

Trinity Sunday: 16<sup>th</sup> June 2019

John 3:1-17

Contemplatio: Michael Wood

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Today is Trinity Sunday where we particularly focus our attention on the distinctive Christian notion that God IS inherently, in God's very being, LOVE. We do this every week and the prayers of the church are saturated in Trinitarian language, as we will hear in a few moments, in the Eucharistic prayer. In these prayers we're reminded that Love is not a static thing, like an object. You can't have a *chunk* of love – like a 'thing'. Rather, Love is always a relationship between persons. So it follows that God must be a relation of persons in God's very being.

This might all sound a bit esoteric and theoretically abstract, but it's actually incredibly important. So I want to go back to these basics because I reckon it's useful for all of us to reconnect to these foundations from time to time.

The New Testament is a witness to the *experience* of the early church that God had revealed God's self, to them in a very distinctive way, IN JESUS. So despite being radical monotheists (that is, they believed in ONE God), then found that they could use the words Father, Son and Holy Spirit interchangeably and still know that they were speaking about that ONE God. BUT even more importantly, the first witnesses were not ONLY saying, 'Jesus is like God' – they were also saying, 'God is like Jesus'. This is the really radical distinctive feature of the Christian testimony, so I'll say in again. It's not *just* that God shows up in Jesus, and might *equally* show up with some other sort of nature on a different day. Rather, **Jesus actually reveals THE nature of God AS love**. God can't *choose* to show up with a nature other than what God reveals in Jesus. As John's gospel put's it, '**whoever has seen me has seen the Father**' (John 14:9). The scandalous claim of the church is NOT [just] that Jesus is like God. The scandalous claim is that **God is like Jesus. JESUS is the icon...the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15)**

This claim permeates Paul's letters and particularly permeates John's gospel – especially Chapters 14-16 which we have been dipping into in recent weeks. The reason it took 300 years for the Nicene Creed to be finalised was that initially no-one felt a strong need to develop an intellectual formation of it. The church simply *lived* this experience – this testimony to Jesus from the Apostles. In Christ, God has come to them and has saved them from the power of Sin and Death. The early church didn't initially feel like they needed to lock it down in a credal form, although the Eucharistic Prayers of the early church *are* a kind of credal statement in themselves.

But over time, of course, the theologians of the church, as we are want to do, started wrestling with the logical questions, particularly around what it meant to be mono-theistic (that is, how can we say we believe in **one** God while also saying **JESUS is Lord**).

There was also the challenge of Greek Philosophy – the God of the philosophers was supposed to be all powerful and omni-present, so how could God be human, and even more importantly, how could God die on a cross? This is why Paul says in one place, the cross of Christ is '*foolishness* to Greeks' (1 Corinthians 1:23).

There were various potential 'solutions' posed to all these intellectual dilemmas, many of which were dismissed as inadequate in the face of the powerful first-hand *testimony* of the apostles that *in* the fully-human Jesus, who had been crucified, raised by God, experienced in the Spirit, and received in the Eucharist, they had been delivered from sin and death (Colossians 1:13).

As I said before, the Creed was not a new-fangled invention. It was a very tightly-worded articulation of the heartbeat of the faith, testified to by the apostles and celebrated in the early church in hymn and Eucharist even before it was written down in various gospels and letters that would become the New Testament.

**God as 'Father'** can only be understood in relationship to God as 'Son' [just like I could only be referred to as a Father after I had a daughter]. The kenotic (self giving) nature of the loving Father is *revealed* in the graceful life of Jesus which results in him being 'raised up' on the cross in love for the world.

**The 'Son'** can only walk this journey because he '*mirrors*' the love of the Abba for him and *trusts* in the love of the Abba for him, even in the face of death.

And we can only comprehend all this by the work of the '**Holy Spirit**' who *reveals all this to us...in the eternally present moment*. The Spirit draws us into the *communion* of God through Jesus so that we participate IN this communion – which John's gospel talks about as 'abiding in the vine' or which St Paul talks about as being 'in Christ'.

[as a rough analogy of how the unity of God is expressed – consider a married couple. They are *two* people, each with their own identity, who love each other in reciprocal self-giving and yet we talk about ONE marriage don't we? Furthermore, when we're in the company of a loving couple, we experience that love as something that emanates out towards us and embraces us. This is why marriage is sometimes seen as being a sacrament of the divine life.]

OK – so what's the bottom line of all this for Christians? The bottom line is that **God IS a UNITY of love - relationship between persons. The Triune God is a union of kenotic, outpouring relationship. A solo god might choose to love, but the Holy Trinity is love and can only ever be love.**

I said at the beginning that the Trinity is the heart beat of who we are and what we do as Christians.

- (i) One: The TRINITY is the key to the hermeneutical key (interpretive key) to how we hear the revelation of God in the *Bible*. Not everything that is said of God in the Bible is, in fact, true of God. To discern the Spirit of God active in the text, we look through the lens of Jesus. If something is being said of God that doesn't look like Jesus and his faithfulness to his Abba (who looks like Jesus), then it's not God.
- (ii) Two: The TRINITY is the key to *ethics* – that is, how we live our lives. The way we relate to other people flows out of being made into the image of Christ and shaped into his likeness.
- (iii) Three: The TRINITY is the Key to *mission* – we are sent out into the world in love because that is the pattern of God's own self-giving. 'As the Father SENT me, so I SEND you'. We are SENT in the power of the Spirit.
- (iv) Four: The TRINITY is the key to *worship*. The Trinity invites us into a communion of love and makes a place for us at this table. Jesus feeds us with his body and then sends us out to be food for others.
- (v) Five: The TRINITY is the key to *evangelism* – because when we testify to God we are testifying to a God who looks like Jesus crucified and risen - which is the best news anyone can ever receive.