

## TRINITY SUNDAY

Nicky Ing - 22nd May 2005

Deuteronomy 4: 32-40; Psalm 33:1-12; 2 Corinthians 13: 11-13; Matthew 28: 16-20

Trinity Sunday reminds us that we are always facing into the mystery of God. The Christian doctrine of God as Three-in-One, is an attempt to express, within the limits of human understanding and language, the Christian experience of God, creating, saving, and sanctifying. The word 'Trinity' does not occur in the Gospel reading we heard ...nor will we find any passage in the New Testament which gives an explanation or a definition of this doctrine of the Christian faith. Why do we celebrate Trinity Sunday? It is a time when we begin to understand how it is that we **live** and **experience** this community of faith. Last Sunday we celebrated Pentecost...the experience of the gifting of the Holy Spirit. Personally, I don't believe many people will be converted to Jesus because we can explain in great detail the complexities of a theological doctrine, but if we can share our faith in real and human terms and tell others about our experience of God's action in our lives, then that is a whole real and different story!.....the Great Commission, Jesus' words which we just read in the Gospel of Mark a few minutes ago, tell us to do just that...to tell our faith story, and go and make disciples....is that a bit scary for most of us?

That first reading from Deuteronomy Ch.4, tells us about the power and glory of God, who entered into a close and loving relationship with the people of Israel....and of the blessings and also the obligations that flow from that relationship. That scripture emphasizes the **Oneness** of God....*'So acknowledge today, and take to heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.'* (Ch. 4 v 39) And the part of Psalm 33 we read together reminded us that the same God who is as close as a father, or a mother, and fully present to his people, is also the one who created the universe....the everlasting God who is transcendent....beyond all that we can think or imagine....full of steadfast love and worthy of endless praise.

Then the two readings from the New Testament add another dimension to our understanding of the experience of God. This 2nd letter which Paul wrote to the Corinthian people is his final message to them. This letter was written because the new Christians of Corinth had failed completely to treat one another with love and respect...there were factions and power struggles and difficulties and moral failures of many kinds developing in that early Christian community. (*does that sound familiar? Is it any different today?*) Paul's words to them here are a reminder that the **only** answer to their ongoing human divisions and struggles is the presence of the wonderfully loving and yet utterly glorious God....and these words have become an expression for us and all Christian people, of our faith experience: *'The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you...'* For the Corinthians, and all believers, Paul's word to them is the hope that they will model their lives, individually and as community, on the unity, peace and love of God.

Whilst the early Christian community declared that God is One....(they had been nurtured in the faith of ancient Israel)...their life *experience* of the risen Jesus after his resurrection enabled them to recognize Him as Lord and God. People who had always said *'the Lord our God is one Lord'*, now spoke also of Jesus as God. And, as we know, after the ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came to the disciples and empowered them in new and remarkable ways for the work God needed them to do. From their *experience*, they knew the Holy Spirit as the mysterious power of God, and as the Spirit of Christ....so they needed to express somehow in words the fact that God is one, that Jesus Christ is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and that all three are present as one, amongst God's people.

Most of us will probably need to admit that this concept of God being Trinity, three-in-one and one-in three, will always be mystery for us....but God's revelation to us *is* within our experience, and is ongoing in our lives.... and that is the way we find ourselves able to express our faith. We believe that, as a creative force, God made the universe and saw that all things on earth were good. We also believe that God took our humanity on himself in the person of Jesus, who came to be born through the power of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary...who lived in the world, was crucified for us, died, and rose again for us on the third day. And as a comforting, inspiring power, God, as Spirit, breathes his life through us...there are not three Gods; but one, who has been revealed to us in three different ways. Different symbols and analogies have often been used to help us describe the Trinity...St. Patrick used a shamrock, for instance...and there have been many others...which we don't have space at the moment to discuss...(see picture of Andrei Rublev's Trinity). It took a few centuries before the early Church was able to agree on how to use language which best expressed the Christian experience of God, before the Nicene Creed was finally written and agreed upon in 325. Definitions can be so controversial....if we were to go into all that, we would be here for a long time! In all of this, the most important thing for us is that we should *experience* God's loving presence personally in our lives. Those early disciples who followed Jesus knew they were following One who was Divine...and later they experienced the powerful gift of the Holy Spirit in their lives... that was the enabling they needed, to be sent out and do God's work in the world.

There is in each one of us an original blessedness...God's creative grace, or gifting. This grace can be damaged, through tough experiences which hurt us in life....but the grace of God can never be destroyed. Through the grace of God we find this free and amazing gift of love...perhaps the most wonderful truth about the Holy Trinity is that God exists in a continuous relationship, a never-ending circle of LOVE... and it is into that living, dynamic relationship of love, that each one of us is continually invited. We know that we are made in God's image, that our lives can be woven into that Life of God....and that through the risen Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, our broken relationships with God and with one another can be mended and restored. We also know that we can never be alone, because Jesus has promised that He will be with us always.

Michael Downey, in a beautiful book called 'Altogether Gift' about the doctrine of the Trinity, writes:

***‘All Christian spirituality is Trinitarian- a way of perceiving and being by which we are conformed to the person of Christ, brought into communion with God, other persons, and every living creature by the creative and bonding presence of the Holy Spirit, Love’s Gifting....’***

So what does this mean for us, today? I wonder if we feel ready to reach out to those who have not yet had the experience of God in their lives...who need to be filled with the love of God and made new..... Is Jesus speaking to you and me today.....to **‘Go and make disciples’**....? How does that message touch us, here at the Church of the Ascension? What is my role here in this church community? Do I come here week by week to receive the Eucharist, to be encouraged, to be strengthened in my faith? That is wonderful indeed, but do I ever feel a nudge from God to offer my own particular gifts for the greater good? Have I asked God to show me what my gifts are? Have I prayed about joining or even starting a faith sharing group? Maybe I could offer myself as a sidesperson, or a reader, or a sacristan....or a helper with tea on a Sunday once a month! Men can make good tea too, you know! What about Sunday School? Can God use me as a helper in that area? Could I be an encourager for our small but enthusiastic youth group? We need more musicians, yes, we know we do....how about that? Do I invite other people to come to church with me sometimes...and help our church to grow? Am I allowing God to use me in ways beyond my church...at home, at work, in society...How aware am I of God’s presence in my life at all these different levels?....What **is** God saying to us today about all these things? Trinity Sunday is a celebration of all this: that **‘God is friendship, and those who live in friendship, live in God.’** We are continually invited to be in relationship with others, but first to be in relationship with God our creator, our redeemer, our enabler....who is our beginning and our end. May our lives both individually and as a community reflect more of that harmony and friendship, and in the words of St. Paul,

***‘May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with us and remain with us today and always’. AMEN***