

Reflection for Trinity Sunday, 4th June by Rev'd Canon Michael Last

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

We may call it the Grace; it is however the final Benediction from St Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians. Today is Trinity Sunday and, although Paul's words are not a direct presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity, they do clearly show the relationship between the three persons of the Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit and how close and intertwined they are – inseparable in fact.

Paul's prayer is that the grace, the undeserved gift of God that comes through Christ Jesus, be deepened in the hearts and lives of Corinthian Christians he is writing to, that they may more fully live out the Christian life. A grace that can be seen in events of history in the life of Jesus God's own Son, but behind which also lies the love of God, the love of God towards his creation, a love that will not let go regardless of the way creation turns its back on him. A grace that is made manifest by the fellowship, the presence of the Holy Spirit, God's presence in the hearts of the believer. A grace that emanates from one God who is Father Son and Holy Spirit, each part integral, each part united in purpose, each part only functioning in relation to the others.

The concept of the Trinity is difficult to comprehend, but it lies at the very heart of the church's understanding of who God is. Begin to understand the Trinity and not only do you begin in a small way to understand God, but also to see how we as a church are called to function.

Even some of the greatest academics have struggled to express and understand the very nature of God. Maybe it is best summed up in this little story. Three people all of whom have been blind from birth are taken to the zoo to meet an elephant. The first goes up to the elephant's trunk and comes away with the idea that an elephant is like a large pipe. The second touches the elephant's side and comes away thinking an elephant is like a solid wall. The third reaches out and touches the elephant's tail - an elephant is like a rope. They are all right, but none has the whole picture. And that is a bit like our understanding of God. We cannot understand or grasp the full nature of God; our minds can only comprehend a glimpse. So, bearing that in mind, let us in a very simple way unpack the three parts of the Godhead in turn.

Firstly, there is God the Father, the one we may well think of as the maker of heaven and earth. Today's Old Testament reading was the creation story as we find it at the beginning of Genesis: a passage that has been much discussed and, however you approach it, one theological point jumps from it - the idea of God as the creator, summed up in the words that are repeated several times - "*And God said*". The passage does not tell us the how, but that creation is the will of God and happens at his command. Creation is no mere accident, rather the work of a creator God. There are times and places when I am sure each of us has felt that; a place maybe out in the wilds where we feel close to God. It may be at the top of a mountain or some beautiful yet lonely place. Creation, manifesting God as the creator and the sustainer – God the Father.

Then there is God the Son – Jesus, the historical figure who lived, walked, taught, and died for our salvation and who is now alive and reigns in heaven. The one who was both fully human, just as we are - knowing pain and suffering, joy and laughter, yet at the same time was also God, truly divine. For us, though, it is not always easy to hold in tension both those parts of Christ's nature.

Then finally there is God the Holy Spirit, the helper, the life giver, the presence of God with us today, working through God's people to extend the kingdom of God.

Our temptation may be to see them as three separate individuals, to relate more closely to one part of the Trinity. One of the questions sometimes asked of students in training for ministry after visiting a church is which person of the Trinity does that church relate best too or push more forcefully. To make such a separation or to elevate one part of the Trinity above another is to distort the wholeness of God.

Today we are reminded that God is one God in three persons, united in every way. It is this complete unity of love, purpose and creativity that lies at the heart of God.

Grasp to some extent the nature of God in this way – being one in creativity, love and purpose - we have the Trinitarian community of God, and it provides a clear and strong model for the church community. It is a model for the way God intends human society to function - united not divided, one in thought, one in purpose. You may have the greatest group of individuals but, unless they are united in purpose, they will never fulfill their full potential.

How often is it said - “divide and conquer”. When division begins to emerge in groups it is the that things begin to break apart. Then those who want to can drive wedges into the cracks - wedges that break apart what appears to be strong.

The doctrine of the Trinity reveals to us that God is a community of persons in a relationship of self-giving love - a love that allows things to be turned upside down. As we look at the image of God today what we need to do is ask are several questions about our relationships and whether they reflect what we see in God.

Firstly, are our own lives a single unity? Is our worship of God, our life of prayer, matched by the way we live in the world and in our homes. The image of God is that of oneness - are we like that?

Secondly, in the life of our church at local level do we reflect the unity of God? Are we all pulling the same direction? Because it is only as we are that we can effectively reflect the gospel message to the world that needs to hear it and be touched by it.

Thirdly, when we look at the wider church what do we see? What does the world see - unity or division? Are we so wrapped up in the struggles of our own denomination, that we fail to look beyond and remember that we are part of a wider body - a body which, like the Trinity, should be united.

Jesus said “Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.”

Paul prayed for the Corinthians saying “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

May we be people and a church that reflects the Trinitarian nature of God in unity of purpose and love.