

Sermon for Trinity Sunday

Sermons preached on Trinity Sunday tend to be of two types – a muddle of incomprehensible theological gymnastics which the preacher has got out of a book the night before and which he himself struggles to understand, or something littered with examples so simplistic as to be ineffectual, irrelevant, or heretical. What do they teach them in these colleges?

It seems ironic that as we reach the climax of the liturgical year, the feast of the revelation of God as Holy Trinity, as marked through our great festivals of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we encounter not boundless joy, but casual indifference. Instead of the living focus of faith at the heart of our lives, we have only confusion. If people in today's world find that it is hard enough to believe that there is a God at all, then belief in the Trinity only makes life even more difficult.

Clergy hate to preach on it, congregations don't much look forward to hearing about it, theological students dread writing about it. But, if it is true to say that the faith of all Christians rests on the Trinity then it is important that all Christians should have some idea of what this doctrine entails. We must all do better to make this mystery central to our lives and not just a peripheral conundrum.

Even though the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible and there is no mention of the doctrine in the life of the Early Church, the root of belief in God as Trinity lies in Scripture with Christ, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation (Colossians 1:15), and the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being. (Hebrews 1:3) This same Christ is anointed with God's Holy Spirit at his baptism (Mark 1:10), and that same Spirit which inspires at Pentecost (Acts 2) is also promised to the disciples at the Last Supper (John 14:26).

Oddly, none of these readings has been set for any of the services or offices in today's lectionary.

In talking about the Trinity, it is essential to stress both unity and deity, the idea that each of the three persons of the Trinity is in and of themselves fully God, while being separate from the others, and yet in relationship with them. All of God's attributes are true of all three persons, since each is fully God. The paradox is held in tension, and maybe the first thing we learn from it is this:

God reveals himself only as much as he wishes to. It is not necessary to know him beyond this.

Attempts to describe and explain the Trinity so often lead to heresy inconsistent with what we are trying to say, that we should be dissuaded from trying to understand the essential nature of God, and instead encouraged to concentrate on the experience of God's revelation in our lives. Salvation is real and apparent, offered by the Father through the sacrifice of the Son and made real in each of us by the Spirit. Through this we learn that:

The redeeming power of Love is to be found in relationship and not in isolation.

Far from being a mystery to confound and perplex, the belief in God as Trinity offers a profound insight into the limits of human knowledge, the perception of the boundless love in which it operates, and the importance of relationships between each other and with God in understanding our essential nature and catching a glimpse of His. So we learn that:

What we know and experience of God is a faithful representation of what God actually is.

This is therefore at the very heart of Christian belief, and worth spending some time with if we are to grow in our faith in the one God who really is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.