and he loves us, and he wants us to know him better.

Of course our struggles in understanding everything about the Trinity remind us that we can't understand everything about God: if we could, he wouldn't be the infinite and eternal God.

We believe in one God.

The Father is our Creator who cares for us and loves us and has a wonderful future for us. Isn't that wonderful!

Jesus is God the Son who in his love has brought us forgiveness and reconciled us to God. God has shared our human existence. He understands us from the inside. Isn't that great!

The Holy Spirit is God within us, loving and teaching and guiding and strengthening, even prompting and helping us in prayer. God is here with us, within us. Isn't that terrific!

Yes, there is so much to rejoice about when we think of the Trinity. Yes, we need to **think** about this God who is one and yet three, to take in what we can. But let us also remember who it is that the doctrine points us to. Let us **enjoy** the blessings of belonging to the God who is one and yet three, the God who himself is love. And let us seek to reflect God's wonderful love in our own lives. Amen.

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