

Year C Trinity Sunday 15th June 2025

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

Last week marked the last of the dramatic festivals in the Christian calendar – first we had Jesus' birth at Christmas, then the crucifixion and the resurrection at Easter and last week the Holy Spirit falling on the disciples at Pentecost.

Today is the last Festival before the long run to Advent when the cycle starts all over again. But this week we are thinking more about an idea than an event, because it is of course Trinity Sunday. People far brighter than me have come up with all sorts of ideas to try and explain the theological concept of Three in One and One in Three and to be honest none of them is really satisfactory and I think that would have been acknowledged at the time by those in the Early Church who came up with the idea of what we now call the Trinity.

To boil it down to its simplest is perhaps the best I can do. At its simplest the Trinity is about relationship, the relationships between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Three, who empty themselves out to each other to create the One. Each has their individual role but needs the other two to be complete.

Each member of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, gives love to the other two, receives love from the other two and returns love. It is a divine dance, at which we are always welcome.

In trying to explain this idea of the Trinity, some people have compared it to an egg, which has a shell, a yolk and a white. But the shell's only job is to contain the other two and when we break the shell to get at the yolk and the white, it has no further role to play.

Others have compared the Trinity to water, but water is either liquid, frozen or steam. It can only be one thing at a time. Or a tree, root, trunk and branch – three parts, one entity.

A couple of days ago I had what I thought at the time was a good analogy. Take Chris for example. She is a mother, a granny and a doctor. Or Susie, a wife, a mother and a girl guide leader. Yes, they are all three of those things, yet ultimately they are wrapped up into the one being we know as Chris or Susie. However, as I shall explain later, that doesn't work either.

But none of this answers a question that we generally skate over – not least because we're aware that no answer really seems satisfactory. The question is so what, why does the Trinity matter? It certainly didn't matter enough for Jesus to explain the concept to his disciples. In our Gospel reading he tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit would gradually guide them into a fuller knowledge and understanding of the truth as they were able to cope with it – and that applies to us today too.

In terms of the court oath that witnesses take, the Holy Spirit would tell them, and by extension us, the truth and nothing but the truth but not necessarily the whole truth. That has to wait until we are ready to hear it.

That's really helpful because it means we don't have to find the perfect metaphor or analogy to explain the three-fold fullness of God. Rather, we just have to wait for the Holy Spirit to come and reveal God's truth to us in God's good time.

Because if the Trinity does one thing that we can grasp right now it is that it challenges our assumption that our faith, our liturgy, our worship, best articulates who God is. The truth of God is always more than our small minds can cope with.

I was reading last week about two Northern Irish priests, Ken Newell and Gerry Reynolds. Newell was a member of the Orange Order and a moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland.

Reynolds was a Catholic and they worked together tirelessly for peace during the worst of the Troubles in the 1980s. Reynolds often attended Newell's services when not holding Mass in his own church.

At one all-age service in Newell's church in 2001, Reynolds stood up near the end of the service to say that each member of the Trinity was different – for the sake of the other. In the same way Catholics were different to Protestants and vice versa, and their difference was the gift they gave to the other. He concluded by saying This is rooted in the very being of God.

The same is of course true even within the same denomination and within those denominations that broadly call themselves Protestant. Whether we see ourselves as liberal, progressive, middle of the road, evangelical or charismatic, each of us is a gift to the other.

This provides the beginnings answer to the question of why does the Trinity matter. At the heart of it is the interconnectedness of the three members of the Trinity. As we are made in God's image, we too are made to be interconnected with each other, which is why COVID was so hard for so many people because we were forced to put those connections on hold.

As Richard Rohr put it in his book *The Divine Dance*, which in a sense echoes what Gerry Reynolds was trying to say. Don't start with the One and try to make it into Three. Start with the Three and see that this is the deepest nature of the One. That is why what I thought was my clever analogy doesn't work, because it started with the one.

There is something special about three. Julian of Norwich regarded three as the most alive of numbers, as opposed to the solitariness of one, the duality of two and the squareness of four.

Apart from the three in the trinity, you have faith hope and love, past present and future and of course three makes a family.

In Greek plays a single actor assumes the persona of two of three characters by virtue of changing masks, and those charged with hammering out some statements of belief about Christianity adopted the language of the theatre as a metaphor for trying to explain what they understood about God.

We talk about Father, Son and Holy Spirit, others talk about Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, the New Zealand Prayer Book describes God as Earth-Maker, Pain-Bearer and Life-Giver. Others have come up with different concepts, but at their heart all trying to explain what it means to live in a community of love, both received and given. When we allow ourselves to receive the love of God, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we become love made new.

It's not only that we become love made new, we live in a creation that is always unfolding with new things. Who would have thought 30 years ago that our main form of written communication would be on a phone small enough to fit into our pockets?

If the Three are the deepest nature of the One, what does this tell us about God's character or God's priorities? At the very least it suggests that God is dynamic and always on the move; that God is diverse, that each of the three has their own way of expressing goodness and love; that God is communal – a warning to us all not to privilege our independence and autonomy over companionship. Above all it tells us that God is love. At its heart the Trinity is an expression of deep, life-giving sacrificial love between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Are we motivated by love – and if not, why not? What are we doing with our lives?

Our Romans reading also helps us in our efforts to understand how we should live our lives rather than focus on the finer details of Trinitarian theology, which don't really help us at all.

The point, Paul insists, is that our faith in God is enough on its own for us to be justified. If we are justified by faith then we can enjoy the peace of God, which in turn gives us the strength to endure almost anything and, what's more, gives us hope.

The thing about justification is that it is God's promise that we are accepted as we are, not because of who we are, not because of what we might do or might become. We are accepted because that is what God does and who God is. When we enjoy God's peace we can in turn in love to extend the same acceptance, grace and mercy that we have received.

Being part of a Trinitarian community calls us to look outwards, rather than inwards or even upwards. God doesn't need our good works, our neighbour does. For each of us our neighbour looks different, for some it may look like social activism, for others it may be responding to the needs of an individual.

But however it plays out, our aim should be to invite people to experience the relational, communal nature of God, by trying to be a community that values each other and which responds to the needs of the world, far or near, with hope and love.