

Sermon 30 May 2021 Trinity Sunday

John 3:1-17

The concept of the Holy Trinity is not an easy concept to grasp. But before we examine that concept, I want to say a few words in relation to our Gospel reading, which records a very interesting exchange between Nicodemus and Jesus.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a Jewish religious leader. It is interesting that Nicodemus recognises Jesus's special relationship with God. *'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.'* This immediately sets him apart from his fellow religious leaders who certainly don't see Jesus in that light. I think that explains why Nicodemus comes to see Jesus at night – *'He came to Jesus by night.'* He didn't want to be seen fraternising with Jesus.

Jesus responds to Nicodemus by telling him that no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. Some translations use the word 'again' here – 'without being born again.' This has given rise to the term 'born again Christian,' a term which in itself has led to some confusion as to just what it means. It invariably conveys a sense of evangelical, but let's be clear what evangelical means. An evangelical Christian believes it is their duty to convert those around them. That is what 'evangelise' means. And that is absolutely fine.

However, I do not believe that is what Jesus means here. Jesus is talking about a personal conversion. He is talking about seeing the light! He is talking about changing our ways. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops puts it so well – 'Conversion to Christ involves making a genuine commitment to him and a personal decision to follow him as his disciple.' Simple and straightforward, and just as Jesus would want it.

Jesus is talking about a spiritual awakening coming from God, or as he puts it, 'from above.' We are given life when we are physically born but this is a new life, a new beginning. It is a new way of behaving and interacting.

So let's now have a look at the concept of the Holy Trinity. The first point to make is that the Holy Trinity puts Jesus and the Holy Spirit on the same footing as God the Father. If we just focus on Jesus for a second. Jesus is not God's messenger, he is not an intermediary, he is not second best. In Jesus we actually see God. David Jenkins, former Bishop of Durham, puts it very well – 'God is as he is in Jesus.'

I find it helpful to think of the Holy Trinity as God functioning in three different ways. 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 God, your greatness is seen in all the world.'* Our second song this morning, Morning has broken, is a tribute to God's creation.

We could get into a debate here on creation versus evolution. In my opinion, there doesn't need to be a debate. I don't have a problem with evolution; that is simply the process by which God has created our wondrous world. I will leave it at that.

Then we come to God the Son, the person of Jesus. Jesus embodies and personifies love. He teaches love. He practises love and demands we practise love. If we go back to the words of David Jenkins, 'God is as he is in Jesus,' then God is a God of love and Jesus personifies that love. In our last song we will sing, 'I want to praise the wonders of your mighty love.'

Let me go ever so slightly off on another tangent for a moment. You might remember the very high profile wedding about three years ago when Harry and Meghan tied the knot. Officiating was Bishop Michael Curry who gave 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. (What did I say last week? – God dwells within each and every one of us). 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 as 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. And underpinning this movement is God's love and our life of love. He refers to this love as a helper and a healer. Last week we spoke about the Holy Spirit as our helper and the power of God healing.

Doesn't this say something about our Trinitarian understanding of God? In expounding on the nature of God to what is essentially a non-church audience, Bishop Curry 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 ultimate form of love has to be forgiveness, and that undoubtedly can be so redemptive. Let me remind you of 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 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 tragic death of Amy.

Then, of course, there was the redemptive power as expressed in the transformation of Nofomela and Peni from hate-filled killers to community workers.

This is the redemptive power of love in action, and this is what Jesus stands 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 the power of God.

I do hope that sheds a glimmer of light on the complex concept of the Holy Trinity. I finish by pointing out that whenever we the Grace at the conclusion of a gathering, 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.'

Rev Warner Wilder