

Matins Sermon for Trinity Sunday, 30th May 2021 *Mother Emma*

[Readings: Ezekiel 1:4-10, 22-28a, Mark 1:1-13]

The mystery of the Holy Trinity is the mystery of true relationship.

Of course, the words “Holy Trinity” never actually appear in the Bible, and the doctrine itself is one which developed through thought, word, prayer, compromise and confrontation during the early centuries of the church, in order to make human sense of Biblical images such as that represented in our second reading and illustrated in our newsletter today.

As Jesus is baptised in the River Jordan, we are asked to believe and understand that the incarnate Christ, the voice of the Father from Heaven and the Spirit represented by the dove, are all persons of the same God.

It is a doctrine which over the centuries has puzzled – and in the case of the other monotheistic religions actually offended – those who struggle to make sense of the “God in three Persons” of whom we often sing (in normal times) in a very familiar hymn. Yet the God whom we worship IS a single God, whom in some strange and incomprehensible way, we experience in three different but intimately related ways.

Preachers, illustrators and artists over the years have thought long and hard about the best way to portray the Holy Trinity, from the many famous images based on the Baptism of Christ to the Rublev icon, representing the three mysterious figures who visited Abraham. Some have drawn on the tripartite leaf of the shamrock, the three sides of a triangle – and my favourite of all which some of you might have seen me demonstrating online last year, the explanation that water, ice and steam are all H₂O, but appear in three very different forms.

But I also recently heard another very evocative description: that the Holy Trinity represents God outside us, God beside us and God inside us.

The Festivals, the readings and the celebrations of the last few weeks make perfect sense as we draw these three images together. We recall God the Father (outside us) who created not only us and our fellow human beings, but the whole earth, the universe and beyond – the magnificent Lord enthroned in all his glory as described by Ezekiel in our first reading.

Yet as we have remembered from Christmas to Ascension, God himself also humbly walks **beside** each one of us, as Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God, who came down to share our human existence, to live himself with sorrow and joy, friendship and betrayal, suffering and death, before ascending to take all these experiences deep into the heart of the Father.

Finally, last week at Pentecost, we saw the coming of the Holy Spirit, the “God inside us” who is variously described as the Comforter, the Sustainer, the Life-Giver, the Spirit of Truth, who fills our hearts with the strength and the inspiration to live out lives of truth and worship, integrity and compassion as God asks of us.

None of these three experiences of God can stand alone; the Christian faith, based as it is on a belief in a loving forgiving God who knows each one of us intimately, only makes sense if we see God at work outside, but BEside and inside us every single step of the way.

The doctrine of the Trinity has been given a renewed emphasis and understanding in the writing of many twentieth and twenty-first-century theologians.

God is described as a relational God, as we see and are drawn into the eternal relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the “eternal dance” of the three persons of the Trinity, endlessly intertwined, of one single substance, and yet with different, but complementary aspects, we see an ideal model for our own relationships with God, with one another and with the world itself.

Some theologians, reflecting on the Church today, have described the endlessly relational Trinity using the word, “perichoretic”, which seems to mean “engaged in an endless dance”, to talk about how we all within the Body of Christ may move together to bring the Church forward. God is not a lonely Lord high in the heavens who subjects us to his rule, but the Trinitarian God is rather a community of loving relationship, a pattern for interactive and complementary unity.

Such ideas lead us into new ways of considering our relationships with creation and the environment, with the global community, the local community in which we find ourselves, and supremely, with our brothers and sisters within our church community.

As we reflect on the words we have just proclaimed together in the Creed, “I believe in God... and in his Jesus Christ, his only Son... and I believe in the Holy Ghost” and then also, “the Communion of Saints”, perhaps we might consider what this Communion might look like if it is called to mirror or echo the endless dance of the Holy Trinity.

The Church should offer an inspiring model for society and the presence of God’s spirit in the world, as members of the Christian community are drawn into an eternal dance of love and communion, demonstrating to the world how a Christian society might operate.

If we are to model the loving communion of the Trinity for a wider society, every member of the Body is called to go out into the world and carry that sense of communion into an endless dance of love and compassion and holy action.

As Christians engage with each of the three Persons of the Trinity: the Lord of glory, who has created our astonishing world and showered us with his abundant generosity; the Incarnate Son who walks beside us on our journey and has shown us the power of self-sacrificial love, and the Holy Spirit who dwells within us to inspire and to guide, we can also engage in love, altruistic action and prayer with all those we encounter in our day to day lives, drawing them closer into a God-like communion of love and generosity.

We are not alone in the world, set apart as Christians in our own private society, but we are called and chosen by God to demonstrate to the world, that Trinitarian example of loving communion which leads to God’s wholeness.