



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Trinity Sunday

Genesis 1; 2 Corinthians 13:11-14; Matthew 28:16-20

4th June 2023

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I wonder how many of you were awake at dawn on Thursday morning? The sunrise showed an extreme delicacy and beauty of colour that is only possible to see when the sun is at a certain angle to our bit of the earth and in certain atmospheric conditions. As the sun rose in the sky, those delicate colours disappeared, but they were amazing when I saw them just as dawn approached. I took a photo of it, but photos rarely capture just how amazing these things are to the human eye.

Sunrise is a good time to contemplate who God is. Sometimes we feel so tiny in comparison to a God who keeps the earth spinning on its axis at exactly the right angle, the moon at just the right distance to govern the tides, and who instructs the sun to keep burning at just the right temperature not to scorch us completely. And the gently moving, ever-changing lavender of the dawn sky helped me see what God is like. It was his creation. A God who creates such beauty surely has beauty at the core of his being.

Other times God seems so big and far away and his “otherness” seems almost complete. How can we understand him? I think it was C S Lewis who first described God as being like an adult playing hide-and-seek with a child, who coughs a few times, so that the child can find him. Scripture says, “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.” Again, Scripture says, “No-one can come to God unless he first believes that God exists and then that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.”

Trinity Sunday seems like a good time to seek him. Many more excellent and sharper minds than mine have grappled with the Scriptures which led them to describe God as “Trinitarian”, so my aim is to draw together a few of those threads which help us to see the uniqueness and importance of this aspect of God’s nature. That word “Trinity” is not a word found in the Bible, but it describes truth that is contained within the Bible about the nature of God.

We can see back to the dawn of time in the book of Genesis. Even there we see God describing himself in the plural: chapter 1v26, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.” Here God is describing plurality of being, yet singleness of image and likeness. From one man, he enabled the emergence of the whole of humanity. That’s like plurality of being. Yet we each have common

threads of humanity which are the likeness of God within us: we have the capacity to love, to hate, to laugh, to appreciate beauty, to reach out or to hold back, to choose to do right, and the ability to sense the presence of God. Those capabilities are part of the image and likeness of God within us. Mankind, made to be like him.

But it's not just Genesis, there are various Old Testament instances where God's plurality of being are glimpsed: Isaiah 63:10 says that the people rebelled and grieved God's Holy Spirit, suggesting that the Holy Spirit is distinct from Yahweh. It is His Holy Spirit, and this Holy Spirit can be grieved – this is an emotional response of a person.

There are numbers of other Old Testament examples, but it's in the New Testament that many more explicit examples can be found. Perhaps because the New Testament is record of the coming of the Son of God to earth. Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

Of course we will get a clearer revelation of who God is, when we read about how God the Son came and lived among us. At his baptism, "the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God, descending as a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased." (Matt 3:15-17)

That's pretty clear, isn't it? Father God speaks loving words from heaven, the Holy Spirit comes and alights and remains on Jesus, and Jesus basks in their approval.

And then Paul, writing his farewell to the Corinthians at the end of the second letter blesses them with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We are such flawed human beings, and he knew we would need that encouragement. The grace expressed by Jesus needs to flow to and from us. Grace is characterised by focus on others, cutting them some slack when they fail to meet our expectations; and unmerited favour to our fellow Christians.

We are going to need it ourselves any minute, so we may as well start by giving grace to others and empowering them to give grace back to us.

Then Paul blesses us with the love of God. That's not just warm feelings, it encompasses choices made that benefit others. It's agape love, giving love, as described in 1 Corinthians 13. I have caught myself lately making decisions that benefit mostly me. So I try and fight back by not taking all the items I like that are on special at the supermarket. Leave some for the next person! I need to ask the Lord to show me other ways in which to express his love to those around me.

Then Paul blesses the Corinthians with the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The more we bask in the presence of God's Holy Spirit, the more we allow ourselves to be infused with him, and the more we have to give away. Some people just seem to have such a lot of love for those who try our patience strongly! How do they do it? I can only think they spend time alone with God. They allow time for the word of God to shape their thinking as they meditate on it, chewing it over.

They pray, "Lord, use me today. Express your life through me today." The fellowship of the Holy Spirit just seems to happen when we pray, "Make me a channel of your peace," The Holy Spirit can be grieved, so to keep in fellowship with him we aim not to offend him. Paul gives us lots of instructions on how to do that in his letters eg Ephesians 4,5 and 6.

So what helps us living in this way? We find out pretty early on that trying harder is not going to work. My efforts at the op shop last week seemed to dry up under the stress. I was trying to

somehow express the love of God to a screaming, abusive customer and her children. We did our best to maintain our equilibrium as a staff team, but in the face of ungrateful, selfish manipulation I found myself wanting to slam the door after she had gone. The spring of the jolly door was too heavy though and thwarted my efforts! But I was glad to note self-restraint in the staff team as well as their choice of Godly responses, instead of returning in kind what they got.

I think our best bet is to rest in the love of God, to trust and obey, and the grace will sink into our souls.

We know that our sanctification (or being moulded into his likeness) was eternally intentional on God's part. This fact stands firm even if you are tossed about by current circumstances or hampered by deep, long-held pain.

For those of us in Christ, salvation was planned and predestined by God the Father, purposed and paid for by God the Son, and is implemented and guarded by God the Holy Spirit.

It was not a last-minute roll of the dice or some mad-scramble when sin entered the human race. God was not caught on the hop—no. Despite our poor responses, we had been the subjects of an eternal conversation between the Persons of the Trinity, and that conversation began long before God ever spoke light into existence.

Trinity brings deep confidence and security into our souls, because long before the earth was formed, God had designed the plan of yours and my salvation. We are deeply known, anticipated, and loved by all three persons of the Trinity. That simple truth should kick into touch the lie that we are not significant or worthy.

Let's think about it another way. Think of a dot. That's one dimensional. It is an item, but has no particular shape. Then think of 4 lines shaped into a square on a piece of paper. That's two-dimensional, a flat shape. Then think of a cube. Cubes are shapes formed by 6 squares that have width, height and depth. 3 dimensions. That 3-dimensional world is the one we live in. We have high hills, flat roads and long valleys.

But we have a multi-dimensional God, a God who is one but is also three persons. That doesn't fit into our world of $1+1+1 = 3$. 3 dimensions are not enough to describe him. The concept of Trinity fits into a 4 or 5 dimensional world. Maybe more! That's getting beyond us, because we are trained to think in 3 dimensions. But if we could totally understand God, we could encompass him and he would be smaller than us. Ridiculous!

If we could fit all there is to be known about God inside our brains, God would not be big enough to be who he says he is. We need to allow him to be that bigger, multi-dimensional person. That's appropriate humility.

So Helen, great theory, but so what? Practically, that means He is bigger than our problems. Bigger than our concept of how things work. He is bigger and wiser than the way WE would sort the world out. Isaiah says in chapter 55, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than yours and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Let's face our difficulties with the knowledge that his ways are higher than ours and his thoughts wiser than ours. Let's intentionally seek his ways and his presence, even though we don't understand everything.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, rest upon you and remain with you now and forever.”