

Sermon for 12.6.22 (St. Thomas's Trinity Year C)

Lord Jesus Christ, open our ears, our minds and our hearts to receive your word.

We're standing by Patrick's car while he writes on the flyleaf of his book for us. The conversation moves onto what had prompted him to write it. "So often," he says, "I've attended people's funerals and listened to their life stories and thought to myself, I wished I'd known all that when they were alive".

I'm sure many of us might echo that thought. Perhaps there are work colleagues, or people we meet at a club or at church, or our neighbours - maybe we know their likes and dislikes, a bit about their families, maybe know when their birthday is, especially if we see them at Tuesday coffee, - yet we never really discover *who* they are until we've sat at their funeral, and listened to personal anecdotes about their relationships and the impact they've made on the world around them.

Today is Trinity Sunday, the day when we seek to celebrate the very essence of God himself, as three persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - but yet just one. Those are the facts that we know and declare we believe each Sunday when we say together the Creed. But do those facts really bring alive for us who God is in a meaningful and personal way?

Actually just thinking about the concept of the Trinity can conjure up some pretty complicated questions in our heads. How can those three distinct persons be one person? $1+1+1=...1$? How can God the Father, be his own Son? How can Jesus pray to God, who is himself? And if they are all one, how can any one of them, send us another of them?"

Are you still with me, or have I now tied you in knots? The Trinity is doctrine, and that feels rather like head stuff than heart stuff. Now as human beings, we are generally a curious species, so we'll often try to have a go at explaining this doctrine of the Trinity through various analogies: it's like a clover leaf we'll say, or like water which is made up of liquid, ice and steam, or maybe like a child's plait, made up of three equal strands braided together.

And yet none of those attempts really seem to encapsulate the profound essence of *who* God is as a Trinitarian being, his majesty, his humanity, his vulnerability, his power, his loving kindness... well, I could go on, but you get the idea. So I find myself wondering, does any of this doctrine stuff really matter? Might our efforts at sorting out the conundrum somehow only serve to diminish God, so that we lose the awe and the mystery. Will I be saying to myself when I eventually meet God in heaven, I just wish I'd understood all that doctrine when I was alive?

There's a story you've probably heard before, of a young man who climbs up a mountain and finds at the summit an elderly holy man deep in meditation. Or maybe he's asleep. Anyway, the young man disturbs him.

"What do you want?" the holy man asks.

The young mountaineer answers, "I want you to help me understand who God is, so that I may learn how to worship Him like you."

There's a pause while the holy man ponders, then he smiles, and shaking his head, replies, "A god that can be understood is not a god that anyone should worship."

So maybe trying to make sense of the doctrine is rather less important than discovering the very deep essence of those three persons for ourselves: how they exist together in a mutual relationship of love, and how that loving, communal relationship might impact our lives. CS Lewis says this, "God is not a static thing, but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost... if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance.

God as three persons dances in our lives in constant movement, coming close to us in his varying personas. Sometimes he's as a parent, gathering us close when we're feeling lost or alone—a hospital procedure that's daunting, becoming a churchwarden while unsure of all it entails, a decision to make that seems overwhelming. He's there welcoming us back when we've wandered away, made some inappropriate life choices and found ourselves at the end of our tether. Sometimes in the dance he's transformed into Jesus as mediator, helping us to choose the right words to mend a broken relationship, or he'll show us how to be a good servant as we take on the role of carer for a loved one. And then there are times when he blows into our lives as his spirit and we find ourselves guided into all truth, as Jesus tells his disciples in our reading, and we'll speak out about him with certainty, in situations we'd never had the courage for before. This is our God, the three persons of the Trinity at work in us, in our community, growing our relationships with each other and with him.

This is the faith we are baptised into, this is the faith Henry will be baptised into today, this is the faith Phoebe, Emily, Fleur, Freddie and Albert are being confirmed in today. In a few moments, we have the opportunity to come and experience the very essence of our God in a form we can grasp, in wafer and wine. Let's feed on him and be thankful.

AMEN