

Trinity Sunday 2018

Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8, Psalm 29, Romans 8:12-17, John 3:1-17

There can be no greater aim in life than getting to know God. No greater vision than to grow in our love and knowledge of God. Both the prophets and the Lord Jesus Christ himself teach us: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”*. (Deuteronomy 6:5; Luke 10:27).

But what is God like? Really? Who is he? What is he in his very person? What is his nature? We ask these questions because we realize that to love someone with everything we have means we want to know who they are. That’s why, contrary to Hollywood, the vows in the wedding service include the promise “I will” NOT “I do”. I promise I will love her or him, not just that I do love them. And that’s because when people marry they very soon realize they know very little about their new spouse. So they promise not only do they love this person at this point (and who wouldn’t given how they’re all prettied up for the wedding day!) but they will love them. No matter what comes. No matter what life exposes. It may take 60 years to really find out what this person I’ve married is like!

Each week as we gather as the people of God we remind each other of who God is and what he is like. We recite together what we call a creed, a word that comes from the Latin and means “believe”. And whether it’s what we call the Nicene Creed or the Apostles’ Creed we are reminding each other in wonder and joy - of God.

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I say wonder and joy, because, like in describing our closest friend, this is not just a list of character traits. We sense we are trying to put into words the understanding, the respect, the knowledge, the honour, the joy, the love, the wonder, the humble adoration we have for the God whom we dare to call Father. Whom we dare to call Father because God the Son has brought us to share in something of that relationship he has himself with the Father. Whom we are confident we know as Father because God the Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit, our inmost beings, that we are the children of God.

Although we remind each other every week what God is like, Trinity Sunday gives us a special opportunity to do this. We have read the truths of Psalm 29 pulsating with the might of the Lord as expressed in his powerful Word: *The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning.*

It's clear there is but one Lord – and yet his word – which is different from him - has all the power we know only God has.

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Again, in that awe-inspiring reading from Isaiah chapter 6 we read of the prophet seeing the Lord – and yet he doesn't, does he? At least – not really. What he sees is the train of the Lord's robe filling the temple. Even this is too much and he is overwhelmed with how inappropriate it is for him to be there: *"Woe is me!" he says. "I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty!"* And as we heard, his guilt is taken away and his sin is atoned for and he hears the voice of God. This God is of absolute purity and holiness – different from created beings. But did you notice that at the end, when the Lord speaks to Isaiah we have these strange words; words very similar to the way God speaks as he creates humankind:

"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

*"Whom shall I send? And who shall go for **us**?"* Singular "I" and in the same breath plural "us".

We are meant to get the message that God is one but he is more than one person.

That is, like the rest of the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi we are slowly having revealed to us the LORD God almighty who sends his Spirit and speaks his word; who has many different attributes; who uses the plural to refer to himself; who is the Father of the divine Son and shares his rule with the Son of Man. This means the LORD is indeed One; but he is not alone. He has both oneness and diversity. It's a strange way of talking, I know, but it's glorious. God is not solitary, like, may I say, Allah. We may not know all that this involves, but we ought not to be surprised that when the Lord Jesus Christ comes into this world he shows what it means.

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So in our gospel for today we read these remarkable words: *I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Did you notice as he is talking to Nicodemus, this leading teacher of Israel, how easily he moves from using “I” to “we”? We’ve heard that before in the Old Testament.

Did you see how he speaks of himself as the Son of Man who came from heaven – NOT a created being – and will return to heaven?

And did you catch the note of his speaking like God – telling Nicodemus that he, as the one and only Son of the Father, is the only way humans may be unashamed and declared guiltless before God? *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”?*

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What we remind each other of week by week as we boldly declare the words of the creeds is of this triune God. This Trinity.

Thank God that this is how he is and has revealed himself to be!

In our church catechism, we learn an answer which is very good to remember on Trinity Sunday:

The question is asked : What do you chiefly learn from the creed?

The answer – and this is the bit worth learning off by heart:

First, I learn to believe in God the Father, who has made me and all the world;

Secondly, in God the son, who has redeemed me and all mankind;

Thirdly, in God the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies me and all the elect people of God.

What better to do now than boldly, excitedly and joyfully to declare to one another how we understand God to be:

CREED