

Trinity Sunday, 27th May 2018.

**9.30am Communion Service at Christ Church
and 3pm Evensong at St. John's Newsholme**

Readings: John 3:1-17

Romans 8:12-17

Father, Son, Holy Spirit, we ask that you reach our hearts and minds through your word.

How did it make you feel, me sitting there, at the front of the church, your church, dressed like this?

What were your initial thoughts, how did those thoughts progress:

Did you think -

I'm not bothered!

It's too early, I'm half asleep anyway!

Sharon's finally lost it!

How disrespectful to God, or to you all, to turn up like this.

How dare I distract or detract from the beginning of our precious time of worship with God.

Anyone would think this service is just about her!

Did I spoil the start of our worship service by distracting you?

What has this got to do with the Trinity or John's gospel?

Well hold onto your own initial reactions and thoughts.

Learning to Trust

I'm quite new to the motorcycle scene. Some of you will recall when my husband Peter began fixing his old BSA motorbike up a few years ago to get back on the road. He said he really wanted me to go out with him regularly on the back, or in biker speak "two up" or "pillion".

I realised I was nervous about that. I realised that I didn't trust him in that context because I'd never had to get on the back of a motorbike with him before. I'd heard many stories of his reputation for being a bit reckless on his BSA in his youth.

Peter and I have worked on our relationship together for over 23 years. Trust took time and effort, love took time and effort, getting to know

each other took time and effort. I have trusted him without even much thought in so many ways over the years, without being distracted by doubts and fears. These doubts however were new.

I remember saying to him

"you haven't ridden a motorbike regularly for years",

"the roads are much busier now you know",

"you're not in your 20s anymore"!

All this was highlighting my own reservations, doubts and fears, my preconceptions about how dangerous motorbikes are.

I realised I had a choice, either I was going to give it a go, even just once, or I could just play it safe and tell Peter that I didn't want to start all this motorbike stuff, he was better off going it alone.

How do we trust God?

Maybe that's how it is with God, we have a choice of how much we give of ourselves to Him, how much time, if any at all, we spend with Him or for Him, doing things that are a service to Him! We are fortunately free to choose. We can decide just how much trust we are going to put in a God who is beyond our own human understanding. It's difficult to learn to trust a God we can't see or touch, let alone to love God with integrity.

How can God connect with us in a relationship? With our thoughts, our doubts, our uniqueness? How can God get us to have a relationship with Him when he is so beyond our human understanding?

Trinity of Relationships

When we look closer at The Trinity, the triune God, we discover more about the answers to those questions about God. The Trinity is about relationship.

The relationship with God the Father.

The relationship with God the Son.

The relationship with God the Holy Spirit.

This discovery requires time, effort and a willingness to be in community with others. The more we give of ourselves to this community, the deeper our understanding becomes.

Distracted by concept

I'm not going to go into the academic theological concept of the Trinity. Not because I'm trying to get away with it, as we all know it's difficult to explain, but because I didn't want to turn today into an academic exercise. Of course doctrine, or guidelines are very important but those guidelines came about from the experiences, the relationships that people had with God, what God was doing in their time.

The Creed, an affirmation of trinitarian faith

The earlier Apostles' Creed was developed so that we could affirm our belief in the triune God, the Trinity. This was later changed to a more detailed affirmation of our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed, which goes into a more detailed explanation of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

This was so that we didn't misunderstand, thinking that God the Father is superior to God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The wording of the Nicene Creed makes it clear that all three are in equality, in harmony, complementing each other with words like 'proceeds', 'incarnate'.

I still get asked why Christianity has three Gods. I usually tell them to read the Nicene Creed and then I try to talk about the importance of spending time with other Christians, building up a community so that we can 'know, show and share God's love.'

John's gospel tells us of Nicodemus.

Our reading from John 3 today is not obvious what it has to do with the Trinity. We learn that Nicodemus was a member of the prestigious Sanhedrin which included at least 70 members of chief priests, elders, Pharisees, teachers of the law, like Nicodemus. It seems likely he came to see Jesus out of a professional curiosity, to learn more. He clearly respects Jesus and he makes it clear that he's accepted that only someone with a special relationship with God could perform the miraculous signs that Jesus has.

Nicodemus seems to struggle to understand what Jesus tells him, that 'only someone who is born again can see the Kingdom of God'. He

questions Jesus as to the impossibility of a physical re-birth, a re-entering into his Mother's womb and be born a second time.

Jesus makes it clear that he means a spiritual rebirth. Jesus is teaching that we already have life on a physical level, yet we are to discover life in its fullness which can only come from being spiritually 'born again'. The flesh and the spirit in unison. Born of water and the internal renewing of the Holy Spirit within us.

Leap of Faith

Nicodemus was it seems a man of integrity, of intelligence, yet he could not take that leap of faith, that willingness to try to understand the possibility of being 'born again' in a spiritual sense. Living in the world of human flesh as well as having an awareness of how we have an eternal life, where the spirit is to be our advocate in heaven after our earthly life is over.

