

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 7th June 2020 Trinity Sunday

Isaiah 40.12–17, 27–31 2 Corinthians 13.11–13 Matthew 28.16–20

In the satirical Monty Python film, *Life of Brian*, which is set at the time of Jesus, the leader of a group of disparate revolutionaries fumes about the occupying Romans saying, “What have the Romans ever done for us?” Whereupon the assembled followers start coming up annoyingly with various benefits, such as roads, sanitation and public order. Well, following Monty Python, on Trinity Sunday we might ask, “What has the doctrine of the Holy Trinity ever done for us?” And the answer is indeed, quite a lot really.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity, that God is Father Son and Holy Spirit and yet one God, became established in the early Church as the touchstone of Christian orthodoxy, and has continued to be so through to the present day. It is everywhere: in our prayers and worship, in Christian theology and the Church. It is a bulwark against theological error and sectarian religion. It can seem unnecessarily complex, but this complexity reminds us that the fullness of God is rather more than human minds can comprehend. Like many scientific principles that have become the bedrock of modern technology, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity needs to be accepted in order to start understanding it.

Its rather exclusive maleness is a bit of a problem these days, but it is helpful to remember that in the Old Testament the Spirit of God is feminine. Comparable formulas can be helpful, such as Creator, Redeemer and Lifegiver, though the classical doctrine of the Holy Trinity sees all three persons as involved in all these three movements. At this point, one is indeed tempted to go and lie down in a darkened room, asking, “What has the doctrine of the Holy Trinity ever done for us?”!

The key point, however, is that the doctrine is not really about the nature of each person in the Trinity, but about their relationship with one another and their relationship with you and me. In Rublev’s famous icon of the Holy Trinity, the three persons are shown gazing lovingly at each other, and the onlooker is being invited to become part of this movement of divine love. God is love, and heart of the Christian vision is that God is sharing his love with humanity. We are being invited to a divine party. It’s a simile that Jesus often used in his parables.

The other key point is that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not something that emerges from philosophical thought, it comes directly out of Christian experience. It emerged because the early Christians knew they had experienced a relationship with God in three distinct ways, in their general sense of almighty God as in the Old Testament, in their relationship with the specific person of Jesus Christ, and in their direct experience of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. In the life of Jesus, the reality of the three persons of the Holy Trinity is revealed for a moment on time, like with a flash of lightning, never to be forgotten.

ST MARY-LE-TOWER CHURCH IPSWICH

This doctrine is all about relationship. We are not limited to know God only as a philosophical construct, or a distant authority figure, or as a mysterious force of immense power, or in the nature of the universe he or she created. We can know God in the person of Jesus Christ in his character and in his teaching and in his death and resurrection. We can know God in our experience of the Holy Spirit, in prayer and worship and fellowship, in the life of the Church.

Moreover, as we come to know Jesus through the Bible, and as we come to know the Spirit through the life of the Church, these insights then inform our knowledge of Almighty God as Father and Mother. God is not a distant authoritarian, but a loving parent, who has provided everything we need to be at peace with ourselves, at peace with one another, at peace with God, and to grow to be the people God calls us to be. The whole point of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, is that for these insights to be true, Jesus cannot just be a prophet, and the Church cannot just have a spirit that comes from following Jesus. Jesus is far more. And the Spirit is far more.

Having said all this, I think most people need a kind of shorthand for the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. For me this is the realisation that God is not just my Creator, but is my Redeemer and my Enlivener too. At any one time, one of these may feel more important, but I know that all of them are constantly true. And as I reflect on this divine activity in our lives, I realise that these movements are deeply interrelated, and that we are indeed being drawn into relationship of love that begins and ends with God.

CJ. 07.06.20