

Trinity Sunday Sermon

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Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

I

Welcome... to the Feast of the Holy Trinity. Today, as we move beyond Pentecost, we celebrate the great Holy Mystery of the “Triune God” – Three in one, and one in three.

We say in our Creed that “we believe in one God....” For this reason, non-Christians are often confused when they hear about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Other ancient religions may have had even more than three Gods – a god of this, a god of that, a god of the other. In many ancient mythologies, they competed for influence, or for the favour of the Head God. Our Trinity is not like that.

God the Father is the Hebrew god, Jahweh, or the Moslem god, Allah. It is perhaps easy to consider a single, powerful Creator, who made the world, gave us life, and rules over His creation. He communicates with us from time to time; as he appeared to Moses, or to various Prophets, through whom we understand his intent. And because this was written down, we have Scriptures to guide us.

God the Son is, of course, Jesus Christ. He is God's son, but no less a part of God. In our Creed, we talk about him "being of one substance with the Father." It is also interesting that he was "begotten of the Father before all worlds". So, even before the incarnation, God had a son. Indeed, even before the Creation.

It is interesting that our Old Testament lesson – and we are back to the start of the Old Testament, in our reading cycle – says that; "...a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." What is this, if not the Holy Spirit? What else could have the power to instil life in the sea, the sky, and the land?

The Holy Spirit can perhaps be best seen as the pervading influence of God on His creation. When we make something, however much of ourselves we put into it, does it stay a part of us? The stranger who picks it up won't necessarily know who made it, or how. But when God breathed over his Creation, he gave some of his presence to everything he created. The "power of the Holy Spirit" is what works within us, to make us instruments of God's peace.

The "Trinity" is sometimes seen historically. In the time between the Fall from Eden and the birth of Christ, God the Father made himself known through his covenant with the Chosen People of Israel. In that short period between "BC" and "AD," God the Son made himself known, through his birth, life and death. And since that first Pentecost, God the Holy Spirit has come back down to us, as the means for the fulfilment of God's promises.

So the Trinity is our way of understanding the different presences that God has in our life. The term does not occur in Scriptures; we only have references to the Father, the Son and

the Holy Spirit. Early Trinitarian concepts appeared towards the end of the first century, when Clement of Rome asked; "Do we not have one God, and one Christ, and one gracious Spirit that has been poured out upon us, and one calling in Christ?"

Around the turn of the first century, the Greek religious text, *Didache* directs Christians to "baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Later Church fathers coined the term "Trinity."

Many symbols have been used to explain the Trinity. The clover leaf or shamrock is common – is it one leaf, or three? Others have used a braid – is it a single rope, or three ropes intertwined? Regardless, the Trinity remains a fundamental part of Christian thought - three co-eternal consubstantial persons – but one God.

II

The period leading up through Easter to Pentecost has definitely been interesting for us.

In the here and now, we have gone from winter into a spring – and now a summer – of uncertainty and anxiety. The COVID-19 pandemic is probably our most immediate shared concern – but it is certainly not the only issue in world affairs!

In the three-year cycle of the *Revised Common Lectionary*, we are now back at the beginning of **Year One**. During Easter season, our first lessons were from the *Acts of the Apostles*. Now we are right back at the beginning – with *Genesis 1*!

“In the beginning ... God created the heavens and the earth....”

And: “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.” The creation of the universe is the starting point of who we are. We have interpreted this story differently, over time – as a literal truth, or as an allegory. But this story is still the **starting point** of our entire Biblical journey!

And we **know**, when we hear about Adam and Eve, how this all ended. We **know**, because we have heard the story before – and we know, because **we** are **their** descendants! We have **been** the story. We know about the fruit, the expulsion from Eden, and everything that happened afterwards.

And, we still live it, every day....

II

But the Lectionary is not just a complete “re-set,” back to the beginning. Indeed, our Epistle and Gospel both **reinforce the continuity**, coming out of Pentecost.

Paul’s Epistle is the **end** of his last message to the people of Corinth. After all the advice he has given them, his last message is:

...farewell. **Put things in order**, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Similarly, Matthew’s Gospel comprises Jesus’ **final** reminder that:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

So, with this Beginning, we are also faced with “endings”. Or are they really endings? Their sequence, provocatively, asks us to decide which comes first.

