

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit Service
at Home Sheet Sunday 15th June 25,
Trinity Sunday prepared by Pat Fry

Today is Trinity Sunday, unusually, a Christian Festival where we do not focus on a particular event in the Bible story – but on an idea, the idea of describing our understanding of God as Trinity, three in one.

So we ponder the questions, What pictures of God do I find most helpful? How does the concept of the Trinity help me communicate my deepest beliefs

One starting point is a sense of awe and wonder, as sense of something so far above and beyond us. This is expressed in our first hymn, an old favourite with many of you. :

Hymn StF 55 Immortal Invisible.

<https://youtu.be/PS3QinSmPHI?si=wFouJHnQGsj eM9DP>

1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

2 Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might --
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and
love.

3 To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish; but naught changeth
thee.

4 Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all praise we would render: O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

5 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908)

Prayer of approach and praise

You are holy,
God the creator,
giving us richly all things to enjoy.
You are holy,
Christ the saviour of the world,
made flesh to set us free.
You are holy,
Spirit of truth and love,
willing to dwell in us.
You are holy and blessed,
O God, eternal trinity,
and we worship you. Amen
(Iona Wee Worship Book, WGRG)

Prayer of confession

God our Father, as we think about the wonder of creation, we are humbled and ashamed,
We wonder at creation, but we are sometimes careless in our use of your good gifts.
And when we think about Jesus, and his compassion, we realise how far short we fall We confess that we call ourselves Christians , but we have failed to follow Jesus' example. We have said and done things we regret, we have missed opportunities to show your love. Forgive us, and help us to grow more like Jesus, for we pray in his name. Amen

Introduction to theme

Sometimes I think the immensity of God's love is like an ocean.

Many years ago when my son was about three we went to the seaside, it was a stony beach no chance to make sandcastles with the bucket and spade he had carried all the way. But he set to, going to the edge of the sea, filling up his bucket, carrying it over the stones and emptying it
What are you doing Andrew?

With all the confidence of a very young child He answered: "I am emptying the sea."

Sometimes we come to God like children with our leaky seaside buckets, we fill them from the ocean that is God, and think we have it all. We behave as if that little bit, were the whole. Yes our little grasp of God is precious, but we have to realise, what we have caught is not the whole story.

There's a very well-known story that conveys the same message I was reminded of a couple of weeks ago in a deep conversation whilst staying at the Quaker guest house in Grasmere.

Three blind men were walking along a path in a forest. Something large was blocking the way, The tall man reached up, and felt something large and flapping.

"It must be a giant fan" he said

The second man put out his hand at chest height." No, no, you are wrong. It's like a hose, oh," he drew back quickly, " it moved on its own,, its curling up trying to grab my arm, it must be a huge snake."

The third man knelt down on the ground and reached forward ."It's nothing like a snake, it's a tree trunk, it must be a huge tree, perhaps it does have leaves like fans, but it is definitely not a snake.

They argued loud and long. Each was convinced by their own experience, each had spoken the truth as they had experienced it, but the whole truth needed the sum of all three parts
What was it? With thick strong legs, large fan shaped ears, and a hose for a nose?

An elephant.

As the Christian church grew, and people tried to put their Christian understanding of God into words, it was a north African bishop, Tertullian, who came up with the concept of the Trinity, The Bible doesn't use the word trinity – but it clearly talks about the three ways God is experienced through the pages of the Bible as Father, the Creator who cares for his creation, Son, who came to show us the nature of God and offers us salvation, and Spirit, God's active presence in the world at all times.

Old Testament Readings:

The Creator: Isaiah 40 12-14, 21-26

The Shepherd Ezekiel 34 11-16, 31

The Old Testament talks of God first as Creator, then as both Judge and Shepherd. But the New Testament brings a much fuller understanding through God's self-revelation in Jesus.
And so we come to think about Jesus.

Gospel Reading : John 1 1- 18

Hymn StF101: Before the world began

This next hymn from the Iona Community expresses the message of that passage. I could not find a you-tube recording. It has been a favourite of mine for more than twenty-five years, but seems to be little known here.

- 1 Before the world began,
one Word was there;
grounded in God he was,
rooted in care;
by him all things were made,
in him was love displayed,
through him God spoke, and said,
'I am for you.'
- 2 Life found in him its source,
death found its end;
light found in him its course,
darkness its friend.
For neither death nor doubt
nor darkness can put out
the glow of God, the shout,
'I am for you.'
- 3 The Word was in the world
which from him came;
unrecognised he was,
unknown by name;
one with all humankind,
with the unloved aligned,
convincing sight and mind,
'I am for you.'
- 4 All who received the Word
by God were blessed;
sisters and brothers they
of earth's fond guest.
So did the Word of grace
proclaim in time and space
and with a human face,
'I am for you.'

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

Reflection

Jesus himself spoke of God as his Father, and taught his followers to think of God as Father. but when we talk about Jesus as God's son,

sometimes our earthly experience of what can go wrong in father son relationships can get in the way of our understanding.

