

TRINITY**Sunday 19 June 2011****Church of the Ascension, the Anglican Church in KZN****Nic Denny-Dimitriou****Prayer**

[Opening prayer, together with a few verses from Psalm 33, the psalm for the day, detailing God's amazing creation and the human response of awe at God – appropriate to today's theme]

We celebrate you, God, as Creator of all things; as the One who formed us and breathed life into us; who showed yourself to the mothers and fathers of Israel, and spoke and guided your people through the words and works of prophets, priest and kings; your Word was made flesh in Jesus Christ:

You are to be praised forever.

We celebrate you, Lord Jesus Christ, true man and true Son of God; before time began you shared community with the Father and the Holy Spirit; you are the Promised One from times of old; born of Mary you shared our life: preached and healed; taught and suffered, betrayed and crucified and raised again as Lord and Saviour:

You are to be praised forever.

We celebrate you, Holy Spirit, sent to us from the Father in answer to Jesus' prayer: you draw our attention to the person and words of Jesus; you stir us to repentance and faith; you interpret to us the Scriptures, and bind us together as the body of Christ; you convict us of sin and assure us of Christ's forgiveness:

You are to be praised forever.

Holy Trinity, have mercy on us for our lack of humility in your presence. There is no part of our existence which is not shadowed by your holiness, no ground on which we stand that is not made holy by your grace, your all-encompassing grace. May our worship resound with wonder at the mystery of your love, and may our hearts respond with Alleluia: Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth. Amen

Ron Gordon 2008

Sermon Intro

The Christian Church has been celebrating the Trinity in its life and worship since its earliest days.

Trinity Sunday is one of the few Christian festivals to celebrate a reality in relation to God and a teaching about God, rather than an event or a person. On this Sunday we remember and honour God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This doctrine is 'a mystery', by which we do not mean a riddle, but rather that the Trinity is a reality beyond our comprehension, beyond our grasp - and yet knowable in worship, and via our symbols, and in our faith.

The Doctrine of the Trinity is best described in the Nicene Creed, formulated at the First Council of Nicaea in AD 325 [with further additions, especially concerning the Holy Spirit, at the First Council of Constantinople of AD 381].

According to this creed the Doctrine of the Trinity is the belief that God is one in essence [Greek 'ousia'], but distinct in person [Greek hypostasis]. Here 'person' means, "that which stands on its own," an "individual reality," and does not mean that the persons of the Trinity are three human persons. Therefore, the doctrine on the Trinity teaches that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are somehow distinct from one another; yet completely united in their being, their will and their nature.

A good illustration [– one that is new to me; others that are often used are flawed, and all analogies have their limitations –] is to explain the Trinity as a musical chord. For example, the C-chord has 3 distinct notes: C, E, and G. Joined together as one chord the sound is rich and dynamic; the individual notes of the chord are all equally important in producing the rich sound, but if one of the notes is left out, the sound is 'thin'.

Although the Doctrine of the Trinity was formally formulated by early Church leaders and teachers in the 4th Century, it developed before that over a period of many years stretching back to the earliest days of the Christian Church. Our Christian ancestors tried to reconcile the Divinity of Christ with Jewish monotheism, and they reflected on the relationship between the "Father", the "Son" and the "Holy Spirit", and they were drawn to formally express it, which they did in various ways and then formally in the Creed of Nicea. Even today's readings draw us to the mention of Father, Son and Spirit in the last sayings of Jesus, and in that familiar "The Grace..." blessing, which comes from St Paul.

This teaching on the Trinity from the Scriptures indicates a dynamic God, whose nature is beyond human “boxes” and easy categorisation, yet who voluntarily operates within the created world. It also shows a loving God, willing to become as we are so that we may know and experience God. The Trinity is not about complex philosophy or pointless speculation, but about the heart of our salvation.

Accept that:

- We can never fully understand God as God really is (or else we’d not be dealing with God!)
- God has nevertheless revealed to us something of the nature and character of God, for us to have at least a basic knowledge and understanding – therefore we need not be completely baffled!

[☺ Even trying to avoid the personal pronoun “he” for God is quite ironic ... it has to do with grammar differences in various languages and as we translate them from the original Greek and Hebrew in which the Scriptures were written, as well as the very biblical “Father image” for God; but call God “Mother” and some would want to lynch you; yet the Greek wording for the Spirit is indicative of the feminine, including the Greek name and word “Sophia” for Wisdom, also used of the Spirit, which is feminine. However, referring to God in gender-terms indicates just how limited we are when using language to describe God, who is literally “indescribable”!]

God has been revealed to us in these major ways (amongst others):

- Creation
- Prophets and apostles; miracles and great deeds; and the recordings of these (Bible)
- Chiefly in Jesus Christ

Much of this revelation has been progressive:

Scripture makes it clear that the Spirit was present from before time and creation, yet the fullness of the Spirit was only given on Pentecost, and subsequently.

God revealed himself as “Yahweh” - “I am who I am” – the one whose name was too holy to be uttered except in the most sacred of contexts; God was revealed in this way to Abraham, Moses and others. Yet as time went on, through prophets, there was a promise of a Saviour – and the person of Jesus arrived in the fullness of God’s timing.

In all of this, we tend to think in terms of hierarchy – yet each is revealed to be as much God as the other. We affirm only ONE God, not three different gods – yet each “person” of the Trinity appears to be distinct. Even the word “person” shows how, in order to make sense of it, we use inadequate language to try to describe God, whose attributes are anything BUT human!

I want to suggest a useful and broadly biblical way to understand it:

- God over us Creator; ruler, with a plan for us
- God with us Emmanuel – Hebrew name, “God with us”; Saviour amongst us
- God in us Spirit – God at work in the world, through the church and in the lives of individuals prepared to allow God into their lives; we have been described in NT literature as “temples” of the HS, because God dwells IN us by his Spirit, as we were reminded last week at Pentecost.

Jesus spoke on many occasions and in many different ways of the relationship between himself and the Father, describing them as one. No wonder there were charges of blasphemy from Jewish religious teachers who fully understood he wasn't simply claiming to be a “good chap”, since he clearly equated himself with Yahweh! [Either what he said is true, or it is a lie - and if that is the case, then Jesus loses the title of “good man” anyway.]

Jesus also spoke much about the Spirit of God who would come to humanity in a new way, after his ascension. No longer would the Spirit of God come only on selected individuals to proclaim a particular message for a particular time, or to do a special “act of God” – now the Spirit would come upon, and dwell in, each and every disciple of Jesus (as discussed in last Sunday's sermon for Pentecost).

Some questions will always remain. The Trinity IS NOT fully understandable in every way, but there is no need for us to get tied up in knots about understanding God, when Jesus in particular came to make God more understandable, making it possible for friendship with God to be real - and based on understanding, not so-called “blind faith”.

We are reminded of the holiness and “otherness” of God, beyond all human limitations and attempts to fit God into small neat theories.

Even that knowledge leads us to praise and worship the One who is infinitely greater than anything we can logically easily work out! It is my prayer, therefore, that we may be continually open to experiencing:

God over us

God with us

God in us

Then we will continue to grasp the richness and fullness of God, as fully intended by God!