

This evening we continue with the theme of unity; and it was suggested that I might like to use the Trinity to illustrate this! So hunker down as it might take some time.

I've brought with me one of my favourite Icons to help us visualise this doctrine; it's a copy of Rublev's famous Icon "The Hospitality of Abraham" but perhaps better known as "The Trinity".

The subject of the Icon is the story of Abraham receiving three visitors as he camps by the oak of Mamre. He serves them a meal. As the conversation progresses he seems to be talking straight to God, as if these 'angels' were in some way a metaphor for the three persons of the Trinity. The three gold-winged figures are seated around a white table on which a golden, chalice-like bowl contains a roasted lamb. The composition is a great circle around the table, focusing the attention on the chalice-bowl at the centre, which reminds the viewer inescapably of an altar at Communion.

The word "Trinity" isn't found in the Bible, which isn't unusual because there are a number of theological concepts not found explicitly in the Bible that scholars and Church history and tradition have validated over the past 2,000 years. The reading we have just heard talks of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit but does not call them the Trinity. The Trinity is one of those doctrines that Christians worldwide affirm, but have great difficulty explaining. The idea of One God in Three Persons — three-in-One — is a concept we have difficulty getting our heads around, and anyway what on earth has it to do with our theme of unity. Well, I would like to suggest the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, is not so much about doctrine but rather is about relationships. The Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit is that very model of unity that we should be trying to emulate. Our God is a relational God and we see this from the very beginning in the creation. In Genesis 1 verses 1 and 2,

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

Then in John's Gospel, we are told that Jesus was also present in creation. John 1 verses 1-5

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him,

and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

So now we have the Father and the Son together at the beginning of creation with the Spirit. And then in the New Testament at Jesus’ baptism, God the Father announces his approval, and the Holy Spirit anoints Jesus for ministry.

In the Book of Acts and the epistles, the Holy Spirit empowers, equips, and emboldens the apostles to tell the good news of Jesus, who is God’s gift sent into the world to redeem it.

In the Book of Revelation God the Father, Son, and Spirit are also present, Revelation 1:4-5,

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

There are also fourteen references to the “Spirit,” seven of which are in the refrain to the churches, “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). So from the first book of the Bible to the last, we are given this wonderful picture of our relational God.

We learn two important lessons from the trinity; first, in the doctrine of the Trinity, we find our model for community. As God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit relate to one another, demonstrate love for each other, and work in concert to accomplish the purpose of God in the world, we get the idea of community.

This idea of the relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit has been depicted by many Christian scholars using the term “perichoresis.” That’s a Greek word which means, literally, “dancing around.” I like the implications of God — Father, Son, and Spirit — in a divine dance, interacting with one another, expressing love for one another, and complementing the work each has to do.

In this evenings reading, we find some of these elements of mutuality. But, everything Jesus has comes from the Father; Jesus said,

‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of

the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

When we baptise children or adults we too baptise in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and we welcome the newly baptised into the family of Christ, we are united together in one baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit to bring God's Kingdom in.

Some of this might sound like circular reasoning, it is. God the Father creates, God the Son redeems, God the Spirit illuminates and equips. In this divine dance of mutuality, each person of the Godhead complements and builds on the work of other members of the Trinity. How well do we emulate this working with one another, complementing each other's gifts?

Secondly, in the doctrine of the Trinity, we find our mission. Jesus said to the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Just as God the Father sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus sends us into the world to do the Father's work, equipped and accompanied by the Spirit of God and united in love. We are reminded of this when we say together one of the Prayers after Communion;

'Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and Glory. Amen.

Whatever work we have to do in this world, we do from the standpoint of the Triune God — Father, Son and Spirit — who created, redeemed, and enabled us to do so.

Being a Christian is about belonging as much as believing, we share in our faith with others, we are united by the cross. Faith is caught it is not taught. No-one becomes a Christian because they suddenly understand the Trinity. People are slowly attracted to God and begin to try to explain their faith using words. This is why it is true that most people belong to a church before they actually believe. This has important implications for us as a church if what we are seeking to encourage is belonging, enabling people to share membership and to feel a part of the church the body of Christ.

So, I want to encourage us to think about the Trinity — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. But we can't stop at just thinking about a theological concept. As followers of Jesus, we are loved by the Father, and led

by the Spirit. All three persons of the Godhead are at work in our lives, in the life of this church, and in the life of this world. Just as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one, so we are united because we are all made in the image of God.

As we live in new awareness of God in all God's expressions as Father, Son, and Spirit, our spiritual lives will deepen, our vision of God's kingdom will expand, and the work that God has chosen for us will take on a new vitality and urgency and we will only be able to accomplish it by working together in relationship with one another and in the power of the Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.