

Trinity Sunday @ St Matt's, High Brooms. 22nd May 2016

The Trinity

What images come to mind when you think about the Trinity?

Symbols of the Trinity:

- Clover/shamrock
- Ice – water – steam
- 3 candles, 1 flame
- Egg
- The Union Jack dates from a Royal proclamation following the union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801.

The flag combines aspects of three older national flags: the red cross of St George of the Kingdom of England, the white saltire of St Andrew for Scotland, and the red saltire of St Patrick to represent Ireland.

- Toothpaste!

But the nature of who God is as Trinity is a *mystery*.

Evidence from the Bible

Genesis 1:1,2

אֵלֹהִים בָּרָא בְּרֵאשִׁית *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God אֵלֹהִים רוּחַ was hovering over the face of the waters.*

(God *elohim* = plural noun with singular verb *bara* created, Spirit = *ruach*, also wind, breath, feminine!)

There is a suggestion of *plurality within God*

(vs majesty, intensification, heavenly court – who created humans in *their* image?)

Genesis 1:26 *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*

Genesis 18:1,2

The LORD (yhwh) appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He looked up and saw three men standing near him.

The Rublev icon

They turn out to be angels – the Trinity in the OT)

But Houston, we have a problem: Deuteronomy 6:4

4 *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*

(*one = echad*; but used sometimes as one in a collective sense, as in Genesis 2:24 *Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh, but two persons, indivisible.*)

What do we make of the following?

The commander of the Lord's army in Joshua 5:13-15 (holy ground)

Who is being spoken of here?

8:22 *“The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.*

23 *Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.*

24 *When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.*

25 *Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth,*

26 *before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world.*

27 *When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,*

28 *when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,*

29 *when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command,*

when he marked out the foundations of the earth,

30 *then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight,*

rejoicing before him always, 31 rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.

(See also Proverbs 9:1-6)

1. Wisdom

In Proverbs 1:20-23; and Proverbs 8, *wisdom* חָכְמָה *chokmah* (*feminine*) is spoken of *as if she were a person*.

In Proverbs 1:20–33 wisdom is likened to a woman crying in the streets for men to turn from their foolish ways and to find instruction and security in her (cf. also Pr. 3:15–20).

This personification continues in Proverbs 8 and reaches its climax in vv. 22ff., where wisdom claims to be the first creation of God and, perhaps, an assistant in the work of creation (8:30; cf. 3:19).

Therefore, *caution* must be exercised in reading into this passage a view of *hypostatisation*, i.e. that wisdom is depicted as having an independent existence. The Hebrews' characteristic resistance to speculation and abstraction frequently led their poets to deal with *inanimate* objects or ideals *as though they had personality*.- *As poets do today*.

2. The Word of God

Isaiah 55:10,11

10 *“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth,*

making it bring forth and sprout,

giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

11 *so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty,*

but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,

and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

1 Kings 19:9 *And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

3. The Spirit of the Lord:

Ezekiel 36:27 *And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

Ezekiel 37:14 *I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.*

4. The *angel* of the Lord.

Genesis 22:9 *When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."*

And what are we to make of:

Psalm 110:1 *The Lord (yhwh) said to my lord (adonai), sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.*

Jesus in Matthew 22:41-46 about this Messianic verse.

41 *Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, 42 saying, "What do you think about the Christ/Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." 43 He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,*

44 *"The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at my right hand,*

until I put your enemies under your feet" '?

45 *If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?"*

St Augustine of Hippo wrote in his teaching against Pelagianism 27:15:

*The New is in the Old concealed;
the Old is in the New revealed.
(writing about grace)*

Surprise, surprise

God was doing a new thing - Jesus!

NT

The Incarnation:

Luke 1:26-38 *Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a*

son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” 34 Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” 35 The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

Matthew 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).*

[in human form].

And the Holy Spirit, with

Many NT references to the Father, Jesus & the Holy Spirit

Baptism:

Luke 3:21,22

*When **Jesus** ...had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and **the Holy Spirit** descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And **a voice came from heaven**, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*

Ministry:

Luke 11:13

*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will **the heavenly Father** give **the Holy Spirit** to those who ask him!” (**Jesus** speaking.)*

It must have been **hard** for the disciples to think that **Jesus was**

God's son;

John 14:8 *Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."* 9 *Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*

Then Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit;

John 14:15 *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17 This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.*

26 *But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.*

Acts 1:1

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

4 *And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

8 *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

So they waited, and 10 days later, in an upper room in Jerusalem:

Acts 2:4

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Hard for the disciples –God in three persons?

