

CTW & St Mary's Holy Communion 11th June 2017

Trinity Sunday

Isaiah 40:12-17,27-31 2 Corinthians 13:11-13 Matthew 28:16-20

as many of you will know, I love puzzles and construction challenges of all sorts; every week I try to do the crossword and ken-ken in the Saturday Times, and every Christmas my children try to come up with something to amuse me

here's what they gave me a few years back, 'Gordian's Knot' [see e.g. here: <http://www.thinkfun.com/products/gordians-knot/>] which describes itself as 'the world's most difficult take-apart puzzle'; the solution guide has 69 pages, which is hard enough to follow through in itself, but you'd be truly lost without it! and when it comes to putting it back together again, where would you even begin?

the Trinity can seem a bit like a puzzle; over the last few months we have been taking it apart, with our focus on Jesus through Lent, Holy Week and Easter, and then on the Holy Spirit in the run-up to Pentecost; this Trinity Sunday is, supposedly, the day we put the pieces back together, as '3-in-1 and 1-in-3'; where do we even begin?

the readings set for today don't really help much either; certainly they are not a step-by-step guide to reassembling your Trinity! the Trinity is not explained, only used as a kind of formula, the sort of things we may recite in church, without thinking too much about what they really mean

in 2 Corinthians 13 we read: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all'; and in Matthew 28 Jesus says: 'make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit': what does it mean? why do we say these things?

here's a little lever to get us started: we are to baptise 'in the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' – it is *name* and not *names* in the Greek – it's one name, for all three together – it's one name, for one what? more than just a single person, but still nameable as one, 'FatherSonandHolySpirit' or 'Trinity' for short

think of the way we may use names for two or more people; we might say, 'the Graysons are coming for tea', meaning Robin & Juliet, or in past years, the whole family turning up together; we are thought of as a single unit, operating as one; there's no theory involved, no 'Graysonology' to explain what is going on; it's just the way we are, and the name 'the Graysons' expresses that reality

so a starting point for thinking about the Trinity is to treat 'Trinity' as a *name for God*, rather than a *theory about God*, a puzzle to be solved; the God we love, serve and worship is called 'Trinity'

next notice the context in Matthew 28 for Jesus' instructions to his disciples: after the resurrection appearances, we've reached the Ascension and the promise of the Holy Spirit (though these are not mentioned explicitly in Matthew); so these are now Jesus' parting words to his disciples

he begins: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'; this 'all authority' is not to set Jesus apart from the rest of the Trinity, on some 'higher level' than Father of Holy Spirit; but rather it affirms that all that has happened and will happen – Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, the promise of Pentecost – are all expressions of the mutual love and cooperative action of all the members of the Trinity together; the Father has given all things into hands of his Son, who will now 'be with them always, to the end of the age' by his Holy Spirit

hence Jesus' words, 'go *therefore* and make disciples of all nations', invite us, command us, to play our part in the ongoing life and work of the God we call 'Trinity'

we find the same thought in Paul's closing words in 2 Corinthians; this letter has been full of argument and persuasion; Paul's relationship with these Christians is not an easy one; but at the end of it all he calls them to love and to peace, with each other and with the wider body of believers, himself included

in that context we read those very familiar words, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all'; those are nice things to pray for, for the church and for each other – grace, love and fellowship – but what have they to do with the Trinity?

it might be tempting to adopt the 'department store' model of the Trinity, based on this formula: 'looking for grace, Madam? 2nd floor, Jesus department; fellowship, sir? top floor, Holy Spirit section'; as though we were to go to different members of the Trinity for different things

that would be to read too much 'precision' into Paul's prayer here; there are a number of these 'Trinitarian formulas' in his letters [e.g. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6], but they're not meant to divide up the functions of Father, Son and Holy Spirit into different 'departments' with different responsibilities, but to express yet again the way that all three work together in all things, for our benefit

and the point here is that the nature of Trinity is now being expressed in the church – the grace, love and fellowship of 'FatherSonandHolySpirit' is supposed to be visible among us!

so we have 'Trinity' as a name *for* God, not a theory *about* God; and we ourselves, amazingly, are called to display the life and character of the Trinity through our own lives and in the life of the church

let's turn finally to our OT reading, two separate chunks from Isaiah 40: verses 12-17 invite us to marvel at the transcendent power of God, creator of heavens and earth, source of all wisdom and understanding; 'who has directed the spirit of the Lord?' – no one! he has acted alone out of his own divine omnipotence

but verses 27-31 bring this almighty God very close to those who turn to him and trust in him; 'those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint'; God is with us, and will strengthen us for the tasks he gives us; that's a wonderful promise, that means more and more to me as I get older!

the Trinity is not directly in view here, of course, but as Christians we read back into a passage like this our understanding of God as Trinity, and in particular Jesus' promise in Matthew 28: 'I am with you always, to the end of the age'; this is the promise of God's presence to us

so my third Trinity thought is this: that the Trinity is how God is present to us here and now, as well as being the transcendent reality of God in heaven; God as Trinity is not just a far-off abstraction, but very close to us

I've been helped in thinking about this by a book given me by Josh Cleaver, 'The Humility of God: a Franciscan Perspective' by Ilia Delio, a Franciscan nun in the US; here are some brief quotes in relation to the Trinity:

'although Francis often spoke of God the Father, he never perceived the Father to be a lonely figure, detached from the Son ... Jesus is always in relationship with the Father; and our relationship with the Father through the Son could not take place without the Spirit; *it is the Spirit who enables us to follow in the Son's footsteps in order to return to the Father*'

I love that thought – take a moment to savour it – how intimately the Trinity is involved in our journey into Christlikeness, and into the Father's love; going on:

'Francis believed that God is love, therefore, God is Trinity; the persons of the Trinity are so united in love that everything they do – creation, redemption, salvation – they do together in love; the Trinity does not separate into parts in the incarnation; rather the entire Trinity is expressed in the person of Jesus Christ ... in his poor and humble humanity'

Francis famously recognised this humble presence of God in his ministry to the poor, to lepers and so on; he embraced them, literally, as being God present and visible to him; Mother Teresa of Calcutta said much the same about her ministry to the poor

that humble presence of God as Trinity is seen in another way in our celebration of the Eucharist; look at Prayer 3 on p.14, and see how the persons of the Trinity are invoked, to prepare us to receive his presence in the elements of bread and wine:

the prayer begins with the Father, whose love for the world is shown in his gift of the Son; we tell the story of the Last Supper, and invoke the Holy Spirit that bread and wine may become for us the body and blood of Jesus; finally we look forward to sharing heaven's feast in the eternal presence of the Trinity

here are three thoughts for Trinity Sunday:

that Trinity is a name *for* God, not a theory or puzzle *about* God

that the Trinity as God's humble presence with us, not some remote heavenly being

and that the life and nature of the Trinity is to be expressed in our individual lives and in the life of the church

the Collect for today speaks of how faith in the Trinity 'defends us from all adversities'; how can that be? maybe we have some clue now, as we recognise the Trinity as intimately involved in all our journey into God, and as shaping our calling to serve and witness in the world; when confronted by our many 'adversities' in today's world, the Trinity gives us hope and purpose