

TRINITY SUNDAY – 26th May 2013 **6.00pm** Festal Evensong Readings: Proverbs 8:32-9:10; Psalm 33:1-9; Ephesians 3:14-21

Most of the liturgical year celebrates events. By contrast, Trinity Sunday focuses on a doctrine, a belief of the Church. That may make us feel like yawning. At least when we talk of the birth, life and death of Christ or of saints, we're talking about living people and events. The Trinity is the realm of theology which we figure is best left to the experts, those who are into that sort of thing. And we're usually too polite to say that anyone who is into it must be a little odd. Yet the doctrine of the Trinity is foundational to our faith as Christians.

There are many things in life that we take for granted, but don't normally spend much time thinking about or talking about. For example, you and I are made up of certain chemical components which we don't think about much if at all. Imagine a young man tells his friend he's just met a wonderful girl who he thinks may be that special someone. His friend says, "I can't wait to meet her. What is she like?" He answers, "Well, she is made up of 65% oxygen, 18.5% carbon, 9.5% hydrogen, 3.2% nitrogen..." The guy says, "No, no, I mean surely she's more than that." "Oh of course she is: she's also 1.5% calcium, 1.0% phosphorus, 0.4% potassium; sulphur, sodium, chlorine..." Well, that's certainly one way of describing a human being, but not a very interesting or romantic way.

Another way to describe her would be to say she plays the piano, runs marathons, has a degree in microbiology, and she earns very good money working as a marketing analyst. That's another way of describing who this person is. Then we could say, "Her father died when she was only twelve years old; she travels to Africa once a year to help advocate for the poor in Somalia; she once jumped out of a plane with a parachute."

We might call the first description purely theoretical. The second we could call vocational: what a person does. The third we could call personal, getting more to who the person is.

As Christians we believe God is ultimately revealed to us in the Person of Jesus Christ. When Jesus came he didn't say, "How do you do? My name is Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. I was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary." He *did* say "I am bread." "I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep." "I am the vine." "I am the light of the world." He taught, not using abstract theorems but stories and parables.

Yet the Church in the early centuries of its existence grappled with the nature of Christ; how his humanity and his divinity related to each other. They formulated what became the universal belief of the Church, that Christ was fully human and fully divine. What we call the Nicene Creed is the definitive statement of faith concerning the godhead or the Trinity. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons and one God.

Like the chemical composition or the DNA of a human being, the trinity is foundational but not something we talk about continually. It underlies much of our liturgical formulae and prayers and hymns. Yes, there's a place for describing God in technical language as we do in the creeds. Then there's

also a place for talking about God in more personal yet still abstract terms – love and peace and joy and mercy, or in more personal terms as Jesus did: bread, light, shepherd and so on.

St Augustine said, “If you deny the Trinity you will lose your soul; if you try to understand it, you will lose your mind.” Ultimately, our belief in the Trinity must be incarnational, fleshed-out in our lives. American Episcopal priest Rob Giesemann refers to the trend of people saying, “I’m spiritual but not religious.” “‘Religion’ has become a dirty word. Maybe it was the nun who rapped your knuckles with a ruler when you were 8 years old.... More likely, it is because of crusades and war and some really ugly things done in the name of religion. Religion has become its own worst enemy.

“So we can understand why religion has become a dirty word. Yet the so-called ‘spiritual but not religious’ have thrown the baby out with the bathwater.

“After all, it was religious people who built thousands of hospitals around this country. It’s hard to think of any hospital built by the spiritual but not religious.”

He goes on to mention the national hospice movement, Habitat for Humanity, which has built hundreds of thousands of homes for the working poor.

“The real question is, does your amorphous spirituality have legs when your husband walks out the door, or when you find out your kid has cancer?

“If spirituality is heaven, then religion is earth. It is where you live your spirituality, and as we tell our kids, practice makes perfect. Reading scripture, praying together, singing songs, kneeling, crossing yourself, sharing faith.

“Which is what Jesus means when he says: You must be born again, of both water and the spirit, you must be born of earth and heaven.”

“The Trinity is not some arcane static description of God. You can’t draw a picture of God. God is not a triangle, nor an egg, nor a three-leaf clover.

“Rather the mystery we call ‘trinity’ is dynamic. It is an eddy, a current, swirling about your body and your soul, and then about the body and soul of the person next to you, and then back to you.” “Pure and absolute Love. The trinity is action, an action verb, and that action is love.”

(<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/05/06/trinity-Sunday-c-2013>).

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