

**S. TRINITY SUNDAY**  
St Bartholomew's Burnley 2025

I. Trinity Sunday is, in one sense, the climax of the Christian Year. Since Advent Sunday there's been a progression: first the incarnation (at Christmas); then the suffering and death of Christ (in Lent, Holy Week, and Good Friday); then Christ's resurrection and ascension (the Easter season); and finally the giving of the Holy Spirit (at Pentecost). What we've had so far is a rolling out of the Trinity over these weeks and months which now becomes explicit. Today we simply celebrate GOD.

II. Belief in the Trinity makes us unique among world religions. Like Judaism and Islam, we are monotheists not polytheists. That is, we believe in one God. But we also believe, as Christians, that God is, in some mysterious way, three-in-one. That is, there is a complexity to the nature of God in creation and redemption, between God and us, between God and creation. And that complexity exists within the one God.

There are three aspects to God in Christian understanding. Firstly God is transcendent. That means that God is above and beyond us, totally different from us. God is mystery and can't be domesticated or captured even in language. John's Gospel says, 'No one has ever seen God.'

And that is true also of the Old Testament. Moses sees only the back of God on Mount Sinai and can't see God face-to-face. And the second commandment speaks of the holiness of God: *'You shall not make for yourself an idol, ... of anything ... in heaven above, or ... on the earth beneath, or ... in the water under the earth.'*

Why? Because God is utterly beyond us, not able to be captured or captivated by anything in creation, whether human or animal or plant. And that's even without taking sin into account.

III. Secondly, God is incarnate — that is to say, God has become human, flesh, in Jesus Christ: God has become one of us. And that makes a difference to our use of images; it re-frames the second commandment. In the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, some of the Reformers thought that statues and icons of Jesus, Mary, and the saints were not allowed and they destroyed them. But the majority of Christians believe that the incarnation itself makes all the difference. God can now be seen and heard. We can now portray God and Mary and the saints in visual form. Because God has become flesh in the Word, Jesus Christ..

That same Word is the source, not just of salvation, but is also of creation. John's Gospel says 'Through him, through the Word, all things were made'. And that connects to our reading from Proverbs. Here Lady Wisdom is the agent of creation: *When God established the heavens, I was there, ... I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always.'*

The New Testament interprets Wisdom as another name for the eternal Word who became flesh in Jesus and who was the agent of creation. Therefore the invisible, unknowable, untouchable God who made the world also redeems it through Christ, through the incarnation. God is now visible, can be known, can be touched, in Jesus Christ

IV. Thirdly, God is not only transcendent, beyond and above us, and not only incarnate, but also immanent: that is to say, God is close, closer to us than our own breathing. Indeed, we can only breathe because of the Spirit's presence. In the Old Testament, God is very near to creation, sustaining it and all life at every level.

The New Testament confirms this view but also adds that the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. As we saw last week at Pentecost, the Spirit is the personal presence of Christ with the community when Jesus departs to the Father. The Spirit is the presence of the absent Jesus.

Our Gospel reading this morning presents the Spirit as continuing the teaching and guidance of Jesus, bringing new insights and new understandings. Similarly, for Paul, the Spirit is the gift of God's love poured into our hearts, giving us hope and strength and resilience in our own lives and in

the life of the church. The Holy Spirit is therefore the closeness of God, forming and transforming us, and leading us into God's blessed future: a future for us and for all creation.

V. At the same time God is not three different modes of being, three different ways of being God. That's not enough. In fact, it's a form of heresy and was identified as heresy by the early church. God is above all profoundly personal; which is why we speak of three 'Persons' of the Trinity — three 'Persons', one God, named in Scripture and tradition as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The language comes from Jesus himself and his unique sense of God as Father. But it's metaphorical language not literal. It doesn't imply that God is male but rather that God is personal. Not just personal, however, but also social, representing unity in diversity. Thus at the core of all life, Christians believe, there is community, unity, diversity, intimacy. The heart of the universe is a communion of love.

VI. We Christians talk a lot about Jesus And that's great. But it also has its dangers. Jesus belongs within the Trinity and is not separate. We need to be careful that our language and thinking are trinitarian and not just Jesus-focused. Unless we're trinitarian in our thinking we can easily end up dismissing creation. We can dismiss the insights of other religious traditions. We can assume that unless something is specifically Christian it has nothing to offer us. A trinitarian perspective saves us from that kind of narrow thinking.

It's obvious that the Trinity is a model for us about the priority of relationship and community and love. But it's far more than that. The Gospel message is that we're invited to enter into the life of the Trinity. The icon on our pewsheets is Rublev's famous icon of the Trinity: three figures seated around a table, taken from the story in Genesis 18, and each is inclined towards the other. The fourth place at the table is meant for us, for the church, for creation. We are invited to sit at a table with God the Holy Trinity; we're to be drawn into the intimacy of the divine communion.

Our calling today is to live within that divine love, that community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to allow it to be poured into our hearts and to place worship of that God above all else in our lives.

Our calling is also to share that love and communion with others, especially in contexts where people are isolated and lonely and disconnected: where people have experienced damage and abuse. We are to live a trinitarian life, reflecting the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit all around us.

Thanks be to God.

*Mthr Dorothy*