This is visualising a perfect relationship where father and son have perfect understanding of each other, the son takes after his father, trusts his father, has his father's protection, carries out his father's wishes. In a human relationship there may be unfair demands, disagreements, arguments, even autocratic domination on one side, and rebellion on the other.

There is a danger of letting those earthly faults creep into our picture. We must never let those earthly failings cloud our picture of God as father and son. And in earthly terms we expect a son to achieve independence, perhaps become a father himself, and eventually the relationship ends with the father's death; that too is not part of this picture. This is a constant relationship of perfect one-ness, for all time and eternity.

God the Father and Son are far closer than the picture sometimes conveys, "being of one substance with the Father" says the Nicene Creed. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" says the writer of Colossians.

The picture of Father and Son is one we can hold on to reasonably easily, but when it comes to thinking about the Holy Spirit, we often struggle:

Gospel Reading John 14: vv8-11, 15-17, 25-28
(or read the whole passage!)

The Bible uses so many different pictures: Advocate, Wind, Fire, Dove, all of them describing different Aspects of the Spirit of God at work in the world. To make it even more confusing the Old Testament talks about the Spirit of God, then Jesus talks about him sending the Spirit as if it's something new. I think it's the same Spirit, but because they have known Jesus it is now a Spirit they recognise and understand better. Powerful yes, but not in the same remote, scary way because of Jesus.

I was struggling with this whilst doing my local preacher training, reading through the material on a long train journey, when something happened that seemed like an active parable, helping me to begin to understand a little better

I was sitting near the back of a two car small local train in rural Cambridgeshire. We stopped at a very small station.. and we waited...and waited.

Eventually the guard walked back down the platform, past my window. He got in, walked to the front of the carriage, and after a while walked back again. He got off, walked forwards along the platform. Curious now, I looked out of the window.

He put a ramp in position by the front door of the carriage and then wheeled a disabled lady off backwards. I realised her wheelchair had been completely blocking the aisle. He then removed the ramp, and we continued our journey.

She had needed his help to get her off the train. Because it was a small train there was no wheelchair space, her chair blocked the gangway. Working alone, as her chair blocked the way, he had three options.

1. He could get on behind her and pull her off backwards. That would have been terrifying for her. a bit like the experience of the Spirit in the Old Testament, powerful and effective, yes, but frightening and mysterious.

2. Ideally, he would have worked with a colleague, one standing in front of her to explain and give her confidence while he manoeuvred the chair.... A bit like the disciples experience of God's power while Jesus was with them.

3. What he did was go in front to explain and then go behind to take the chair off backwards, but because he had talked to her face to face, she was no longer afraid... a bit like the Acts experience - this powerful Spirit was indeed the Spirit of Jesus whom they had known face to face.

If a friend makes same journey, she will tell her: "You can trust the railway staff, I know, I've been there and met one who was excellent."

That's how it is for us. We can read the Gospel - we see Jesus there, and when we experience God's Spirit, it's a power to move us where we need to be - a power we recognise as being like Jesus.

I hope you find that picture helpful - but if you don't - don't worry, may be God speaks to you more through his Creation, or through his word, Remember the seaside buckets - each picture is just a drop in the Ocean.

But God who is Creator, Shepherd, Self-giving love, powerful Spirit cares enough to be ready to speak to each of us in a way we can relate to, even though sometimes we find it hard to tune in to him.

Prayer of response

Take a moment to hold in mind a picture of God, Father, Son or Spirit you find really helpful; rest in holding that picture, and give thanks for all it meant to you

Prayer for others

Having given thanks for God's goodness, goodness, take time to bring before God your concerns for suffering in the world.

Focus on one place in the news, or forgotten by the media, where people are enduring the horrors of war or famine Pray that God's Spirit will inspire people to respond.

Focus on one area of the life of your church where people are finding it hard to do all they feel called to do. Pray that they may find strength from the presence of God's Spirit.

Focus on one person you know in particular need, and pray that they may sense God's loving presence surrounding them even in their difficulties.

And draw your prayers together saying the prayer that Jesus gave us, in whichever form is right for you.

Hymn StF3 Eternal God your loves tremendous glory. <https://youtu.be/inaETa6Cn5o>

Eternal God your love's tremendous glory cascades through life in overflowing grace, to tell creation's meaning in the story of love evolving love in time and space.

Eternal Son of God uniquely precious,
in you deserted, scorned and crucified,
God's love has fathomed sin and death's deep darkness,
and flawed humanity is glorified

Eternal Spirit, with us like a mother, embracing us in love serene and pure
you nurture strength to follow Christ our brother, as full-grown children, confident and sure.

Love's trinity, self-perfect, self-sustaining,
love which commands enables and obeys,
you give yourself, in boundless joy creating one vast increasing harmony of praise.

We ask you now, complete your image in us,
this love of yours, our source and guide and goal,
may love in us seek love and serve love's purpose
till we ascend with Christ and find love whole.

Alan Gaunt (b.1935)

Blessing

Now may the love of the faithful Creator,
the grace of the wounded Healer,
and the joy of the challenging Spirit,
the hope of the Three in One
surround and encourage us, and those we have prayed for, today and always. Amen

Kate McIlhagga, The Word in the World

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