

Sermon for SJB and SSC Trinity Sunday May 29th 2021

Some of you will remember Rev Alan Freeman, our Vicar here some thirty years ago. He was in charge of my preaching training and absolutely insisted that always, before attempting to preach a sermon, I must cover myself with the sign of the cross and speak out confidently in the name of the living God, Father, son and Holy spirit. Awesome! Thirty years later I still think of Alan with love and gratitude. “The living God, Father, son and Holy spirit”. This is the Holy God whom we worship. These are words we should never take for granted. If they’ve become a bit too familiar, today Trinity Sunday, is the day to re-examine and reclaim them.

Did you know that the early church struggled and prayed and argued for over three hundred years before finally agreeing on our doctrine of the Trinity? After the earthly life of Jesus and the birth of the church, those first followers needed to find some way of expressing the divine truths they had experienced through Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, within the eternal and awesome truth that there is only one all encompassing living God

I must confess I used to dislike what I originally saw as an attempt to reduce God to a formula: G equals F plus S plus HS, but I was wrong. Doctrine simply means teaching, arising from the church’s collective ongoing prayer and reflection. It’s basically an attempt to put into words the indescribable in order to help us to understand things more deeply and clearly. As scientists understand more and more about the mysterious and wonderful workings of God’s universe- -atoms, molecules, particles and all the rest of it, they too devise ways of describing the indescribable. Godfrey tells me absolutely mind-blowing things about the discoveries of physicists about God’s activity.

Some people find analogies helpful. if you do, then I offer you this, a favourite one of mine from Robert Faid ‘s book, “A Scientific Approach to Biblical Mysteries”. (No I haven’t read it all! I just like this bit!) He writes that one day while standing by the sea shore he suddenly had a thought: if the sea itself is compared to God, we might then think of a wave as representing God the Son. A wave has an identity of its own, and it comes from and returns to the sea. Yet it is never separate from the sea. Further, we might think of the salt air as the Holy Spirit. It invigorates and penetrates and draws us to the sea. It signals that the sea is near. It even has a separate existence. Yet it’s still the sea.”

If this analogy helps you, you might like to ponder it further: the sea has immense power and beauty. We can be carried by the sea, get food from it, be invigorated, amazed, alarmed, thrilled by it, constantly discover more about it, but we can never tame it, contain it or fathom all its mysteries.

We firmly believe that there is only one living God, one Lord, as scripture tells us, but scripture also tells us, though without mentioning the T word, how we can relate to God in three distinctive ways.

First, we can know him as creator and provider in all the wonders of the created world. To be human is to be dependent on creation for our very existence. There’s plenty about that in the

media these days as well as in the scriptures and very important it is too, but not only for our physical existence. Creation can reveal a spark of the divine, a sense of awe and wonder, a spiritual awakening even in people who've rejected the very possibility of God's existence.

We can know him too through the person of Jesus Christ, in the good news of the Jesus story of the human face of God. Jesus shows us the nature of God in ways we can understand most clearly: the God whose love is so profound that he enters the world as a human being, who pours out his lifeblood to bring the gift of pardon and peace to his whole fallen and broken world, who shows us a new way of living, the way of self giving love. In that marvellous first reading about the prophet's encounter with the living god in the temple, his lips are touched by the burning coal brought from the altar by the seraphim. Week by week our lips too are touched by something precious brought from the altar, something we take into our bodies and souls to strengthen us in our faith: The Sacrament given to us by Jesus himself at the last supper. How privileged we are that we can know God revealed in Jesus, human son, redeemer, pardoner, saviour, who demonstrates in his earthly life, death and resurrection that we can have eternal hope.

This is all made possible by the activity of the Holy Spirit who has been there with the father and the son from the beginning when the spirit of God breathed creation into being. He is our inner guide, energiser, sustainer and strengthener. Jesus speaks of the spirit to Nicodemus in today's gospel reading. Nicodemus is an important person, a leader, a teacher from the powerful religious Jewish authorities. He along with so many others has witnessed the astonishing things Jesus has been doing and realises that he must be from God. All great! So, why does he come to speak with Jesus secretly, by night? Clearly the radical things he's been hearing seem much too far outside his comfort zone. He's unwilling to undergo any real shift in his thinking and takes things very literally. He's baffled by Jesus's words about the need to be "Born from above" or born again as it's often translated, (the Greek word means both "from above" and also "again"). Nicodemus doesn't get it at all. He takes it literally as we see from his puzzled questions.

The nub of their whole conversation comes in verse 16, words so often quoted as the heart of the gospel, set to music and loved by generations of Christians; "For God so loved he world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life".

Elsewhere in his writings John states very simply, "God is love". Love is not static. It's dynamic, active and relational. Impossible to grasp or fully fathom. But in order to flourish, all human beings need to give and receive love. We believe that the ultimate source of all our loving is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When we come to our offertory hymn you might like to use it as a prayer. Each verse focuses on one aspect of God the Holy trinity and the final lines beautifully express our faith and trust in him; "Thus provided, pardoned, guided, nothing can our peace destroy". Amen.

Carole Lewis