

Sunday 12th June 2022 - Trinity Sunday
Proverbs 8: 1-4 & 22-31 and John 16:12-15
Making sense of what we mean by the Trinity
Rev David Coster

I have never been one for remembering formulas. And if I did remember the formula the question I had was, "Does this apply in this circumstance?" Maybe that is why I never excelled in the sciences.

Yet when I was a child, we had around in those days an oil called "Three-in-one." Maybe you can remember it. It seemed to have a multiplicity of purposes. If anything needed lubricating, three in one was the oil to use. Today I presume CRC fulfils the same purpose. But what did three in one mean – three oils in-one-oil, and how did they mix? I'm sure there was a formula but not one that I could comprehend.

Maybe it is a little like that with music and the bagpipes. Now some people tell me that I should not place music and bagpipes in the same sentence – but being one who appreciates music rather than one who analyses it, I don't go along with that sentiment. What is it about the pipes that makes the music, and who was it that even thought of making such an instrument? I don't know. But I do appreciate them – they stir the soul-that's all I need to feel.

And while I'm talking about these things that I don't fully understand, "What is it that makes human beings great? What is it that holds our relationships together? What is love and why do I love? What is it that sparks some deep affinity with one person and indifference towards another?"

I suppose I could throw in here for good measure our theme for today – the Trinity. How many people understand this? Why have it at all, because from what I can gather it creates confusion in the minds of followers of Jesus Christ. At least that is what most people tell me – they cannot grasp this concept of three-in-one and one-in-three. For me the Trinity only made sense when I had it explained to me at University and there I came to understand that we were not talking about a formula or even for that matter an oil, but about a God who is in relationship. A God who revealed himself/herself to the Jewish people as a loving Creator, this same God who in Christ Jesus revealed himself/herself as a loving Saviour and this same God who as Holy Spirit personally inspires us day by day. This is the God who keeps not only the universe oiled, but also is the one who keeps our relationships "oiled." In some ways what we are discussing in the Trinity is the God who is the team player, rather than God who is the individualist.

How do you see yourself! As an individualist or as a team player-a person of community?

How do you conceive of God – as the individualist, or as a team player? The Trinity indicates to us that God is a Team player – God is one of the pipers, one of the drummers, not the soloist.

Many people in our world today would say that they do not believe in God – that they are atheists. Others would say that they have not made up their minds whether they believe in a God or not – they are open to be convinced, but they haven't yet been convinced. These people are agnostics. And then there are people like me - people who believe that there is a God – we are theists. Now the question for us is that when we say that we believe that there is a God – what is it that we are saying that we believe in? Is it something akin to a formula or is it in a being who is in a living, loving relationship with us?

The Trinity speaks of a God who is in loving relationship.

Now it is natural that people will try to closely resemble the God they believe in. I suppose it is just as natural that people will resemble that which they believe in even if it is not God. In some ways what I am saying is that, as people, we are shaped by our belief.

Now because the Trinity speaks of a way of understanding or conceiving of God let us try to grasp what it is attempting to indicate.

Some people have a concept of God as an absolute individualist – an autocratic dominator. This stream of thought has strong foundation in Jewish religion, in some classical Greek philosophy, in Islam and in a strand or two of Christianity. God is the ultimate soloist – the absolute Monarch –

lofty self sufficient, not needing anyone or anything. God sits on God's throne and demands that all pay homage - or else.

As one person said, "This solo God holds all power and takes no advice on how to use it. He (and God is always He in this view) is augustly independent, essentially unaffected by the fortunes of any other being. God the individualist is alone without loneliness. Eternal without weariness. He is utterly unruffled and content, everlastingly superior to all else."

People who hold this view of God get very, very annoyed if anyone should suggest that God is other than what they conceive. They also tend to be very assertive, aggressive people who are strongly individualist and in the main wealthy and successful. These are self made people. As God is the Dominator, so they are the dominator. And look out for anyone who should dare to cross them.

Now I believe that the God we know in Christ Jesus (the God we know as Trinitarian) actually contradicts this absolutist view of God. In doing this I want to acknowledge that any language we may use to speak of God is inadequate and so easily misunderstood – for it is not a formula, but a way of expressing a relationship.

So let us try to understand God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit as a relational way of speaking of God.

Father: Today we are cautioned re the use of this word for many children don't have a father, or we are told fathers who are abusive give their children a bad image of what it is to be father. But Jesus was brave enough to use the Aramaic word, Abba to speak of God.

Abba was not a patriarchal, monarch of the Hebrew race. The best translation today is Dad or Daddy. This is the tender, forgiving, welcoming Father we discover in the parable of the Prodigal son. This is the Dad who comes down to our level and plays with us, encourages us, helping us to be the best we can be, while at the same time giving us the freedom to make mistakes. This is the creator God.

The Spirit: If the word Abba is difficult for us to grasp, then the word spirit is even more difficult. My suspicion is that for most people it conveys ghostly images flitting in and out of our lives scaring the pants off us. Yet there is no better word to describe the God who is invisibly here now, and intimate with us sharing our lives, and the life of the world. This is the unseen God who is actively working to bring God's Kingdom into Being.

When we say of ourselves that we are one in spirit, we say we are saying we are united in belief and purpose – the barriers are down. So, it is with the Holy Spirit of God – unseen, uncontrollable, yet nearer than anything we can conceive of or any other person can ever be. In Hebrew the word is ruach – spirit, wind, breath – that which gives life and breath.

The Son: Again, we have difficulties, as any parent knows when a child asks, "If Jesus was God, was he talking to himself when he prayed?"

Nevertheless, in Jesus we have a real human being with a real story. He was not some religious concept, but a real human being with a real life. And for those of us who are his followers we say that in this human being Jesus God dwelt without reserve to the point of us being able to say, "If you want to know anything at all about the unseen God, then you only have to look to Jesus – there you will find more of God than anywhere else." Look on Jesus in action and you see God at work. Here is God who laughs, cries, thirsts. God is not only the divine One in the heavenly realm. God is also the one who comes and shares life with us – God's human family. Through Jesus, God's Son, God is saving his human family from the inside out, because God has become one of us.

There we have it – the Trinity as a way of understanding the God who is active in relationship with the people of the world as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not some scientific formula, but a God in community with us, nurturing our lives and the life of the world to bring God's family into fellowship with God and God's Kingdom to fulfilment.

To God be the glory. Amen