

Sermon 27 May 2018 Holy Trinity

The concept of the Holy Trinity is not an easy concept to grasp. So I would like to try and keep it as simple as possible. But first, why is it problematical? Christianity is a monotheistic religion, in other words, we believe in the one God. We share this with Judaism and Islam. However, where we differ with Judaism and Islam is that we believe that this one God is also at the same time three Gods – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each is a person or god in its own right. Now, mathematically that actually doesn't work, and in fact, it is impossible. So this is where it becomes a little tricky. So what do we mean? How do we explain this?

I find the best way to think of it is the three functions of God, or God in three different forms. One way to understand it is to think of water. When water is cooled to below 0 degrees it becomes a solid, and we call it ice. The properties of ice are very different to the properties of water, yet the chemical formula for ice is H₂O, the same as it is for water. If we take water and heat it up to 100 degrees it turns to steam, which is gas.

Obviously, the properties of steam are very different from properties of water and ice. And yet, the chemical formula for steam is also H₂O. Isn't it strange, when we think of water, ice and steam, each is very different, but essentially still the same. So perhaps that analogy might go some way towards helping us understand the concept of the Holy Trinity.

That is thinking of God in three different forms. I also mentioned that it is useful to think of the Holy Trinity as the three functions of God. Before we explore this further, let's just reflect on the Gospel reading where we read about the baptism of Jesus, because here we see a most graphic reference to the Holy Trinity. As Jesus emerges from the water, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove. This is a sign of the presence of God. Last week we made the point that one of the descriptions of the Holy Spirit was the presence of God. We then hear the voice of God, 'This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with him.' And so we have God the Father. And then we have Jesus himself, God the Son. So these three images give us a Trinitarian perspective of God.

So let's look at the Trinity in terms of the three functions of God. We begin with God the Father. Another word we can use here is Creator. God is father of all creation, and what a mind-blowing job he has done. It is virtually impossible to grasp the enormity, the complexity and the sheer beauty of God's creation. Psalm 8 is a wonderful tribute to God's creation. 'O Lord, our Lord, your greatness is seen in all the world.' *Psalm 8:1. (Nature programmes – David Attenborough)*

Then we come to God the Son, the person of Jesus. Jesus embodies and personifies love. He teaches love. He demands we practise love. Let me go ever so slightly off on another tangent for a moment.

Last week I briefly referred to Bishop Curry's sermon at the big wedding. It really was a wonderful discourse on love. Among other things, he said this, 'There's power in love. Ultimately, the source of love is God himself, the source of all our lives. Love can help and heal when nothing else can. Jesus had founded the most revolutionary movement in human history: a movement built on the unconditional love of God for the world and the mandate to live that love.'

Now unwittingly, Bishop Curry has encapsulated the Holy Trinity. I am sure he didn't consciously mean to but he has. He refers to God being the source of all our lives (God the Father, the Creator). He refers to Jesus as the founder of the Christian movement, in other words, our Church (God the Son). He refers to love as a helper and healer (God the Holy Spirit).

Doesn't that in itself say something about our Trinitarian understanding of God? In expounding on the nature of God to what is essentially a non-church audience, he has unwittingly made reference to the three persons of the Holy Trinity. So to really understand God, we have to understand the three different roles or functions of God. I actually found that very interesting and quite revealing.

Let's return to God the Son. As I said, Jesus embodies and personifies love. Something else Bishop Curry said, 'Love can be sacrificial. And in doing so, becomes redemptive. And that can change lives.' I have always believed that the ultimate form of love has to be forgiveness, and that undoubtedly can be so redemptive. Let me tell you a story.

Some years ago a 26 year old Californian woman, Amy Biebel, on a visit to South Africa was set upon and beaten to death in one of Cape Town's largest black shanty-towns. Amy's killers, Nofomela and Peni, were driven by frustration and hate. They were imprisoned. Amy's parents came to South Africa. They set up a foundation in Amy's name to fund community projects in the bleak poverty-stricken Cape Town townships where Amy had worked and died. They pushed for the release of Nofomela and Peni and after four years they were released. Ever since then they have been employed by the foundation run by Amy's parents.

Many people in South Africa were outraged but for Amy's parents the healing had begun. Out of their ability to forgive, to practise that power of love, they in return received the power to not only get on with their lives, but also to put something in place which benefits so many lives, lives which through their harsh circumstances, led to feelings that were ultimately expressed in the drastic and tragic death of Amy.

This is the redemptive power of love in action, and this is what Jesus stood for in the name of God his Father and our Father, the Father of the Holy Trinity.

And so that leaves the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. We dealt with the Holy Spirit last week, Pentecost Sunday, so I don't intend to go there again. Suffice to say, that the Holy Spirit is the presence and power of God.

And so there we have what I hope is a reasonably understandable explanation of the Holy Trinity. I do hope that is helpful. I will finish by pointing out that whenever we say the Grace at the end of a gathering of some sort, we are actually proclaiming the Holy Trinity. 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen.'

Reverend Warner Wilder