



The Avenue Uniting Church

Sunday 26th May, 2024

"The way of trinity"

Listening for Sacred Wisdom

Matthew 28:16 - 20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the GOD of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of GOD, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Contemporary Reading of Grace from "Convictions" (Marcus Borg)

"For Christians in particular, the imagination is the home of our images of GOD, the Bible, Jesus, salvation, and more.

Together, these images combine to create a vision of GOD's character and dream. They matter greatly, for they shape what we think the Christian life is about.

What's it all about? What's the Christian life all about? It's about loving GOD and loving what GOD loves. It's about becoming passionate about GOD and participating in GOD's passion for a different kind of world, here and now. And the future, including what is beyond our lives? We leave that up to GOD".

Have you ever tried explaining or talking about something and finding words totally inadequate? Particularly, to someone who speaks a different language from you, or understands the world differently?

Welcome to the world of Trinitarian theology and practice!!

- A world often in a state best described by my favourite word of this year: "*Omnishambles*"...
(Thank you, Justice Michael Lee!)
- and yet also one of wisdom, curiosity, prayer, deep thought, and soul-searching

'The Trinity': isn't simply a doctrine. In terms of doing Christian theology, this is historically '*the big one*', the one where people have tried to 'explain' something beyond explanation. The one where people have tried to speak of experience of GOD in ways that make sense to themselves and others.

This is where the language of trinity came into being over many centuries:

- With people trying to reconcile the bedrock understanding from our Judeo-Christian heritage that GOD is one, with the awareness that we don't always experience GOD in the same ways.
- With people trying to hold together the sense of GOD as creator of all that is, and the claim that in Jesus we see GOD present in human experience.

- With people coming to grips with the sense that GOD's life and presence seemed to continue beyond Jesus' life, and so beginning to talk about the 'Holy Spirit'.
- With many generations struggling with the language and understandings to express the ongoing mystery of GOD in sensible ways.

(The original first line in verse 2 of "*We limit not the truth of GOD*" read: "*Our great forefathers groping went...*" There are all sorts of reasons we shouldn't sing that now, but it does express well the image of looking for something, without really knowing what, exactly.)

For many contemporary Christians, the understanding of the trinity remains the way of expressing these things. For many others, it's a worthy expression, which arose in its time, which shouldn't stop us looking for other expressions in our time.

For me, as a doctrine, 'trinity' has some limitations, particularly if I treat it like some sort of '*maths equation*'. But as a rich part of our tradition, reflecting the experience and wisdom of so many faithful generations, this particular way of giving expression to GOD remains vital and important, and contemporary.

Without it, our ability to think about GOD - to name experience of GOD as the sacred in the world and beyond - would be diminished greatly. And so would our ability to respond to GOD!

That ability rests on what we have seen, heard, sensed, felt, imagined, and named of GOD in our lives, and in the life of creation. This would be more difficult if no one had gone before us to speak of GOD as creator of all that is - however we might understand and express that.

It would be more difficult if no one had gone before us to speak of Jesus as revealing glimpses of that creator to humanity, giving the language of relationship and intimacy as well as distance and powerful.

It would be more difficult if no one had gone before us to speak of that GOD remaining faithful and present in creation after Jesus had gone from among us: the continuing life of GOD.

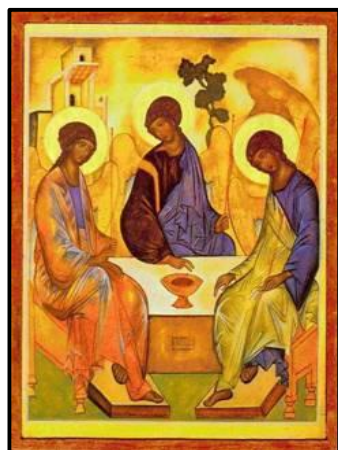
**The language of trinity is not definitive.
It will not - can not - express all that GOD is. Or isn't.**

We don't have to accept it in every detail – there is, after all, 1600ish years of life and faith since it was adopted as a doctrine of the church.

But it helps us name, and grow, in our experience of holiness, and in our response. I'm grateful for the giants of faith on whose shoulders we stand, for that gift. And I believe the best way to honour that gift is to build on it, as they did in their day

Some have done it with words - LOTS of words! Others have done it with art.

The two that I've highlighted here come from artists 8 centuries apart. In Andrei Rublev's icon "The Trinity" and Margie Thompson's "Dance of the Trinity", we see two very different expressions of a deep truth: that **whatever GOD is, GOD is, in relationship**.



Our calling, as followers of the way of Jesus, is to reflect and live that truth in the way we relate to GOD, to each other, to creation, and to ourselves.

That, for me, is where the closing blessing of Paul in 2nd Corinthians 13 is really important:

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of GOD, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

(There you go, I’m not just making it up when I say “*communion*” instead of “*fellowship*”!))

Remember something very important about 2nd Corinthians. For the most part, it’s a really tough letter to read, because it arises out of a difficult relationship between Paul and the church in Corinth. We see in the letter a relationship close to breaking, and we don’t know if it ever really recovered.

Yet, at the end of such a letter, we see Paul offering a blessing to the church, and I see no reason to imagine it wasn’t sincere. He’s not making a point, not telling them off, not defending his authority as a leader in the church.

He’s offering a blessing: a blessing which, with the hindsight of 2000 years, we call ‘trinitarian’. I don’t think Paul would care what we call it. He just wants these people to be blessed with all the richness he can imagine in GOD.

Grace is not the ‘department’ of Jesus alone. Love isn’t the exclusive province of GOD, creator. Communion isn’t just what the Holy Spirit does, or brings to the party.

All are part of the fundamental mystery and unity we call “GOD”, shown in the world. And with this blessing, Paul does far more than invoke the name of GOD. He enters into the life and work of GOD, to be part of the means by which the blessing is made real in the life of the Corinthian church and its people.

His blessing, I believe, is an act of reconciliation: a hand held out in the grace, love and communion that he wishes for them. It’s the blessing and action of an open heart and an open mind. It’s a blessing that follows the way of Jesus, and all that Paul has learned of GOD through him.

For Paul, this is where “communion” becomes a verb, not simply a noun: where it becomes what we do.

And as we do communion, as we do grace, as we do love, this is where we truly live Trinity.

Blessings, *Rod Peppiatt*