That’s what we have been left with.

T.S. Eliot once wrote that, “to make an end is to make a beginning”. And in *The Journey of the Magi*, he asks, “Was it a birth or a death?” The lesson of Christ’s incarnation is surely that it was both. The incarnation is not complete until it had passed through Christ’s death to his resurrection. And through his resurrection to his ascension. And finally through his ascension, to the descent of the Holy Spirit, to live among us for as long as we will let him abide with us.

III

So, at first glance, it is odd that we would be celebrating the arrival of a Holy Spirit that was already here. But a lot of time has passed since that Creation. Including that moment of disobedience in the Garden, when we ignored the Holy Spirit.

And perhaps that was when the Holy Spirit left us to our own devices.

And that is where we are today. Not at the beginning of the end, but at the end of the beginning. The Holy Spirit is back, dwelling among us – over to us to take it from here!

What is happening in our lives at the moment is complex. We are all dealing with COVID-19, and we are coming to realize that our lives, going forward, may have to become very different.

Elsewhere in the world, the lines are perhaps being more firmly drawn. Here, we are blessed, to be – more or less – at peace with our neighbours. At least for now. Nonetheless, we must not be ignorant of the long-standing and unresolved issues in our own communities – we cannot behold what is in our brother's eye, and not consider what may be in our own eyes.

IV

In his poem *The Second Coming*, the Irish poet William Butler Yeats wrote:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

We have seen a lot in recent weeks. We have seen an Episcopal church, being used as a backdrop for political photo-ops. ***We have seen the priest of that church teargassed.***

We have seen that “passionate intensity” – that sets buildings on fire, or that fires rubber bullets into unarmed protestors.

And we have not always seen the conviction to stand up against both extremes. And so, “The centre cannot hold...”.

Via Media – between extremes. We are **not** a Church founded either on the infallibility of our leaders – or on literal interpretations of Scriptures. I have often talked about our spiritual journey – and we are on a journey, guided by faith and hope. But that doesn’t mean that any of us knows the exact right path, or even the easiest path. There is plenty of room for doubt, for discussion.

But, that centre “cannot hold” if we do not adhere to Christ’s teachings. Or if we ignore the influence of the Holy Spirit. This is what he left us.

And, when we “follow too much the devices and desires of our own hearts” – we lose Christ and the Holy Spirit.

I talked in an earlier sermon about the sculpture of the “homeless Jesus”, asleep under a blanket on a park bench. That image should be disturbing enough to all of us.

Now imagine the image of Jesus, dying slowly, under the knee of a Roman centurion – or a modern-day policeman. Remember what Jesus said, in Matthew 25:

‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, **you did it to me.**’

So it is indeed time, as St Paul says, to “put things in order”.

Let’s look at ourselves. What are the important things in our lives? What can we do to bring about God’s kingdom?

It is time to decide, in the words of the folk song, “whose side are we on”.

Whose side do you think the Holy Spirit is on?

V

Trinity season is the longest part of the Church year, uninterrupted by major feasts and festivals. It is the time that we settle in to the “new normal” of the post-Easter season, before we start again with next year’s Advent.

It is perhaps no coincidence that it covers what George Gershwin called: “Summertime... [when] the living is easy....” Most summers, we are happy to take advantage of a combination of long days; warm weather; summer vacations; fresh strawberries; and beaches and campsites. We might have some of these this summer; but we aren’t going to have everything. And “the living” may not be quite as easy as we are used to. We are still living in “interesting times.”

But we should all learn never to underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the will of God; His presence on earth, and within all of us.

With the Holy Spirit, we have the power to make things better.

Paul's very brief Epistle today ends with blessing that has become part of our tradition:

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

And that is really all we need; grace, God's love and the continued presence of the Holy Spirit. Where things are wrong in the world, surely it is because one or more of these is missing! We have God's love, always. We got the Holy Spirit back, at Pentecost. All we have to do is let God's grace rule our hearts!

And in our Gospel, Jesus says:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me....

Make disciples of all nations, ... and teach... them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

But as we leave Pentecost, and start the long, hot – and potentially challenging – Trinity season – we must also remember that final promise:

“... I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

His Holy Spirit is among us, and within us.

Alleluia! God is with us!

Amen.