

June 7th 2020 Sermon for Trinity Sunday –

Rev Joshua Brocklesby, Curate of St Mary's Church Watford

Bible Reading 2 Corinthians 13:11-end

“Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints send their greetings. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Gospel Reading Matthew 28:16-20

“Then the eleven disciples when to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So today is Trinity Sunday, the day in the church when we celebrate the Trinity which is to say we celebrate that we have one God, within which are three persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now I'm very aware that for many of us in our day to day lives, we probably don't really give much thought to the doctrine of the Trinity. Yes, its there in most of the things we say in church, but when we hear it, it might be so common for us now, that we don't really give it any attention. And probably when we do give it a bit of attention we might end up giving ourselves a bit of a headache, Because the doctrine of the Trinity asserts that within one there is three, which on face value alone seems to be contradictory. It is something which sets off alarm bells in the logical sides of our brains as it goes against everything we are taught in our primary school maths lessons. And the truth is, the Trinity and how we understand it, is a highly debated and discussed area of Christian belief because of how difficult it is to illustrate it properly.

It is though really fascinating stuff, and an area which I have done a fair amount of study in. So if you would like to talk more about it then do get in touch. But this isn't going to be an academic lecture, despite the fact that my background today is a bunch of books. Instead this is to be a celebration, and not only that, but I think the Trinity at this current time, has so much to offer us on how we are meant to respond as Christians to the many issues we see in the world today.

But first I think we need to celebrate the Trinity. This is its feast day and so celebration is in order. And so some of you might be thinking now, ok that's nice, we should celebrate the Trinity but it's a highly confusing piece of theology so why? Well, a good question. We need to celebrate because God is communion. The Trinity teaches us that God is not a static being as we might think or imagine. God is not some perfect entity unmoved and unchanging throughout all of time. Instead God is a dynamic community of three persons, so close and in love with one another that they are one. They are so in relation with each other that it is impossible to exclude one from the other. They are completely one but can only be understood as there being three as well.

There is a Greek term perichoresis which is often used to describe the Trinity and the word can be understood as representing something like a dance. The dance of God, of God who is Trinity. The constant movement, the constant giving and receiving of love. A dance so dynamic and full of movement, the three persons of the Trinity cannot be separated. It is a beautiful picture and one which some of us might find helpful in celebrating the beauty of the Trinity, the beauty of our God. Because it shows the creative and dynamic nature of God. A God who is constantly at move, a God beautiful simply in the way it is and exists.

So what I think the Trinity boils down to, is relation. Through Jesus we know we have a God who seeks relation with us. And through the concept of the Trinity we know that God is in very being relation; the relation of the Father and the Son and the Spirit. We cannot think of these in isolation because they can only be understood through their relation with one another. It is why for all our ways of trying to explain the Trinity, they will always be imperfect because we do not fully know the Father, or the Son or the Spirit, and so we are not able to fully express God completely.

But we can offer pictures or concepts which can be helpful in some ways. One which I find particularly valuable is thinking of God as relations of love. God cannot love just God, love for just oneself is not true love, it would be selfish. So within God there must be two persons who are completely equal but reciprocating in that love. But even that love if it is just between two is closed. It is not open to others. It is inward looking and not outward looking. And perfect love must surely be inclusive, a love which is open and outward looking. This would fit with our understanding of God, given to us through Jesus, a God who loves us, who looks outward and wants to share love with each and every one of us. Therefore within God there must be a third equal person who reciprocates in this love completely too, forming a community of one. Being completed and understood through the relations of love of the three persons. Completely at one in and through love, and most beautifully of all a community open to love others. A community which Jesus himself says we will dwell in eventually. I find this picture of God understood as Trinity, an incredibly beautiful one. And one I believe is worthy indeed of celebration.

So we have a beautiful God seen and understood as Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But what does this mean for us now? And here I will offer you my own thoughts on this, so do feel free to disagree. But I believe that because our God is one God and yet three persons, that within the heart of God there is a celebration of diversity. God cannot be seen as one static being but must be seen as three persons. Each unique yet not isolated. Each different yet completely united and as one. The essential nature of each part of the Trinity is as one theologian puts it 'to be for the others, through the others, with the others and in the others.' They do not exist in themselves for themselves. The 'in themselves' is for the others. This idea of the Trinity is I believe a blueprint for us as humans as to how we are to try and live and be and form our communities. And I think it is vital at this time that we live this out now more than ever.

