

Sermon 31 May 2026 Trinity Sunday

Matthew 28:16-20 1 John 4:13-17, 20-21

'Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.' Matthew 28:18-19. In that command to his disciples, Jesus refers to what has become known as the Holy Trinity.

The term, Holy Trinity, does not appear in the Bible. The concept and the term itself first appeared around 200 AD, and the formal doctrine of the Holy Trinity was later defined at the Council of Nicaea in 325. The concept is, on the face of it, not an easy concept to grasp, but if we take a close look at it, it's perhaps not quite so complex as first appears. So let's try and keep it simple. Firstly, what is this concept, and why can it appear to be a little difficult to comprehend?

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 is that we believe that this one God is also three Gods – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each is a person or God in its own right. Now mathematically that doesn't work – 3 don't make 1! So this is where it can appear to be a little tricky. So what do we mean? How do we explain it?

One way of approaching this concept is to think of the Holy Trinity as three different functions of God, and I begin by referring to our music group. Each person in that group has a different role to play, but they combine to produce a particular sound, and can I say, it's a darn good sound! They are each a musician or singer in their own right with their own function within the group but they are unified in both their purpose and in their outcome. What they produce is a product of their combined talents and function, and it becomes a creation from which we all benefit.

So let's apply this approach to the Holy Trinity. What are the functions of each person of the Holy Trinity? We begin with God the Father. Another word we can use here is Creator. God is the father of all creation. It all begins with him, and what a mind-blowing job he has done. Psalm 8 is a wonderful tribute to God's creation: *'O Lord our God, your greatness is seen in all the world.'* Psalm 8:1. And how many of us have sat glued to the television as we absorb the wonders of a David Attenborough programme?

Just a quick observation here on the debate between Evolutionists and Creationists on this issue of creation. Firstly, let me say this, I don't have a problem with evolution. That's how God has effected creation. God is still responsible. But the question I pose to those who deny God's part in all of this, is this. It is accepted it all began with the Big Bang billions of years ago. How can you explain this ginormous explosion of energy which gave rise to creation as we know it today? Where did this energy come from?

Don't tell me it was just gases and extreme heat. Maybe it was, but they have to have a source. You cannot have energy of that scale, or any scale for that matter, developing out of a vacuum. That source was God. Am I being a tad simplistic? Maybe, but I am a great believer in keeping things as simple and understandable as possible.

Then we come to God the Son, the person of Jesus. I want to depict the interrelationship between Jesus and God through the question of love. We believe that God is love. John states it quite clearly in our first reading, *'God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.'* 1 John 4:16. Now the point is this, Jesus embodies and personifies love. He teaches love, he practises love and he demands we practise love. *'So now I am giving you a new commandment: love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.'* John 13:34. Then Jesus goes on to say something very interesting, *'Your love for everyone will prove to the world that you are my disciples.'* John 13:35.

I believe this demonstrates that God, Jesus and love and inextricably linked. I also believe that herein lies an expression of the Holy Trinity – God, Son of God and love, love being the power of God working in people and through people, in other words, the Holy Spirit. I would also make the comment that the understanding of God, Jesus and love being inextricably linked is the cornerstone of Christian belief and theology.

I would like to illustrate further this connection between Jesus, love and the Holy Spirit. Bishop Curry of the Episcopal Church, USA, 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 can undoubtedly be redemptive. Let me tell you a story.

On the 12th February 1993 Mary Johnson's only son, 20-year-old Laramiun, was murdered in Minneapolis, USA. The perpetrator was 16-year-old Oshea Israel who received a 25-year sentence for murder.

Initially, Mary was filled with hate for Laramiun. She viewed him as an animal. She gave the victim impact statement. Interestingly, she ended off her statement by saying that she had forgiven Oshea. She did this because she was a Christian and in her words, *'The Bible tells us to forgive.'*

But she actually hadn't forgiven him. The root of bitterness was running deep, anger had set in and she hated everyone. She remained like this for several years, driving many people away. You see, this is what hate cast in a particular direction does. It impacts on all your relationships. It permeates in an invidious way your attitude to everyone. It colours your perception and the way you engage with people in a negative way.

Then one day she read a poem which talked about two mothers – one mother whose child had been murdered and the other mother whose child was the murderer. Suddenly she had a vision of creating an organisation to support not only the mothers of murdered children but also mothers of young people who had committed murder. She knew then that she would never be able to deal with these mothers if she hadn't really forgiven Oshea.

So she put in a request to the Department of Corrections to meet him. Never having been to a prison before, she was so scared when she got there and wanted to turn back. But when Oshea came into the meeting room, she shook hands with him and said, *'I don't know you and you don't know me. You didn't know my son and he didn't know you, so we need to lay down a foundation and get to know each other.'*

They talked for two hours during which he admitted what he had done. She could see how sorry he was and at the end of the meeting, for the very first time, she was genuinely able to say that she forgave him. Oshea couldn't believe how she could do this and asked if he could hug her. When she left the room, she knelt down, saying to herself, *'I have just hugged the man who murdered my son.'* Then, as she rose to her feet, she felt something rising from the soles of her feet, an incredible feeling of something leaving her body and being replaced by a warmth that enveloped her. From that day on, she no longer felt any hatred, animosity or anger. It was over.

In March 2010 Mary gave Oshea a welcome home party when he was released early. She regarded him as her spiritual son. Mary founded From Death to Life, an organisation that uses healing and reconciliation to end violence and animosity between families of victims and those who have caused the harm.

Mary said that she had learned that if you hold on to pain it grows and grows but if you forgive you start to starve that pain and it dies. Forgiveness is pretty much saying I give up holding on to that pain. Hurt people often haven't forgiven and have so much pain they end up causing even greater pain.

This is the redemptive power of love in action, and this is exactly what Jesus stood for in the name of his Father, and God our Father, the Father of the Holy Trinity. It is the power of God working in people and through people, and this is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity.

I want to finish by making this point. Forgiveness enables us to move on; forgiveness gives us a future. Someone said, *'Hope, like joy, doesn't grow from vengeance, bitterness and holding grudges. Hope takes root in the soil of forgiveness.'*

And after all, forgiveness is the cornerstone of our Christian faith.