

GOD IN THREE PERSONS – BLESSED TRINITY

Pentecost 1 Year B - Trinity Sunday

Is. 6:1-8; Ps. 29; Rom. 8:12-17; Jn. 3:1-17

Gladstone 30/05/2021

Jesus said, Who do men say that I am?

And his disciples answered and said, Some say you are John the Baptist returned from the dead; others say Elias, or another of the old prophets.

And Jesus answered and said, “But who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered and said, “Thou art the Logos, existing in the Father as His rationality and then, by an act of His will, being generated, in consideration of the various functions by which God is related to his creation, but only on the fact that Scripture speaks of a Father, and a Son, and a Holy Spirit, each member of the Trinity being coequal with every other member, and each acting inseparably with and interpenetrating every other member, with only an economic subordination within God, but causing no division which would make the substance no longer simple.”

And Jesus answering, said, “What?”

Today is Trinity Sunday—the day in which we acknowledge the triune nature of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For many of us though, any kind of official definition of the term “Trinity” would end up sounding much like the above definition of Christ’s relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit. Reasonably accurate, it may be—helpful for the masses, it ain’t.

As you will all no doubt know, the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the foundational cornerstones of the Christian church—but it was not always so. It wasn’t until sometime in the fourth century AD, surrounded by much heated debate, and pressured by the onslaught of heretical teachings, that our Fathers in the faith finally came up with what we now refer to as the Nicene Creed—or more accurately the “Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed”. But even that does not give us a definitive explanation of the Trinity.

The story is told of St Augustine of Hippo, a great philosopher and theologian who wanted so much to understand the doctrine of the Trinity and to be able to explain it logically. One day as he was walking along the sea shore and reflecting on this, he suddenly saw a little child all alone on the shore. The child made a hole in the sand, ran to the sea with a little cup, filled her cup, came and poured it into the hole she had made in the sand. Back and forth she went to the sea, filled her cup and came and poured it into the hole. Augustine went up to her and said, “Little child, what are doing?” and she replied, “I am trying to

empty the sea into this hole.” “How do you think,” Augustine asked her, “that you can empty this immense sea into this tiny hole and with this tiny cup?” To which she replied, “And you, how do you suppose that with this your small head you can comprehend the immensity of God?” With that the child disappeared.

Like Augustine, we may not be able to comprehend the Trinity, but even if we could, what difference would it make to the way in which we live our lives? Comprehending how the Trinity exists within the Godhead, is one thing, but how should that knowledge impact on my life and on your life?



(Show Picture—
What do you see?)

Our experience of God is a marvellous and mysterious experience. It's like looking at the picture of the old woman—or is it a young woman. There is one reality—yet there is more than one reality—and so it is with God. And as we experience God in our lives in different ways, we catch a glimpse of God's nature and so are led towards a more meaningful experience of worship.

In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah saw the Lord. Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6:1-8, gives us a very particular image of God—but it's one that we all know—the God who is high and lifted up in his temple—the God who speaks and brings forth all of creation—the God who is judge, Lord, ruler and king—the transcendent God—the awesome God. This God is strange to us. This God is beyond us. This God we dare not touch, even though we know this God and he knows us, even though we see this God's signs all around us in the earth, the wind, the air, and the fire.

And then we have the God who is in Christ—the God who is lowly, and humble—the God who reaches out and touches others—the God who serves others—the God who walks the earth with us, and cries and laughs with us—the God who calls God, Father—the God who is tempted with us—the God who hungers and thirsts with us—the God who embraces us and encourages us—the God who surrenders himself to death for us—having only the promise and the hope of being raised again. This is the God whom we know as friend and teacher.

And then, we have and know God the Spirit—God the bringer of visions and of dreams—God the source of strength and of hope—God the supplier of healing words and of prayer that brings comfort—God the wind, the breath, the air we breathe—God the transformer, the one who gives new birth, new life—God the presence within us and the presence all around us—God calling to us—calling for us—calling through us—calling in us.

We are God’s children, says Paul. When we cry Abba, Father, it is the Spirit of God bearing witness with our Spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if in fact we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

As a Christians we cannot know all that there is to know about God. God is always greater than our knowledge of him—but we *can* know what God has shown about himself—we can know God in three different ways, we can experience him in three different ways. We can love and adore him in three different ways.

CS Lewis, in his book, *Mere Christianity*, tries to describe part of this experience—this three-fold knowing—this three-fold loving in his description of a Christian at prayer.

“What I mean is this.” he writes, “An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to say his prayers. He is trying to get into touch with God. But if he is a Christian he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God: God so to speak, inside him. But he also knows that all real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who was God—that Christ is standing beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him. You see what is happening. God is the thing to which he is praying—the goal he is trying to reach. God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on—the motive power. God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed to that goal. The whole threefold life of the three-personal Being is actually going on in that ordinary act of prayer.”

What so many people lack in their lives is a sense of the mystery of God and of the mystery of the life that God gives to them. We keep trying to develop one simple mental picture of God—one simple portrait of what our life in God is like or ought to be like. Most of us like to think that things are either black or white—and we will go to incredible lengths to fit things around us into one or the other category—but God is greater than any category—any system of thought or classification—and so is our life in him.

We want to fit God into a neat and tidy box. We want to formulate God into a fixed set of rules so that we can manipulate him into being the kind of God we want him to be. And every time we do that we limit God’s potential for our lives.

This was part of the problem for Nicodemus. He thought he understood God. He thought he had God all figured out and nicely packaged in a neat little box—how God can and cannot act in the world. He knew about people, knew that they are born to grow old and die. He thought he knew all this. But something—maybe something he heard Jesus say or saw Jesus do, has confused him—has caused him to question his own understanding about God.

So Nicodemus came to Jesus that night looking for a formula—a tried and tested set of rules to add to the church's already lengthy list of rules. John portrays Nicodemus as a sincere, devout man, who obeyed the law and exercised responsible leadership in his community. But at the level of faith, there was something missing. His vision was blurred, his perception too narrow. He couldn't see things as they really were in the eyes of God. So he came to Jesus for help in understanding this mysterious kingdom Jesus has been preaching about.

But this mystery is not something that you can contain in a box. You must be born “from above”, says Jesus. You see, the mystery of God doesn't fit into any of the normal paradigms of human life, and our new birth in Christ doesn't fit into our normal way of understanding. It's a spiritual rebirth. And in that spiritual rebirth, God's Spirit witnesses to our spirit that we are children of God—whether we understand it or not.

The God that we see portrayed in Isaiah's vision is the transcendent God—the awesome God—the God that brings us to our knees—whose holiness shows up our sin. The God we see in Jesus Christ is the human God—the personal God—whose teaching shows us how we should live—whose death restores our relationship with the Father. The God active in the Holy Spirit is the God who is in us and around us—the God who calls us to repentance—who humbles us and witnesses to our spirit that we are children of God.

Our God is a mystery and the life that our God gives to us is a mystery, but because God, within that mystery, touches us, it's mystery that we can experience and savour and know something about.

Let's learn from these images of God so that we might understand the vastness of God—if only to some small extent—the God who is greater than our human minds can comprehend—the God who loved us so much that he sent his Son to die on a cross for us. Let us stand in awe and learn to worship, more fully, this triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God in three persons, blessed trinity.

To him be all glory, honour, majesty and power. Amen.