

John 3:1-17. Trinity Sunday

31st May 2021 CCO and online

Father, we pray that through studying your Word and applying it to our lives, we may come to know you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

I have preached on this beautiful story of Nicodemus quite a few times now and am in danger of repeating myself. It's also Trinity Sunday, and I've preached many times on that doctrine too. So I thought that today we could do something different.

The idea of the Trinity, God as three in one and one in three, is difficult to understand with our heads. But what really matters is what we know in our hearts. So don't worry if you can't explain the doctrine of the Trinity in words. Just focus for now on the ways in which *you* know God, as Father, as Son and as Holy Spirit.

So how do we think about the Trinity? What can we know? We'll have a sort of meditation, using prompts from Scripture, our own experience, and our imagination. Let's be ready to listen and see what God wants to tell us about himself, or even herself.

In the beginning, God . . .

That's a good starting point. Just sit with that thought for a moment. God, the starting point of all that is, that ever has been and ever will be.

Paul in his letter to the Romans writes:

Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen *through the things he has made*.

The Psalmist wrote:

The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. (Ps.19)

If we want to have some idea of who and what God is, we need to look around us and be open to the amazing creation in which we find ourselves, and of which we are part. Sit with that thought for a moment. Maybe close your eyes and see in your mind a place of beauty that you know, somewhere that has made you catch your breath in wonder. . . What do you feel when you see the view from a mountain top, or hold a new baby, or taste the first ripe strawberry of the year, or . . . you will know which are the experiences that lift you out of the ordinary . . .

So we stand in awe of God as Creator, as the source of all life, as the power that holds the universe in being in all its astonishing complexity and beauty.

But the God we worship isn't some remote being. We might echo the words of Psalm 8:

When I consider the work of your hands, the moon and the stars that you have ordained, what are mortals, that you should be mindful of them? Mere human beings, that you should seek them out?

This great God, beyond our imagining, clearly takes an interest in us humans, even though we just teem over the earth like little ants for the space of a few years.

God doesn't just sit and watch us. He cares about us. We matter to him. We belong with him.

The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Deut.33:27

Just sit with those words for a wee while (repeat them). Let yourself be held in that security.

That verse from Deuteronomy in our Old Testament shows us that even before Jesus came, the Jews had some idea of belonging with God, of being cared for by Him. But it was of course Jesus who taught us to think of God as Father. He knew that that parent/child relationship is what we are made for.

Not everyone has the kind of father who reflects the true Father-love of God. But we can look beyond our own experience of fathers to what Jesus teaches and shows us.

Jesus takes us by the hand and leads us back to the Father, right into His presence. He shows us what God is really like: he tells us 'He who has seen me has seen the Father.' Jesus is the visible human form of the invisible God.

And Jesus is all love: perfect, faithful, unending, strong, undying love. The love of God revealed in human form. Many people find the way to God the Father through getting to know him in Jesus. But Jesus always points us beyond himself to his Father God. He doesn't ask to be worshipped himself. He tells us to worship our Father in heaven – hallowed be thy name.

Reflect for a moment on how you first came to know God. How you came to know Jesus. Do you worship Jesus only? Or as you draw close to Jesus, do you find yourself drawn into the presence of the eternal God of love? . . .

Think of the parable of the Prodigal Son, and the way Jesus uses that story to lift us into a deeper understanding of the grace and endless mercy of the loving Father God, whom he knew so well.

So, the God beyond becomes the God within: love is given and received, relationships of love, concern and compassion are created. And they continue, after the death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus, because the power of that love he showed us goes on. It spreads. It keeps on working, healing, reconciling, strengthening, encouraging.

How, well, through a power not our own. Through a power we cannot see or touch, but a power we know to be real. A power whose work affects our whole life. The power of God's Holy Spirit, what someone has called God Beyond:

So in the wider community, when justice is done, when reconciliation is achieved, when good laws are passed, when diplomacy triumphs over hostility, when the hungry are fed, when the handicapped are noticed, when corruption is replaced with honesty ... I believe God Between is evident and experienced.

Take a few moments to think about how you have experienced God the Holy Spirit in the past and how you experience him or her in the everyday, God Between. And give thanks.

So now when someone asks you about the Trinity and what on earth Christians mean when they talk about three in one and one in three, I hope you will be able to speak from your own experience – which is always what people relate to best! Remember the different ways in which you experience God in your life – as the mighty creator and sustainer of life, as the Father of love and grace, as the tender Saviour who lifts us out of the deepest pits and guides us on our way, as the Holy Spirit who moves among us and within us, helping always to make God's kingdom grow. Amen..