

Trinity

3 6 12

Almighty and everlasting God,
you have given us your servants grace
by the confession of a true faith,
to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity,
and in the power of the divine majesty to worship the Unity:
keep us steadfast in this faith,
that we may evermore be defended from all adversities;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit
one God, now and for ever.

This morning, our text is the cry of adoration from the seraphim who surround the throne of the Lord our God and it may be found in the book of the prophet, Isaiah chapter 6 and verse 3:

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;

The whole earth is full of his glory

One thing that the Jehovah Witnesses have got right is their assertion that nowhere in the Bible is there a statement of the doctrine of the Trinity. As such, Jehovah Witnesses are Unitarians in the sense that they believe in one God. As such, their understanding does not reflect the historic, Trinitarian belief of all

Christian churches: Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Eglise Réformée, Lutherans, United Reform – we all share this central belief that God revealed through the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, is one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It is always worth remembering our roots as Christians: Jesus was a Jew; his first disciples were Jews; the gospel was originally brought first to the Jews. What was particular, distinctive, to the Jewish understanding of God was their insight that God was one. This was a revolutionary thought in the face of the polytheistic beliefs of their neighbours: take for example the many gods of the Egyptian pantheon: Anubis, Set, Ra to name but three. What was revolutionary in the Christian understanding of God was the insight that at one and the same time God was One and Three, God was Three in One. The God whom we worship as Christians is indeed one God but he is at one and the same time three persons: God is not only God but God is also God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

So what is all the fuss about? Surely that is something we've known since Sunday School, from the days we first went to church, part of our earliest memories of reading the Bible for ourselves. We can all cope with the notion that there is one God. We can all cope that one God is Father-like: creating and sustaining the world, enthroned above us in glory in heaven. We can all appreciate that that one God was born in a stable in Bethlehem someone who went about among us for a period of time in Palestine till his life was cut short on a cross only to rise again

from the dead three days later. We can all feel the thrill at the thought of God the Holy Spirit is there with us, alongside us, giving us the strength to be Christians, inspiring and informing our lives.

So what is the problem ? The problem is simply that in truth we cannot understand the true nature of God, what it means exactly for God to be God. A limit to what we can understand should come as no surprise: we don't have to know how a computer works to work a computer; we don't need to know how to change a tyre on a car to drive a car ! So why should we imagine we can ever fully appreciate God even though we know he loves us and will never abandon us ?

The fact is what it means for God to be God is a mystery. We do have the Bible to tell us something of the character and nature of God. We do have the experience of being touched by him throughout our lives. But fact is we cannot appreciate or understand the nature of the Trinity; how something can be both separate and indivisible; how a unity and a trinity can exist together alongside one another; how God at one and the same time can be three and one and one in three.

The Trinity must necessarily remain a mystery for us. The Trinity is an article of our faith; the trinity is something we have to take on trust. One day we will know even as we are known, to quote the words of St Paul from his first letter to the Corinthians. Till then we simply have to take the Trinity on trust, conscious that in the superlative threefold expression of God's sanctity, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts' Isaiah for Christians is expressing something of the mystery of our Trinitarian insight into our God.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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H: Sermon 26 : Trinity