Many of us will have been impacted deeply by the events unfolding around the world but especially in the US after the killing of George Floyd. It is an event which has sparked anger, outrage and hurt in many of us. And it is something which must lead all of us into some deep soul searching and action. As Christians we are called to be peace-makers. Paul in the reading we just heard said we are to live in peace with one another. But this

peace has to be just. Peace and justice in God's kingdom go hand in hand. The peace which is at the heart of God, which dwells in the Trinity, is one of justice. It is one found in the equality of each person, in the celebration of each person, and in the complete unity of each person in God. The societies we have formed are nothing like this. They are based on the dominance of one group over another. They are based on violence to control and subjugate. They are based on inward selfish love not outward selfless love. They are based on fear of difference and diversity rather than celebration of it. We cannot strive for peace on those terms. That is not a Godly peace. The peace which we are meant to help bring on earth is the peace of God, one of equality, diversity, love and unity. Each and every person within our communities needs to be loved and celebrated for who and what they are. They must be equal and we must find oneness in that and that alone. It is the challenge for us as Christians that we must strive for this peace and nothing else. Not the peace which the world offers but the peace which our God offers.

Many of you who know me well, will know that my hero is Martin Luther King. Someone who played a key role in my belief that as Christians we can change this world for the better. And so I want to read you some of this words now. Words which constantly inspire and challenge me.

Dr Martin Luther King said "I've seen too much hate to want to hate, and every time I see it, I say to myself hate is too great a burden to bear. Somehow we must be able to stand up against our most bitter opponents and say 'we shall match your capacity to inflict suffering, by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you. But be assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves, we will appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process. And our victory will be a double victory."

Those words were spoken by someone who had seen friends and loved ones die. Who had to deal with attacks and threats against his own life and that of his family. And yet he refused to hate, and believed that love was the tool to change things for the better. And in the end he was prepared to give his life for that very cause. That love is the way to bring true justice and peace. Not a love of inaction, but a love of action. A love prepared to stand up and bring attention to injustice, hate and violence, while seeking to do no harm to anyone else. A love which I believe changes this world. A love which I believe God is changing this world in and through. Because it is God's love for us.

And so as Christians we need to embody this love. We need to create communities of love. Communities where the Trinity is used as our blueprint. We cannot allow brothers and sisters to suffer alone. One person suffering, is suffering for all of us. We cannot allow acts of injustice against some of us. Injustice to some, is injustice to all of us. We cannot, even unwillingly, be part of systems of oppression. Oppression to some, is oppression to all of us. We cannot accept structures and systems where some of us benefit simply because of the colour of our skin while others suffer. We must stand up to this and strive for God's peace on earth. We cannot allow Christian symbols and images to be used by authorities of this world who use power and violence to subdue. Instead we must show the world that Christians follow the example of Jesus, in showing love to hate, and using non violence in the face of violence. Brothers and sisters for too long we have accepted an unequal peace,

a worldly peace. Brothers and sisters for too long we have allowed some of our family to suffer. Brothers and sisters for too long some of us have benefited from that suffering. And so as Christians we need to say enough is enough. We can no longer be allowed to think that these issues do not affect us simply because we do not suffer directly. The Trinity should highlight that in a Godly community, the suffering of one is suffering to all.

When Jesus was on earth, he was found with those who were oppressed, marginalised and persecuted. And as the church, as community shaped and led by God we must be found there too. Because Jesus at the end of our Gospel reading for today, sends out the disciples to go to all nations to spread this message of love and to do so in the name of Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We are sent out in the name of the Trinity so we must follow its example, the example of God. We must seek to share in all of this. To be one is to suffer as one, to strive as one, to love as one. As Christians we know the day will come when God's peace will reign. But until then each and every one of us who claims to believe in a God who is Trinity, must search in ourselves and discuss in our communities what we can do to bring God's peace on earth as it is within the heart of God, within the Trinity.

Today we celebrate that our God is three in one. An image which I believe can be inspiration to us for a new way of living where there is no domination of one side over another, but instead an embracing and celebration of difference through equality, unity and oneness. They can inspire us to reject societies where difference leads to domination, oppression and division. And instead strive for societies where we look to God for the blueprint. Societies where difference and diversity are celebrated, in and with and through God's love. We need to form societies of peace, not as the world gives, but as God gives.

So today as we celebrate the Trinity we need to ask ourselves some difficult questions. We need to be prepared to hear some difficult truths. And in all of this, we need to follow Jesus' example and respond in love. Amen.