

Reflection for Trinity Sunday by Rev'd Canon Michael Last

To be inquisitive, to want to know and understand how things work, is part of our human nature. We all, at least to some extent, want to understand the world around us – but it goes one step further than that; there is also a desire to be able to control and develop things that are around us.

When it comes to finding out and understanding how things work there are two main ways we can approach things: the academic way - sitting down with books and research papers, studying them and trying to absorb and understand what others have already found out, or alternatively we can explore for ourselves, and that can sometimes lead to problems.

As a child I remember being fond of trying to find out how things work and, for me at the time, the simplest way was not to read books but to take things apart. Great fun - bits all over the floor!

That, though, was where the problems began; how to put it back together again and then make it work! There was always at least one bit, and usually an important bit, left over! And that was before I was in trouble with my parents.

You may have been the same. Perhaps you still are!

Trinity Sunday is similar in number of ways. It's a Sunday that encourages us not just to accept but to think and to ask some very deep and searching questions about the very nature of God and the way God works.

Thinking about and trying to understand the nature of God is, and will always be to some extent, a mystery. No words or ideas can ever truly or fully grasp the reality of God. The images or pictures we may use to illustrate the Godhead will be inevitably be limited – limited by smallness even of the greatest minds.

We are encouraged today to struggle with how the persons or “modes” of God fit together into one unity. One God in three persons - Father Son and Holy Spirit - God in Trinity. Not three Gods but one God.

Think of this image of three triangles each interlinked with the others and it helps us, albeit in an imperfect way, to grasp something of this. Three distinct triangles, each one representing a mode or person of God, yet at the same time joined in a way that forms an intrinsic unity; so much so that no one triangle can be taken away without breaking apart the whole.



From the exceedingly early days of Christianity the doctrine of the Trinity has formed one of the foundation stones of our faith.

Without it, any understanding of the key questions about God's plan for salvation-history are futile. Only given the Trinity as the backdrop can the big questions be tackled. Could God be both one and many? Could the church provide both for the unity of the Godhead and the divinity of Christ? Could the idea of monotheism be expanded without being destroyed?

In essence, the whole idea of the Trinity comes down to this series of questions. Who is Christ, and what is his relationship to God the Father? What did his life and death mean for our salvation-history? Where does the Holy Spirit fit into this equation? All of these can and often do, become very theologically deep and longwinded. The bits are scattered all over the floor.

You will be pleased to hear that I am not going to open that box this morning. Rather, there is one main thing we can reflect upon and take away from this Trinity Sunday. It has an enormous impact on how we live out the Christian life and it is the concept of unity - the unity that can be seen in the Godhead and the unity of purpose we see in Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

All of us, I am sure, when we think about God, find our minds drifting in the direction of just one person of the Trinity. Maybe it is towards God as Father, whom we think of as the creator and sustainer of all life. This could be because we feel closest to God when we are surrounded by nature especially in such a beautiful area as the one we live in. For others, it may be the person of Jesus, God's son. Here it could be the humanity and teachings of Christ that we find easiest to associate with. Then, for others, it may be the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit of God at work today challenging, enabling, drawing us towards God.

What Trinity Sunday does is say to us – yes, there are three persons in the Trinity, but they are also one in unity and purpose. Each part of the Godhead has its place and can only be understood alongside the others. That balance must be reflected in our theology and our understanding of God; failure to do so and we begin to distort the nature of God.

This should lead us on to reflect on the unity within our own lives and that of our church. So often we break our lives into compartments - work, home, leisure. The question that needs to be asked is how the relationship between these parts works. Are they unified, complementing, reflecting each other and fully reflecting the Christian faith that we have, or are there sharp, incompatible differences between them? Is the me in one setting the same as the me in other settings? Because if we are reflecting the image of God it should be.

The same should also be true of the life of the Church. What do those looking in see? Is it a church united in purpose, reflecting what is seen in the Trinity or is it an ineffectual discontinuity?

The Trinity is not only theoretical but also practical and challenges us to look at our own lives and our church.

When I was serving in Canada, I ministered alongside a locally ordained clergyperson, the Rev'd Marilyn Scutt. She wrote a hymn trying to help us understand the Trinity and I would like to leave you with it today.

Come together and sing with me,
Sing together in harmony;
Watch and listen and you will see
What we mean by the Trinity

REFRAIN: *God the Father and Christ the Son
And the Holy Spirit, that's three in one.
Three in one, and one in three,
And that's the meaning of Trinity.*

God the Father created all;
Made the creatures, both great and small;
And He longs for that perfect day,
When we follow His Holy way.

REFRAIN

Jesus Christ was His only Son;
God is in Him; the two are one.
Jesus loves us - for us He died;
On the cross He was crucified.

REFRAIN

Jesus left us, but by His grace,
Sent His Spirit to take His place;
Giving power and strength to all
Those who gladly obey His call.

REFRAIN