

W4E Trinity Sunday

26th May 2024

Isaiah 6:1-8

John 3:1-17

In the love of the Creator
In the light of the Christ
In the leading of the Spirit
We place ourselves now
Amen.

John 3:16 - "for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life."

Probably one of the best known sentences in the Bible.

And maybe because it is so well known, it's really tempting to look at this story of Nicodemus visiting Jesus and see it only as the introduction to that great statement of God's opening of the way back to the life he always intended us to have.

But of course, there is so much more we can take from this passage. A few minutes ago we were thinking of the 'pictures' we have of the Trinity and how they can help us to grasp the concept, but that none of them are perfect. And we said that ultimately the Trinity is a way in which we try to explain that we encounter God in more than one way.

And in this passage we find a beautiful example of just that - of how the One God can be encountered not just as Father, not only as the Son, but also as the Holy Spirit – three-in-one, existing and working together.

We tend to think of the Pharisees as a bad bunch. It's easy to lose sight of the fact that they were genuine seekers after God, albeit it turned out they had lost their way. Yet here we have Nicodemus, who had begun to discern the right place to find God and came to Jesus with his questions.

"No-one can do the signs you do apart from the presence of God," he says. When he looks at Jesus he *sees* God the Father, the Creator, the Maker, present in human form.

And Jesus gently takes him another step on the way. Yes – you've seen the Father in me, but there's more.

He speaks about 'being born from above' – about accepting the offer which comes from God to take a step that is so profound that it's like being re-born, like starting a whole new life. A step which involves *also* encountering the presence and work of the Holy Spirit – as well as baptism into the new community – the new 'people of God' that God is building in love.

Jesus offers us a beautiful picture of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – three, yet one – inviting us into their never-ending community of love.

We've already talked a lot about images of the Trinity – here's one that really speaks to me....

[Image on screen]



The three persons of God in one heart of love.

Together.

And yet it's really hard for human heads and hearts to grasp this. I'll put my hand up and say that when I'm really, really concentrating I kind of get the "in one" bit, but mostly it fragments back to Father/Creator, Jesus and the Spirit.

And I'm not sure that this is a problem – so long as we are aware that we are doing it, and don't forget that when we do, we are seeing only a fraction of a fraction of who God is.

Some of us will naturally be drawn to the understanding of God as the Almighty, the Holy One (as experienced by Isaiah in this morning's reading). The one to be worshipped in awe and wonder. All true – but if this is our only picture, then we can come to see God as distant, remote, maybe disinterested. Unapproachable. Maybe even to become fearful.

Some of us will identify most closely with Jesus. Human like us. An example of how to live. Yet somehow also divine. Opening the way back to relationship. Calling us to leave the old life behind (ouch, that's hard) and follow him (where to? Will it be easy? What do you mean, not necessarily??) If this is our only picture, then it's easy for us to feel that it's all too difficult; tempting to begin to see Jesus just as 'a good man'.

Fewer of us, maybe identify with the Holy Spirit – so hard to imagine. "The life of Jesus living and working within us and within creation." The Presence and the Power of God. Maybe we feel wary. Yet Jesus calls the Spirit the Comforter, and who doesn't need reassurance from time to time? The Spirit enables us to grow, to become more like Jesus, to do the things that God needs us to do. But if this is the only way we understand God, it's easy to want power for its own sake, to view the Spirit as a resource for us to use, to seek to possess rather than to trust.

One of the reasons I love the Celtic Christian tradition is that it gives us a model for holding these images as one in a practical day-to-day way. In the solidity and beauty of creation, in

our daily tasks with Jesus alongside us, in the joys and the tragedies sustained by the Spirit. All exemplified in the glorious intertwining of Celtic art, where the strands interweave and we cannot see where one ends and another begins, and we find ourselves being drawn into the wholeness of it all.



So – where does this take us to?

Perhaps back to the image we saw earlier, of the dancing Trinity – the community of love. If you've ever been to a ceilidh or Barn Dance you'll know that there's often a step where one couple holds hands and raises them to form an arch, and all the other couples process through, as if through a doorway.

[return to dancing Trinity image]

In my mind's eye I like to see the same happening in this image, as the dancers raise their arms and invite us to step through into God's heart of love – to enter the new life which God offers to us.

Maybe we did that years ago. Maybe we've never thought about church-stuff in that way before. Maybe we're a bit intrigued, and would like to explore more. Maybe we'd like some time to think about it.

All that is fine – but can I encourage you to take this image with you and think on it. Can you take another step in responding to that invitation?

And I'll be around at the end and would love to chat if you'd like to.

Shall we pray...

Awaken me, Creator God
To your light;
Open my eyes
To your presence

Awaken me, Jesus

To your love;
Open my soul
To your welcoming

Awaken me, Holy Spirit
To your life

Open my heart
To your indwelling

Awaken me, Three-in-One
To your purpose
Open my will
To your guiding

Amen

Adapted from David Adam, Times and Seasons
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