

## 20140615TrinitySundaySermon

Earlier this week I was thinking how should I approach the concept of the Trinity in this sermon. I'm a teacher of Theology and therefore I enjoy arguing over the minor minutiae of three persons who are one God. I would love to spend time talking about orthodox or the heretical understanding the Trinity; pointing out whether a certain explanation was modalism, binatarianism or arianism.

But then I thought, how would that help you to draw closer to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? I mean, we have to have knowledge of our faith, but we mustn't become so legalistic that it is like treading through a minefield.

I suppose I should begin by defining what a sermon should do. Wikipedia defines a sermon as an oration by a prophet or member of the clergy which addresses a Biblical, theological, religious, or moral topic, usually expounding on a type of belief, law or behaviour within both past and present contexts. It goes on to say that Elements of preaching include exposition, exhortation and practical application.

Let's explore those last three words. Exposition is when a biblical text is unpacked and explained. Exhortation is when the congregation is strongly encouraged to follow a religious or moral standard. Practical application is when the sermon makes practical suggestions of how we can live out lives imitating Christ.

Now, you can see none of these definitions given by wikipedia is a dogmatic or legalistic discussion on what the Trinity is and how it operates. So, which element, exposition, exhortation and practical application, should I include in this Trinity Day sermon?

Carol Hartley strongly suggested that we sing St Patrick's hymn to the Trinity which demonstrate his strong belief in the Trinity. *I bind unto myself today the strong name of the Trinity, by invocation of the same, the Three in One, the One in Three. I bind unto myself today, the virtues of the starlit heaven, the glorious sun's life-giving ray, the whiteness of the moon at even, the flashing of the lightning free, the whirling wind's tempestuous shocks, the stable earth, the deep salt sea, around the old appointed rocks. Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.* The hymn is over 8 verse long and to a not-well-known tune so I demurred on that, but you will see from the short passage I read from the hymn that Patrick was being a typical Celt in his use of the natural created world, created by the Trinity by using images of earth and heaven, sea and wind, and tying it all together by showing that Christ is in all.

In fact, this is what our lectionary readings do this morning. It is the Triune God that blessed the world at the creation. In our first lesson from Genesis God (the Creator) speaks the creation into being, and as part of the creative act blesses the fish of the sea and the birds of the air (vs. 22). Part of the blessing is for them to multiply and fill the earth. Then human beings are created (vs. 28) and their blessing includes to multiply and to have dominion or stewardship over creation. Another blessing which we might forget is the Sabbath day, when God rested and so can we (2:4). In Psalm 8, humanity is crowned with glory and honour — yet another blessing.

So the Triune God has poured God's blessing on us. Our second reading from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is also a blessing — the famous words of the Grace that we Anglicans love using at the end of any gathering or meeting. You see, the Triune God is restoring all things, that is central to God's work in the world, in that context Paul says "Put things in order...live in peace" (2 Cor. 13:11) and this adds a new dimension. As stewards of creation, humanity should be putting things including creation in order, and living at peace with and in the creation. Thus the Trinity Sunday readings become a celebration of God's creation and humanity's role in the creation.

So I've given an **exposition** of the first two readings and the psalm which is that the missional call for us to be stewards of the creation which rooted in the very nature of who God is — for God is by definition Three-in-One and One-in-Three. And human beings have been invited into God's work of making all things new.

It is also interesting to see how other poets and writers also use the natural world to try and understand the Triune God. Emily Dickinson invoked the Bee, the Butterfly and the Breeze. The ancient Celts invoked a trinity of birds: Wren, Raven, and Wild Goose, each known for different qualities of compassion, courage, character. The Celts also invoked a female trinity, virgin, bride, and crone, each with powers for regeneration and fertility, and they were beseeched in the blessings of fields, hearths, marriage beds.

The male Christian Trinity is so repeatedly invoked liturgically that it loses its resonance, its sense of wonder or invitation in its names, its relations. It has become a salute, all about marshalling obedience, and not at all about walking in mystery. When I read the Gospel for this Sunday earlier this week, my immediate thought was, "Oh dear, not this same passage again!" It is of course the Baptismal formula but it does remind us that Baptism is, among other things, a blessing in the name of the Trinity.

As one internet commentator put it: the Trinity intends to convey a dynamic relationship, full of the flashing lightning, whirling wind, deep salt sea that St. Patrick named, elemental wonders Jesus also cherished and used descriptively for the relationship of God and people: sheltering tree, wild sower, extravagant giver offering tangible love. So I want **to exhort** you all to see in the concept of the Trinity something mystical and dynamic not something hierarchical as the Nicene Creed does. That 4th century pledge of allegiance makes Trinity into a hierarchy: Father, begotten Son, and Holy Ghost begotten of them both. Or not. Theological wars have been fought, and churches divided, over whether the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, or from the Father and the Son, whether you should say 'and the son' when reciting the creed, or not. But now we are back in dogmatic argument area again.

It is wonderful to think that the Triune God blesses us and that is something worth celebrating. But if that is all we see we have missed the point of Matthew 28, our Gospel reading. We are told to *go and baptise*. We are to taking the blessing we have received and pass it on to others. And that is my **practical suggestion** to you this Trinity Sunday.

We don't bless in our name or on our authority — we bless in the name of the Triune God and use the authority Jesus has given us — but we carry God's blessing to others. As stewards of the creation, as those who carry the authority to baptise — we fulfil that calling by telling others of the blessing they can receive from God. We can do more than tell, we are invited to offer that blessing in God's name to a world desperate to hear good news.

In the theological paper I've just finished marking, the students were asked to give a talk to the local community showing how God is the creator of all things and how we are co-creators with God. It then asked them to give practical suggestions within their community to demonstrate this. Very few did... all they tended to do was to suggest that we pray to God that something be done about the area in which they lived. I suppose prayer is practical but sometimes we have get off our knees and go and do something instead of just talking about it. So please, this Trinity Sunday, do not just pray that God would send God's blessing on people — go out there and carry God's blessings to others you know or even don't know and share with them how they can receive God's blessing too. In the name of the Creator, the Redeemer and the Giver of Life. Amen