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) 3rd president of USA called the notion of the Trinity: “metaphysical inanities” that hindered the religious growth of humanity and represented “relapses into polytheism, differing from paganism only by being more unintelligible.”

Alister McGrath asks how we can talk about a “triune God” or the “three-in-one” without talking mathematical and metaphysical nonsense?

The fundamental problem is the inability of human language to do justice to the transcendent, the divine. We use words and images borrowed from everyday life, putting them to new use when trying to capture and preserve precious insights into the nature of God.

One insight of Christian theology and spirituality is that our ability to grasp the things of God is limited. what we can know about God is accommodated to our capacity.

St Augustine of Hippo said “if we can get our mind around it, it cannot be God.”

*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.
Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

1 Corinthians 13:12

If Paul could only understand a fraction of the nature of God, good luck to us! We are confronted by something so great that we cannot fully comprehend it; but we do our best!

Tertullian (c.160-c.225) invented the word: *trinitas*, “Trinity” and the concepts of hypostasis/persona; *persona* tended to mean the role that someone was playing in a drama.

And also the concept of *substantia*, “substance,” is what the three persons of the Trinity have in common, despite their outward appearance of diversity.

The Cappadocian Fathers

(Basil the Great [c.330 - 379]

Gregory of Nyssa [c.330 - c.395]

Gregory of Nzianzus [329 - 389]

The Trinity = one substance (*ousia*) in three persons (*hypostaseis*).

Karl Rahner (1904-84)

The *economic Trinity* = the way that we experience the diversity and unity of God's self-disclosure in history (the way He works)

The *immanent Trinity* = God's diversity and unity as it is in God Him-or-her-self.

Unity vs distinctiveness.

Distinct but not divided.

Different but not separate or independent of each other.

The three persons acting in distinct yet co-ordinated ways in human history.

Eastern theology started from the three-ness of God;

Western theology starts from the one-ness of God.

The eastern approach might seem to suggest that the Trinity consists of three independent agents, doing quite different things. But this possibility was excluded by two later developments:

perichoresis (mutual inter-penetration, where the individuality of the persons is maintained, but each person shares in the life of the other two; a community of being) and

appropriation (every person of the Trinity is involved in every outward action of the Godhead).

Two heresies

(a heresy may be defined as an inadequate version of Christianity)

Modalism

The One God manifesting Himself in 3 different ways.

Tri-theism

Three equal, independent and autonomous beings, each of whom is divine.

But I would argue that the three members of the Trinity are not *independent* nor are they *autonomous* (acting on their own); they act as one, backing each other up as each one performs their ministry action.

(See diagram)

The key point for us is that God likes diversity, not just because he made so many different people and parts of His creation, but because it is part of the nature of God him-or-her-self!

We need to keep in mind the different persons of God at work in the life that we live today, and not go overboard on one person of the Trinity.

What do you notice about these pictures?

and

And also that God invites us into His life - to participate in the life of the Trinity:

Trinitarian verses of scripture:

Matthew 28: 19

2 Corinthians 13:13

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

2 Corinthians 1:21,22

Galatians 4:6
Ephesians 2:20-22
2 Thessalonians 2:13,14
Titus 3:4-6
1 Peter 1:2

For us?

1. Acknowledge that the nature of God is a mystery
2. Be open and available to the work of the Triune God – in us as individuals, in us as a congregation
3. Like HM Queen Elizabeth, respond to the call of God to fulfil our holy responsibility (she was anointed with oil at her coronation) in (what she would regard as her holy service, entrusted to her by God)

I first saw her in 1953 at RAF Odiham.

Her 3 symbols of office at her coronation (2nd June 1953) were:

1. the crown (symbol of the head of the state. She wore St Edward's crown [based on the original made for Edward the Confessor worn by him in 1065, & William the Conqueror in 1066 but lost with the rest of the crown jewels by King John in the Wash in 1216]. A new one was made after the monarchy was restored in 1660 for Charles II, who wore it in 1661.)

Connection with BCP revised under Charles II the following year 1662.

2. the orb (symbol of the monarch as Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the C of E.)
3. the sceptre (symbol of authority to reign)

All under the cross.

4. Perhaps the HS is the person of the Trinity that we are least aware of, so perhaps we need to ask the heavenly Father to give the Holy Spirit to us who ask him!" (Jesus speaking.)

Three heresies:

1. Tritheism

2. Modalism
3. Arianism (the Son is subordinate to the Father)