

Trinity Sunday Year A (7 June 2020)

Lectionary Readings: Exodus 34:1-8, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, Matthew 28:16-20



Getting older is no fun (as you know I had another birthday last week!) Age though has a way of sneaking up on you. As if it was overnight, suddenly you can't run as fast, can't hear as well, see as clearly as you once did. Your kids are taller than you (not too difficult in my case!) The mind says, "get up and go", but the body creaks and responds, "maybe later".

There are some ageing signs which sometimes hit us with unexpected thunder. For 59 years, I thought 60 was old; that is, until I turned 60. Therefore, by my definition, I was old. (And of course the kids didn't exactly help!) Personally, I felt depressed with one foot already in the grave, but I guess the good news is that you can always find someone older than yourself to cheer you up.

But I suppose the unexpected age-related symptom, for me, occurred when I saw the optometrist, and he said I needed multi focals, also called varifocals or tri-focals. The writing had been on the wall... I had worn glasses since the age of four, and I was expecting bifocals, but trifocals!..... Anyway after a bit of back and forth, I managed to persuade the optometrist that bifocals would do the job just nicely, thank you very much – the thought of trying to adapt to two lenses was challenging enough without a third lens to complicate matters. However, I must say that I am somewhat impressed with the idea of tri-focals – the ability to see three different plains, in three dimensions so to speak, through the same set of glasses; to focus on the same area from three different perspectives.

Today is of course Trinity Sunday. A day that many understand as being devoted to a doctrine, to a great mystery – one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is a defining marker by which we as Christians find our identity. You could even say it is when we are called to try and look at God through tri-focals; to see the different levels, personas, persons of the Godhead.

In this morning's gospel reading, which is the conclusion of Matthew's gospel, Jesus gives his followers what is known as The Great Commission:

*"All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the **Father**, and of the **Son**, and of the **Holy Spirit**, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you*

always, until the end of the age.”

Chosen for this week because it contains the most clear Trinitarian statement in all of Scripture.

There are of course various ways of reflecting on the Holy Trinity. One of these is to consider the ‘inner workings’ of the Trinity ... to try to understand how the Father, Son and Spirit relate to each other within themselves. This is called the ‘ONTOLOGICAL (or essential or immanent)’ Trinity – (I put that in just to impress you and to prove that I was paying attention during my ordinand formation training.

St. Patrick describes God as a Shamrock with three distinct leaves on one stem. St. Augustine used the example of a tree: the root is wood, the trunk is wood, the branches are wood; one wood, one substance, but three different entities. I’m sure you have heard of the ice, water, steam analogy – yes, the struggle to try and fit three aspects of God into a monotheistic religion is sometimes challenging.

Perhaps you have heard the old Hindu parable about “The Blind Men and The Elephant”. Having never seen an elephant, they went to check it out. “An elephant is like a rope”, the first man exclaimed as he touched his tail. “Oh, no!” “It is like a thick branch of a tree,” said the second man who touched the trunk of the elephant. “It is like a big hand fan”, said the third man who touched the ear of the elephant. “It is like a huge wall,” said the fourth man who touched the belly of the elephant. They began to argue about the elephant and every one of them insisted that he was right. The reality was they all were right, for the elephant was as each had experienced it to be.

When I was chaplain at PC, every Thursday morning I would spend a session with the ‘Kindy’ girls (one of my favourite times of the week). One particular day when I was asked what God looked like I suggested they each draw a picture ... there were many drawings – some drew scenes with flowers and trees, others the sun or the stars, and another a cross. All were different yet all were God, or at least how they experienced or thought of God; God in the beauty of Creation, God in the majesty of heaven, God in the pain of Good Friday.

Scripture uses many images to describe God. There is the still small voice that spoke to Elisha in his anguish; there is the majesty of God which made the psalmist write, “And I will meditate on your wonderful works. They tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds.” God is compared to the father of the prodigal, waiting with cloak and ring and fatted calf for his wayward child to come home, or the mother hen brooding over her chicks and protecting them from danger.

One English clergyman and writer wrote that “the doctrine of the Trinity was not dreamed up in a theological think tank, but was articulated by actual worshipping and serving

Christians.” It was their way to give a face to God amid a disbelieving world. It was their way to bring God close in a world that seeks to push any talk of God away. It was their way, our way, to see God in our world, in our living, in our struggles, in our courage, in our lives.

The Church sees this holistic view of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer as essential for all those who call themselves Christian. Therefore, at baptism, as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28, we baptise in the name of the triune God .

But the Trinity is more than Christian doctrine because it speaks of relationship. We can look to the Father, the Lord who came down in the cloud and stood with Moses, and proclaimed his name, ‘The Lord , the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. We can hold up the image of Creator and celebrate as we look into the sky or see the flowers pushing through the soil and, as we do these things, we can catch a glimpse of the nature of God.

We can look at the Son, or in the words of John’s Gospel, the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us, and in Jesus we see one who reached out to the women and children when the rest of society looked the other way. We can see one who said, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you when the rest of society preached vengeance and an eye for an eye, and we can see the nature of God.

We can look at that day of Pentecost and how these Jerusalem-bound disciples became so charged up that, through the Spirit, they were able, as stated in Matthew 28, to go into all the world to teach and baptise. We can see this same Spirit in the lives of Christians from that time forward, and the discovery of a faith and a Spirit that gives us courage in times of fear, hope in times of trouble, and life, even amid the realities of death, and we can, again, catch a glimpse of the nature of God; the One who made us, sustains, us and calls us forward.

And so this morning, let us think about this Triune God, not as a theological exercise, but as an attempt to see God through tri-focals, to see many plains all in perfect focus through the one pair of glasses. I invite you to see God in “Three D”; the height, the width, the depth of God as it has touched your life. You see, trifocals, even Trinitarian theology, is not bad, if it helps us to see a little clearer!

The Lord be with you.