

Trinity

15 6 14

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.

Our text is from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians chapter 13 and verse 13:

'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.'

'Two's company, three's a crowd'. Advice I heard as a boy. Advice that when you're in love, you want to be alone with the one you love and no one wants to be the unwanted third, in the way, 'de trop' A phrase to describe that unwanted third might be 'being a gooseberry' . A quick check in my Brewer's tells me its meaning and origin is uncertain but it may refer to the time when a courting

couple was supervised by a chaperone but if the chaperone were kind, she might go off to pick gooseberries allowing the couple time alone together !

What is truly distinctive about a Christian understanding of God is that while we share the Jewish understanding of God as one, our particular insight is that the one God in whom we place our trust is also three persons. We believe that God is at one and the same time both ONE and THREE, that HE is both SINGULAR and PLURAL, both SEPARATE and DISTINCT. Of course, in this world such a truth claim is logical nonsense but, nevertheless, it is, I would argue, a true reflection of the nature of God which we cannot, being mortal and temporal, understand because God is essentially so very different from us.

The problem here is one of mystery. At the heart of our God encounter is a truth which we cannot understand: that ONENESS and THREENESS is possible at one and the same time. Strictly speaking, logically speaking, this is simply not possible yet as Christians we believe in this impossibility so mystery is fundamental to the nature of God. That is to say we have to acknowledge that we can't actually know how it actually works in practice but, we can have a pragmatic, down-to-earth, working understanding of what we can't fully understand. It starts with the idea of one God. it proceeds with the idea of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We think of the God the Father as the creator of the universe. We think of God the Son as Jesus Christ, born a human being, fully Man and fully God. We think of God the Holy Spirit, considering him alongside us, inspiring, informing and strengthening us – truly the Comforter.

On the one hand, we have one God and on the other, we have three persons. So how does it work ? 'Two's company, three's a crowd' may be true for us as people in love. But for the mystery which is God, three is perfect. What makes the three one and the one three is the love each has for the other. It is beautifully expressed in Andrei Rublev icon entitled 'The Hospitality of Abraham' where the three angels represent the Father, Son and Spirit and the look of love that flows between them speaks volumes about their relationship - wholly as one and wholly separate. There is a moment on the cross when Jesus cries out: '**Eloi Eloi, lama sabachthani - my God, my God why hast thou forsaken me ?**' (Mark 15 v34). At that point, Jesus feels for the first and only time the perfect communion of love between them to be broken.

So let me honestly say that we cannot know this side of heaven what exactly it means for God to be God and how he can be both ONE and THREE at the same time. But to us as Christians, it encapsulates the truth that has been revealed to us so let us rejoice that at the heart of our faith is mystery which is true !

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

15th June, 2014

G: Sermons 30 : Trinity

