

Trinity Sunday: 12th June, 2022

MUC

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God, may my words be loving and true; and may those who listen discern what is not. Amen.

Today is Trinity Sunday. The Trinity is one of the central doctrines, or teachings, of the Christian tradition. Often poorly understood, it seems as though we are told there are two essential things to know about the Trinity:

First, you must believe it.

Second, you cannot even pretend to understand it.

This second point often gives rise to the suspicion that the Trinity may not be as essential as we've been told.

The Trinity can seem like idle speculation about the nature of God. This is not helped by the fact that traditionally this doctrine is articulated in the outdated language of Greek philosophy. Some have suggested that the Trinity was merely a political response to the context of Roman Imperialism. Others have challenged the gendered nature of the Trinity, with a Father and a Son, and no divine Mothers or Daughters to be found.

The Trinity seems only to erode the credibility of the Christian tradition in a modern, learned world.

Against this I want to suggest that the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most concrete teachings of the Christian tradition. And can help us to see the beauty of God. To profess the Trinity, if nothing else, is to profess that whatever we might say about God we *must* say that God is self-giving love for the world.

Being Trinity Sunday this sermon comes to you in 3 parts.

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Part 1: in the beginning

"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the

light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.” -- Gen. 1.1-5

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” -- Jn. 1.1-5

The writer of the opening of Genesis did not have the doctrine of the Trinity in mind when they wrote those famous words; nor in all likelihood did the writer of John’s Gospel. And yet, both of these texts witness to a central insight about the nature of God, which the doctrine of the Trinity seeks to express.

Namely, when we name God as Creator we do not primarily mean that God stands at the beginning of a chain of causes which brought the world into being. Rather, when we name God as Creator we mean that God seamlessly unfolds divine love, and light, and life, and wonder into the world itself. God is not content to exist in eternity wrapped up in a little ball, in some sort of self-contained ideal community floating out in heaven. God is always unfolding in creative love for the world.

God is that one who speaks light into the world wherever there is wonder.

God is that one who holds together the patterns of our lives: every breath, and every morning.

God is that one through whom all the joys of life come into being.

And crucially, it is this same God, this same one, who is at once at work in all the beauty of the world, *and* in the beauty of Jesus’ life of service, solidarity, and sacrifice.

The Trinity holds together God's gracious, loving unfolding in creation and God’s entering into the confrontation with creation’s brokenness, pain, and trauma.

The Trinity tells us that we must dispel from our minds any sense that the world is a failed plan A, in need of a divine saviour who offers plan B. The beckoning of the world's mystery every

day — and always — is a beckoning towards love and mercy, justice and wonder, peace and joy in *this* world.

And yet, we cannot collapse the mystery of the world into the world itself. As though the world we meet, filled with pain, and trauma, and violence, and evil, can have the final word on what is real, and what matters. God as Creator is the hidden thread of love which flows through every part of the world: resisting all evil, seeking after healing, reconciling us to peace. All that is visible, and invisible is caught in the divine arc bending towards justice.

We cannot allow this whole suffering world to have the last word, to be the ultimate horizon for our pursuit of co-creating love: making of the world an idol. We are called beyond the world that *is*: all that is visible; to the world that *ought* to be: to all that is yet invisible.

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Part 2: the image of an invisible God

“Since you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure—the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them, things that the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven. But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron-smelter, out of Egypt, to become a people of his very own possession, as you are now.” -- Deut. 4.15-20

“[Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” -- Col. 1.15-20

It is difficult to talk about an invisible God. In Jesus' own Jewish tradition, God refuses all divine images. God must be protected from being reduced to dead images, or totems, or any human objects of devotion. The majesty of the ever-living God must be protected from the finite and worldly: God has no end, as the things of this world have an end. God cannot pass from life to death, to something static, controlled, or possessed.

