

Trinity Sunday 27th May 2018

Readings:

Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalm 29

John 3:1-17

Reflection

*In the beginning, not in time or space,
 But in the quick before both space and time,
 In Life, in Love, in co-inherent Grace,
 In three in one and one in three, in rhyme,
 In music, in the whole creation story,
 In his own image, his imagination,
 The Triune Poet makes us for his glory,
 And makes us each the other's inspiration.
 He calls us out of darkness, chaos, chance,
 To improvise a music of our own
 To sing the chord that calls us to the dance,
 Three notes resounding from a single tone,
 To sing the End in whom we all begin;
 Our God beyond, beside us, and within.*

So writes poet, priest and song-writer Malcolm Guite in this exquisite Trinity Sunday sonnet. The glorious mystery of God - this Triune Poet – calls us into intimate and eternal communion with the community of the Godhead – Father, Son and Spirit (three notes resounding from a single tone).

Gregory of Nyssa, who thought a lot about the Trinity in the 4th century, found it a daunting subject. He wrote the following in one of his sermons:

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You tell me first what is the unbegottenness of the Father, and I will then explain to you the physiology of the generation of the Son, and the procession of the Spirit, and we shall both of us be stricken with madness for prying into the mystery of God.

Trinitarian theology was not forged by inventive theorists, but by faithful Christians trying to make sense of the concrete, experiential nature and story of salvation, beginning with the biblical narrative and continuing in the ongoing history of believing communities. Reflections on the nature of God began within an ancient community deeply grounded in the monotheism of Judaism, but which, over the centuries, found a coherent unity in the Godhead of what we now know as the Trinity.

Trinitarian faith describes a God who is not solitary and alone, a God who is not an object which we can stand apart from and observe. The Trinity is an event of relationships: not three separate entities in isolation and independence from one another, but a union of subjects who are eternally interweaving and interpenetrating – the community of God.

There is an eternal *sending* within God, an eternal self-*giving* within God, an eternal *exchange* by which God is both Giver and Receiver simultaneously.

.....

The Spirit of truth guides us into this truth, just as it did the first disciples. Like the disciples, who experienced the resurrected Christ, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we too are encouraged, empowered and called beyond the confusion of the world's (and our own) darkness and suffering, to rejoice in truth – and proclaim the love and glory of the community of God. *“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him,”* John 3:17

In an essay called *Deeper Than the Darkness*, poet and mystic Edwina Gately writes:

‘These are hard times. No doubt about it. Wherever we look, there seems to be pain and suffering in our world.A few weeks ago, we celebrated Easter and were reminded of our fundamental Christian belief in the risen Christ and the hope that this most glorious event in our liturgical calendar places before us. But, even as our “Alleluias” fade into the past, the realities of our world and its violence remain fixed before us — on television, the internet, the media, a rural road, a burnt out car. Everywhere.’

How are we to understand how the world is shaped in such a way that it manifests the redeeming presence of God? How are we to absorb the great mystery of last week's Pentecost, which assures us that the Holy Spirit comes down upon us like tongues of fire to send us forth with *hope* for the world?

Augustine – the first Archbishop of Canterbury (acknowledged in our calendar yesterday) wrote the following:

“Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage. Anger at the way things are and courage to see they do not remain as they are.”

Through baptism we are ‘reborn’ by water and the Spirit. We are baptized in the name of the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are again reminded of our intimate, personal relationship with God, and our commitment to *redemptive* relationships with one another - relationships that change and grow, as we grow in our faith, and develop new understandings.

Nicodemus, who – as we read in John’s gospel - came to Jesus ‘in the dark’, could not appreciate the need for rebirth by water and the Spirit, and took Jesus literally: *“Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”* he asks. As a Pharisee and leader of the Jews, Nicodemus was intently focused on the purity laws – the stringent requirements of cleansing and sacrifice needing to be followed, in order to approach God in prayer. And through this rule-based faith position he was well aware of those who didn’t measure up to the stringent standards that Nicodemus’s God required.

Yet John doesn't point the finger at Nicodemus – if we were to read on through John's gospel, we would discover Nicodemus taking a risk in suggesting to fellow Pharisees, that Jesus receive... *a fair trial*. And even later in John's gospel, it is Joseph of Arimathea and *Nicodemus*, who take Jesus' body from the cross, wrap it in spices in linen cloth and lay it in a new tomb – Joseph, who had come to Jesus in *secret* for fear of the Jews, and Nicodemus, who had come to Jesus by night. These two who began in darkness, were, in the end, moving toward the light of Christ, coming to understand the significance of Jesus for their lives and faith.

It would seem that they, like us, were given the space and opportunity to change and grow in their faith, understandings and actions. And like Isaiah in today's Hebrew scriptures, whose unclean lips were touched and transformed to cry out "Here I am, send me", we too, have the opportunity and invitation to change and grow in our faith, understandings and actions as we live as people of hope.

The Trinity isn't just a doctrine or an idea. It's a practice, a way of life, the shape of every story.

The Trinity has to do with the lives of each of us, our daily experiences, our struggles to follow our conscience, our love and our joy, our bearing the sufferings of the world and the tragedies of human existence; it also has to do with the struggle against social injustice, with efforts at building a more human form of society, with the sacrifices and martyrdom that these endeavours so often bring.

So, what about us, today, in our damaged and conflicted world, living in a nation grappling with child poverty and child abuse, youth suicide, housing crises and homelessness, obesity, environmental damage, and a societal god called the free-market economy?

How do we proclaim and live out our faith and hope in the Triune God, embracing the peace we are promised and indeed have, through our Lord Jesus Christ, filled and guided by the Holy Spirit? Can we engage with our communities, proclaiming the

love that God has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, rejoicing in God's created world and recognising the divine spark within all humanity? Can we sing God's song and dance a divine dance with the Godhead, knowing that they delight in us?

As one commentator states: "we do not worship a stingy God who grudgingly gives gifts and who grants forgiveness as a divine grump. Not at all. The triune God is a joyous, dancing God who pours out overflowing gifts to humanity with gladness"

Even in our brokenness, the Godhead calls us out of darkness, chaos, chance, to improvise a music of our own.

So, can we hear the music, and put on our dancing shoes...?

Let us pray:

God of many names,
you invite us to dance with you,
the three in one.

By your Spirit of truth, may we *know*
the power of your love
believe in the depth of your compassion
and continue to grow
into the immense breadth of your grace.

Surprise and challenge us,
As we journey in relationship
with each other and with You
toward your eternal kingdom.
Amen.

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