

On Trinity Sunday 2010 Rev'd Mike Bisset preached on the Trinity.

Readings:-

Prov 8.1-4 (Wisdom's call)

Rom 5.1-5 (Justified through faith)

John 16.12-15 (Spirit will guide in truth)

Sermon:-

It has been said that the Festival of the Holy Trinity is the only day in the church year where the focus seems to be on a doctrine rather than an event or a specific teaching of Jesus. On the other hand, it can be argued that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is in fact a teaching of Jesus which may not be explicit perhaps, but is most certainly implicit. The doctrine, simply put, is that God is one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God relates to his creation in the manner of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet he is not three gods but one God.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity was not the invention of stuffy old theologians who sat around thinking up ways to make the Christian faith more complicated. Rather, the doctrine came about in its refined formulation as an effort to describe how the one God in whom we believe relates to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine was forged in the heat of serious theological controversy. Back in 2nd and 3rd Centuries AD Marcion, for example, taught that the God of the Old Testament was harsh and cruel, but Jesus was kind and nice; therefore we should believe in Jesus and reject God the Father. Arius taught that Jesus was only a kind of demigod created by God the Father to be a mediator between heaven and earth. Then there were the Enthusiasts who taught that the coming of the Holy Spirit (as evidenced in their ability to speak in tongues) completely replaced God the Father and God the Son. In order to clear up the confusion and set things straight, the church fathers formulated the doctrine of the Holy Trinity to describe our basic belief in one God in three persons, where no person competes with another, exceeds another in importance, or replaces another. The ancient Church accorded so much importance to the proper understanding of the Trinity, that they dealt with the Trinity before they addressed the canon of the New Testament.

You may be lost already! Problem is that through the centuries folk have tried to make it simpler and in the process have simplified it to the point where it is no longer true. So they have had a go at describing the Trinity as Father being the creator, the son being the redeemer and the Spirit being the sanctifier. Neat! But sounds more like a job description. When you face an existential crisis in your life, you need to pray to a person, not to a job description. And of course it is not the way God has revealed himself in scripture and that is our plumb line.

Part of the problem in that rather neat description and all of this sermon is a problem integral to the discussion itself. You see, the first temptation in the Garden of Eden was to "be like God, knowing everything." That temptation has remained with humankind from the beginning and is with us yet today. We want to nail everything down—put everything into neat little boxes—so we can be in control of all knowledge and every situation. Now the quest for knowledge is good as long as it is directed toward the world over which God assigned us to have dominion. The scientific enterprise is based on the instruction from God in Genesis to till the Garden and keep it, and to give names to all God's creatures. How can we do that unless we explore the world around us and examine it in every detail?

But God is not part of the world around us. God is wholly other. God can never be the object of our scientific investigation. God is not a riddle to be solved, but a mystery to be adored. A mystery explained ceases to be a mystery. All we know about God is what God has chosen to reveal to us. Beyond that, God remains hidden from us. Think you have a handle on God – not a chance.

And that is the whole point of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The doctrine does not define God, but rather it describes what God has allowed us to know of him. The doctrine remains mysterious to us because the God it describes is mysterious. The doctrine challenges our secret desire to be like God, knowing everything, and thereby dispelling all mystery from our life.

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God is transcendent over the universe. It teaches panentheism (God is in all things) not pantheism (all things are God). It teaches that although God is accessible to all, He is above all and beyond all. He is not a higher self or a deeper consciousness, He is not a pocket genie who performs tricks for the theologically clever, He is not an oracle or a familiar spirit. He stands above the universe, even as He pervades it, He exercises His own judgment. He has the prerogative to do as He pleases.

The doctrine of the Trinity reveals how God could possibly create the universe and be provident within it. But the Trinity reveals that within the Godhead there are three Persons—three consciousnesses if you will. The Persons of the Trinity are one in substance, essence, and will, but each person in the

Trinity perceives the others as both "me" and "not me." Thus God is eternally self-conscious and thus is capable of deliberate acts.

The doctrine of the Trinity reveals the divine economy, for Jesus, one Person of the Trinity, called Himself the Son of another Person of the Trinity, whom He termed His Father, and the third Person He called the Holy Spirit. He thus revealed that the relationship among the Persons is perfect love, mutual submission, and unity of will.

The doctrine of the Trinity reveals God's motivation to save us and sustain us and to bring us into His glory. Jesus reveals that even though we are His artifacts, He has more interest in us than a potter has in his pots. God is not satisfied with displaying the good pots and discarding the defective ones; He has a paternal interest that goes beyond making us of clay; He seeks to save us from the fate of mere crockery, he seeks to perfect us, so that we may live with Him in His glory. Our destiny is not to sit on some dusty shelf as a trophy, but to live in eternal fellowship with God, sharing in the divine economy of love.

The doctrine of the Trinity reveals how God can be transcendent and eternal, yet invade time and space in the Person of Jesus Christ. It explains how God can relate to us on our own terms, without abdicating the operation of the universe.

The doctrine of the Trinity explains how God can be transcendent and eternal, yet indwell us and empower us. It explains how God can be in all things, but not of any one thing; it explains why we find God within, when He is above and beyond us as well. It explains how the church can be a human institution with a divine charter, how it can carry out God's will even as it exemplifies our imperfection.

In the Gospel for today Jesus tells his disciples, "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. . ." What Jesus means is clear. Instant and full knowledge of all things would be unbearable for us. Instead of giving us freedom, it would be intolerable and impossible for us to bear. That is why the Spirit of truth comes to guide us into all the truth, not suddenly and instantaneously, but slowly and gradually, in a measure appropriate to our ability to receive it.

Martin Luther wrote these words:

This life is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness;
not health, but healing;
not being, but becoming;
not rest, but exercise.

We are not yet what we shall be, but we are moving toward it.

The process is not yet finished, but it is going on.

This is not the end, but it is the road.

All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.

The Good News for us this day is not that we proud Christians have a doctrine about the Holy Trinity, but that God in three persons creates us, redeems us, and sanctifies us. The Good News for us this day is not that we have God all figured out, but that God has always had us completely figured out and graciously loves and forgives us infinitely in spite of all he knows about us. The Good News for us this day is not that our journey of faith is over now that we are baptized and confirmed, but that the journey continues with God behind us, ahead of us, and beside us, leading us on to that day in heaven when all mysteries will be revealed and all doctrines will disappear in the presence of God himself.