It was this concern to safeguard the majesty of God that animated the Priest Arius, against whom the doctrine of the Trinity was developed. In rejecting that Jesus of Nazareth was fully God, Arius did not seek to undermine the Christian tradition; rather, Arius sought to protect the glory of God. Jesus may well be the greatest human being, the greatest creature in all of creation: above and beyond any spiritual being or angel. But, said Arius, it would diminish the living God to be found fully in Jesus: the living God cannot die as Jesus died.

Against this, the Trinity says that it does not diminish God to be among creation, to be human, and to be among the wretched of the world. The doctrine of the Trinity says rather: here is God in fullness, God giving Godself in humility. Here God willingly goes to the killing post, willingly goes to be with those who an all too majestic God cannot bear.

In the Trinity everything we might say about God must be passed through the prism of Jesus. All preconceived notions of God which we have half-remembered, conjured from our minds, or borrowed from cultural traditions, must come face-to-face with the Risen Crucified One: Jesus the Christ. The point here is not to present a picture of Jesus imbued with the divine qualities we assume God to have; rather, all divine qualities must be reinterpreted in light of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

There can be no God apart from the one who died in solidarity with the nameless suffering ones of the world. There can be no God apart from the one who encountered the forces of death, who stood against the violence of Rome, the sickness of the world, the callousness of humanity itself. There can be no God apart from the vision of a bond of love stronger than death, a life more full than the emptiness of loss.

This same God who we find in Jesus does not cease to be the living God. As we heard in the Christ hymn from Colossians: the risen Christ cannot be contained by simple references to Jesus the human one. The living Christ can no more be reduced to an object we can control or possess than the living God. Jesus the Christ ought always to open us up to wonder, to expand our vision of the world God is creating. Christ is always the sent one: the one moving out just beyond our grasp, beckoning us onward.

To confess Jesus as God is not first and foremost to confess the miraculous power of a first century Rabbi. Rather, it is to confess that all we might say about God must have at its centre the self-sending humility and love of Jesus Christ. A humility and love we are always seeking to discover.

And so if we are to share in the life of God, then we must seek after the way of Christ which is always before us, we must take our place in the project of salvation which Christ draws us into.

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Part 3: the ongoing project of liberation and love ... of which you and I are a part

*“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn ...” -- Is. 61.1-2*

*“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’
When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If
you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are
retained.’” -- Jn. 20.21-23*

And so as we gather together the threads of the Trinity we must not be led astray. There is no place for idle speculation about God when we speak of the Trinity.

The blessed Trinity beckons us into the ongoing project of liberation and love which was seeded at the foundation of the world: as the evening and the morning of the First Day beckons us across every day. As the light and life and love of the world opens our eyes to wonder, draws out our hearts deeper, and deeper into the world.

In our movement into the world we seek after the Trinity whose dynamic life is the very mystery of the world. The Trinity is the very profession of a world of love and mercy, of justice and wonder, peace and joy. When we confess God as Creator we confess that we will be caught in the flow of co-creating love which seeks to confront the heavy parts of the world with light.

When we confess the Trinity we no longer sit and stare and ask: Who is God? Where is God? What kind of God do we worship?

There is God! Hanging on the cross. There among the countless victims of all the world's evil, oppression, violence, and disregard.

Do not, then, lose hope friends! For God is with us in the confrontation with the world's failures, pain, and trauma. God is with us in the renewing work of hope against hopelessness. God is with us, the Spirit broods over the waters of creation, and all the world's tears.

There is not time left for idle speculation. Not time left for idle talk of God in the timebound, static, and dead language of human invention. Go and seek after the ever unfolding love of God which is being sent out into the world. Participate in the project of liberation and love that is bending the arc of the universe towards justice.

The Spirit is at work in this world, evernew and ever-living.

There is only the God who can be found upon the cross, and who beckons us deeper into wonder at the world, to share in the unfolding of self-giving love. May the Spirit breathe on us, and grant us a share in this divine life.

Amen.