

## **SERMON FROM THE WEBSITE OF ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, ENFIELD**

We are sometimes told that Trinity Sunday is a unique date in the church calendar because it's the only Christian festival that celebrates a doctrine rather than an event. Think about the rest of the Festivals: Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost and so on...These are all events. But Trinity Sunday is different, so we are told, because the Trinity is a core Christian doctrine: an idea at the heart of our faith.

But I want to challenge that and encourage us to look at Trinity Sunday a little differently. Because I think it's a tragedy in the church that we have turned the Event of the Trinity into a Doctrine.

What I mean is this: that the Trinity is primarily an experience; it is the way we experience God in our lives. But we have turned it into a matter of faith: an idea to be understood. And then we get frustrated when we can't understand the Trinity and so we defend ourselves, we defend our faith by declaring it a mystery beyond understanding.

And, of course, the Trinity is a mystery but not because it is a complicated doctrine! It's a mystery because the Trinity is an Event of Love - and Love is a mystery. We can't describe Love. We can only experience it: and so it is with the Trinity too.

It was Pope Gregory IX who instituted Trinity Sunday in the 9<sup>th</sup>-century and it was a beautiful gift to the church because it gives us one more occasion to wrestle with the mysterious love of God to us and our experience of that.

So, I want to try and avoid all those torturous metaphors that we use to try to 'understand' the Trinity. There are so many of them: the notion of a Shamrock, 3 leaves joined in one stem, water existing as ice, steam and liquid, an apple made of peel, flesh and core and so on...

All of these analogies are good as far as they go. But they are all attempts to rationalise what is beyond rationality: they are all attempts to logically examine what is beyond logic. The experience of love is not hallmarked by rationality. The experience of love is not logical.

Trinity Sunday calls us to dwell deeply in the experience of God, not some scientific analysis of him that divides him up into parts.

So what does the experience of God's love mean to us? How do we experience the Trinity for ourselves?

### ***First, we experience God as Father***

It is good to reflect on our experience of God as our Father. God our Father is not a doctrine to be believed. It is love to be experienced. Abba, Father, is a phrase that speaks of our utter dependency on him, our need for his provision in our lives, our complete security in his strength. As earthly fathers, we can only aspire to that..

I remember when my daughter was about 4 years old, she used to stand on the fifth stair in our house and wait for me to pass by and, without warning, she would jump off and say, "Daddy, catch me!" It never dawned on her that, one day, I might miss, or be too preoccupied in my own head to hear her, or be just too tired to play the game. She jumped - and expected her Daddy to be there to catch her. It was by chance, not skill or strength, that I never did miss.

But in our heavenly Father, we can be more confident: he will never drop us, he is never too preoccupied with other things to meet our need, he is never too tired to be a Father to

us. Our experience of God the Father is both security and playfulness and today, on Trinity Sunday, we rejoice in that.

God is our Father – our security, our playmate even...

### ***Second, we experience God as Son***

We have an experience of the love of the Father - but that has been made possible for us through the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, on the cross. Through his death, death is conquered. Through his death, life is made possible. Through his death, we have the Way opened for us to live with God. In Hebrews 10:19, we read: "*We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body...*" It is through the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ that we have access to the Father.

But again, this is not a doctrine to be believed. It is love to be experienced. Paul reminds us in Romans that we live in union with Christ. This defies logic, this defies rationality. Union with Christ is not something just to be believed but to be experienced.

But how can we experience that?

The answer is related to our third experience of God, which is ultimately through his Holy Spirit.

### ***We experience God as Holy Spirit***

When we become united with Christ, it is through the indwelling of the Spirit in us. We receive God's Spirit and, as a result, we receive healing and grace.

The experience of God's love is simply this: We have become alienated from the Father through sin. The Son has dealt with that alienation on the Cross, freeing us from judgement. The Spirit lives in us so that we can live in relationship with God for all eternity.

Surely that is more than a doctrine to be believed? Surely that is an experience to celebrate!

That being the case, let's not attempt to use words to describe a Trinitarian doctrine. Let's move beyond that and seek out a fresh experience of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is the life into which we are all called as Christians and that is the life of possibility that we, as a Christian community are to help other people discover...

So Trinity Sunday calls us to an experience of love - but one that stirs us into action: obedience to God's commandments, which has an outworking in love towards him but, just as importantly, love towards others too.

There is nothing passive about love. As believers, we are constantly being re-made in the image of God and called to mirror that into the world through our words and actions and loving service. As we practice the presence of God in our lives, so we will become more concerned for the well-being of others and seek to serve them to the best of our ability.

Our Gospel reading this morning (Matthew 28), ends with the words of Christ: "*And I will be with you always, to the ends of the age*". Emmanuel – God with us. It's fascinating that the climax of this Gospel, takes us right back to the beginning: we go full circle, right back to Chapter 1 where the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and announced the birth of Christ - and what did he say? "And they will call him Immanuel – which means 'God with us'".

God with us – that's the beginning of the good news.

God with us – that's the conclusion of the good news.

God is with us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is our beginning and our end. He is our Alpha and our Omega.

That is our life.

That is our experience.

That is the experience into which we are to lead others as a mission-shaped church.

This Trinity Sunday, our prayer is that we will journey on together deeper and deeper into an understanding of what that means for us as a Christian community to become mirrors in the world of the grace, compassion, love and hospitality of God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

***Amen.***