Nicodemus seems to be holding himself back from what Jesus was telling him, not willing to trust him fully.

John's gospel does go on to tell us that Nicodemus is willing to stand up for Jesus when the authorities are all against him. John 7 verse 51 "According to our Law we cannot condemn people before hearing them and finding out what they have done."

John 19 verse 39 tells us that Nicodemus helps Joseph of Arimathea to prepare Jesus' body for burial by bringing expensive embalming spices.

Did Nicodemus' understanding grow over time?

The Bible – A trinitarian journey

The Bible takes us on a trinitarian journey of human faith and understanding in God.

The more we read our bibles the more it opens up story after story of humans involved in learning about who God is.

In the Old Testament God can seem hidden from us, He is depicted as being in the ark of the covenant and in the temple, only approachable to

a few chief priests. If we were to read the old Testament today and disregard Jesus and The Holy Spirit from it, then we could end up thinking of God as one of wrath and judgement with little compassion.

In the New Testament God reveals himself as being accessible through His incarnation as Jesus, as human flesh in a certain time and a certain place, accessible to a relatively small number of people.

We learn of his teaching, his life in this world, his suffering, how he brought salvation to us, how God brought Jesus, our role model, to us. Looking at Jesus we see a man and God, flesh and spirit, human and divine, earthly and heavenly, fully integrated as one.

If we were to disregard God and the Holy Spirit when reading about Jesus then we would be missing the fact that God sent Jesus because 'God so loved the world' as John goes on to tell us in verse 16.

Then we read of Pentecost, the dramatic telling in Acts, when God becomes accessible to all people, in all times, in all places by giving people recognition of the Holy Spirit, the breath of life. If we only highlighted the Holy Spirit alone, then it would be disregarding God as creator and Son Jesus as our role model, our rescuer, our saviour.

The Trinity, giving all equality with one another, is our role model for our community today.

Where are we today?

Today I'm dressed in the required safety uniform for getting on a motorbike. Underneath all the armour, all the protection, my whole head covered, I could be anyone. I could be The Stig from Top Gear. I could keep the visor down, keep the sunshade down, block out everyone, hide away safely underneath it all, staying unrecognisable. It is certainly beneficial to do just that sometimes. To shut out the world for a while.

But the safety armour has to come off.

Underneath we are us. Who deals with what is inside of us? With our real thoughts and feelings. Who deals with what is really going on inside. This is what God wants us to bring to him. This is what God

wants us to deal with honestly. Why? So that our understanding and eagerness to bring in God's Kingdom here on earth grows into an urgency. So that we can grow in eagerness to bring God's peace to a broken world.

We are very aware of our own flesh, our physical existence. We can protect ourselves physically for whatever pursuit or job we are doing as much as possible. We spend a lot of time, energy, money on the practicalities of life, especially keeping ourselves safe and comfortable. The science of our existence is easier to gain knowledge of than it is to put in the time required to recognise and fully know a Spiritual presence.

God's work isn't just about leading us individually to heaven when we die. It takes time to recognise that God wants us to truly bring about His Kingdom here on earth. We say it in prayer "thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven."

This is because it takes effort, it takes time to build up a meaningful relationship with God.

Beginning somewhere

My relationship with God began quite dramatically which led to a realisation that the Holy Spirit had reached my heart. I won't go into my testimony of coming to faith in detail now but one thing that has struck me ever since is how I recognised that the Holy Spirit was connected equally to God. It was the Holy Spirit that I recognised firstly but straight away I then knew for certain that God does exist and he was actually interested in a stubborn atheist like me, and had been all along.

Without ever regularly attending a church, or studying Christianity, or even spending time with other Christians, I recognised God the Father and The Holy Spirit as also being God. I had initially disregarded Jesus.

Church – getting closer to Jesus

What would have happened if I hadn't started attending Christ Church regularly? What would have happened if I hadn't plucked up the courage to attend a homegroup even though I knew nothing about the

Bible or Christians? What would have happened if I hadn't put myself out there to become as much a part of this church community as I could? Would I have spiritually grown? Would I have learnt to have feelings for Jesus without spending time socially and in worship with a church community? Would I have understood what being born again means or actually feels like?

Community – building relationships

The Trinity can best be explained today by looking at the relationships in our community. Christians have grown their understanding of God by looking at what he has done and is still doing in the world today.

I'm still working on reaching out to this church community, I can be a bit of a loner, I was at school and I can still be very much like that.

As followers of the Trinity we are created by the Father, redeemed by Jesus, and have been equipped by The Holy Spirit to bring God's Kingdom, God's peace to each other, to our communities.

Nicodemus seems to have been content with a limited knowledge of God and a limited understanding of God's power. We can choose to be content with that.

Just as we can be nervous and fearful of simply getting on the back of a motorbike we can be just the same towards God.

Commitment to our community is so important today. So that we can, as the new people of Christ, those who are born again, we can say with confidence

“we speak of what we know, and report what we have seen.”

As Romans 8 reminds us,

“we have an obligation, but it is not to live as our human nature wants us to... God's Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children.’

Amen