

Trinity

John 16:12-15 ; Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Romans 5:1-5

12th July - Trinity Sunday

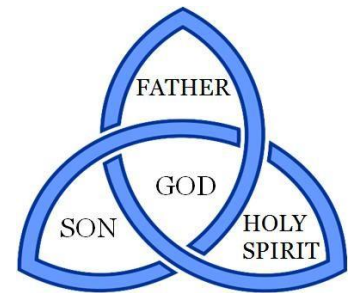
© 2022 The Revd Ian Hardcastle

Last week was Pentecost when we remembered the coming of the Holy Spirit in power on the Church. The effect of the Resurrection, the Ascension and Pentecost are profound for our understanding of God. Why is that? Because we have evidence given to us that Jesus is God and the Holy Spirit is God as well as God the Father.

In the gospel passage we hear Jesus speaking of the Father and the Holy Spirit as being distinct from himself and from each other. He speaks of the Holy Spirit as revealing the things Jesus wants his followers to know. That sounds like the same relationship as between the Father and the Son - you may remember that Jesus said earlier that he only said the things that the Father told him. There is an interdependence between the persons of the Trinity.

In the passage from Romans the work of the Trinity is identified this time in the context of salvation: Jesus Christ makes peace for us with the Father so we have access to him. Then the Father's love is poured out on us through the Holy Spirit who is given to us. Here we see the Trinity mutually working for our salvation.

The early church quickly began to refer to Jesus and the Holy Spirit as God. Often using the title, "The Lord", for Jesus and God for the Father.



The Father is described as God

This evident from the first verse of Genesis where God created the heavens and the earth. Jesus calls God his Father in heaven.

- John 5:18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him [Jesus]; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even **calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.**
- John 6:27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him **God the Father** has placed his seal of approval.

The Son is described as God

- John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and **the Word was God.**
- John 20:28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and **my God!**"
- Titus 2:13 ... we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of **our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ,**
 ...

The Holy Spirit is described as God

- Acts 5:3-4** Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that **you have lied to the Holy Spirit** and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? **You have not lied to men but to God.**"
- 1 Cor 2:10-11** God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

John 3:5-6 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

Trinitarian References:

In addition some scriptures make reference to all three in the same sentence:

Matthew 28:19 Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the **Father** and of **the Son** and of **the Holy Spirit** ...

2 Cor 13:14 May the grace of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, and the love of **God**, and the fellowship of the **Holy Spirit** be with you all.

1 Peter 1:2 ... according to the foreknowledge of **God the Father**, through the sanctifying work of **the Spirit**, for obedience to **Jesus Christ** ...

One God

Yet, the Bible also thunders that there is one only God.

Deut 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Isaiah 45:5 I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

There are many more references we could look at but time does not allow. What we can see it that these statements can be made with excellent scriptural support:

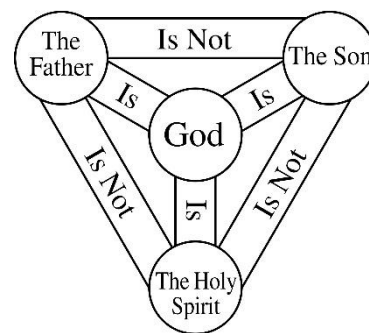
- The Father is God; Jesus Christ is God, the Holy Spirit is God
- Each is fully God.
- There is one God.
- Each is distinct from the others.

The formulation of the Trinity is the attempt to describe an understanding which honours all of these without losing any of the truths revealed to us.

Illustrations

We have all heard various similes to help us grasp the idea of the trinity. For example:

- The three-leaved cover;
- an egg being made of three portions: shell, white and yolk yet all are the egg together;
- Water in its three states of steam, ice and liquid water;
- An apple having skin, flesh and seeds - yet together they make an apple.
- Or we mix red, green and blue light together to make white light. All are light but the three are separate.



The Dance of God

While these can help, they are limited because if you push them too far the analogy goes wrong. One much earlier way of imagining the trinity was as a dance. The dance is perichoresis, the Greek word for dance (peri=around; Choresis=Dance). The term was used by our greek theologian ancestors as a metaphors to refer to the Trinity. Eugene Peterson describes it like this:



Imagine a folk Dance, a round dance, with three partners in each set. The music starts up and the partners holding hands begin moving in a circle. On Signal from the caller, they release hands, change partners, and weave in and out, swinging first one and then another. The tempo increases, the partners move more swiftly with and between and among one another, swinging and twirling, embracing and releasing, holding on and letting go. But there is no confusion, every movement is cleanly co-ordinated in precise rhythms (these are practised and skillful dancers), as each person maintains his or her own identity. To the onlooker, the movements are so swift it is impossible to distinguish one person from another; the steps are

so intricate that it is difficult to anticipate the actual configurations as they appear: Perichoresis¹

Do you like that? It is dynamic not static. It is about relationship and movement. This describes the Trinity as always in motion, each person dancing with and around the others.. A photo of the dance kills it, stopping all motion and fixing each dancer in one spot.

How do you react to the dance of God? How does it change the way you approach God? What would it be like for you to join the dance?

There is another idea from that dance. I heard it expressed by Dr Mike Lloyd, a theologian associated with HTB. If we imagine God the Trinity in a circle dance, each person loving the others and being loved. They are in perfect harmony and unity. There has never been any breach - any discord.

Then Jesus goes to the cross. At Gethsemane he is aghast at what lies before him. Why? Because he is about to bear the sin of the world. Paul says, "he who knew no sin became sin for us!"²

It is a horrific prospect. The very relationships of God would be affected. God cannot embrace sin, God cannot look on sin. There would be some rending, tearing, splitting which we cannot imagine.

When the crucifixion is over, the price of sin is paid. The utterly innocent one has paid the penalty for the rebellion and hatred of mankind. With the consequences utterly drained, he has dealt with it all, he rises to life again. The unity is restored.

Mike Lloyd says, that the Trinity broke the circle dance to rejoin again. Why? So they could include us in the dance. So we could join into their relationship. Isn't that wonderful? "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."³

Will you accept the offer? Will you let the Spirit bring you to the Father through the Son? Will you?

All scriptural quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*® ©1972, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Societies. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

¹ Peterson's book "Christ plays in Ten Thousand places"

² 2 Corinthians 5:21

³ John 3:16