



The Trinity – YrA – 4 June 2023

Message – Live the Trinity

Source of All Being, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit, one God in three persons, Unity and Trinity Divine, open our hearts, minds, and bodies, to love as you love us. **Amen.**

Though people of been put to death for failing to believe the doctrine of the Trinity, you will guess, from the brevity of our

last two readings, New Testament passages supporting the doctrine are at best open to other interpretations.

Explaining the Trinity is fraught with potential ventures into a wide variety of heresies. A colleague even suggested that congregations could play heresy bingo and see just how many heresies their preachers ventured into.

Much like contemporary physics, which gives the probability we have found a new particle and says we have when we have over ninety-five percent certainty, I think that doctrine of the Trinity is probably true though I remain open to the possibility that we have misunderstood God in some way.

This is not the position of the Anglican Church. Article four of the thirty-nine articles of religion, the statements setting out how the Church of England was going to be different from the Roman Catholic Church, states that we only need to believe that which is read in or can be proven from Holy Scripture. Article eight then claims that the Nicene, Athanasius's, and Apostles' Creeds can be proven from scripture.

I was going to say that I have some ambivalence towards this second claim but, on reflection, I have ambivalence towards both. I am glad that when I was ordained, I affirmed that the thirty-nine articles would inspire me, I was not required to say that I believed them. They have certainly inspired me... to think about these things!

There is no neutral place from which we can read the Holy Scriptures. There is in fact no neutral place from which we can engage with the world around us, or as a social scientist

put it, “the view from nowhere”. There is nowhere from which we can look at the world without bias. We all start with a set of assumptions; the best we can do is acknowledge our assumptions. Yet, some of those assumptions are so well hidden that it may be very hard to identify them, particularly when everyone around us holds the same assumption.

Although we may agree that the Holy Scriptures contain all that is necessary for salvation, we must also recognise that we read the Scriptures from a particular perspective and that other interpretations are possible.

Being confronted with such alternative interpretations is uncomfortable. We need an openness of faith and trust in God to explore where our underlying assumptions differ. Only when we do this can we engage in real discussion, without recognising our assumptions our debates are pointless. We argue at cross purpose without real engagement.

Some will argue that, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ensures that we are never in error in our interpretation of Scripture. Given the diversity of interpretations, either we are not very good at listening to the Holy Spirit or the Holy Spirit is only speaking to a select few. You can find scriptures to support both view! We must understand the basis for our beliefs.

Our worldview and our understanding of the Holy Scriptures are formed from several sources. It is suggested that John Wesley, in exploring the way in which scripture is above all things, noted three sources of knowledge that we use alongside it: tradition, reason, and experience. The categories are helpful, though whether they accurately represents

Wesley's thinking is debatable. It may be our own worldview being read back into his writings, which we may also be doing when we read the Bible, all because of our assumptions.

The quadrilateral, Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience, collective experience rather than individual experience, gives a base to help us explore our assumptions and to see where others' assumption may differ from our own. With this breadth, it is more of a wonder that we can agree on anything than that we sometimes disagree!

Growing up Evangelical, I was told there was a right answer. My study of theology has taught me that, to most questions there are a variety of answers, depending on the context in which the question is asked and the perspective from which it is answered. Studying a subject deepens knowledge but also makes us aware of just how much we don't know. Studying resulting in knowing more about less. Hopefully, we keep perspective and realise how much we do not know.

Our starting point with the doctrine of the Trinity has to be in knowing we do not have all the answers and being open to others' insights. In the words of Richard Rohr,

“Circling around” is all we can do. Our speaking of God is a search for similes, analogies, and metaphors. All theological language is an approximation, offered tentatively in holy awe. That’s the best human language can achieve. We can say, “It’s like—it’s similar to...,” but we can never say, “It is...” because we are in the realm of beyond, of transcendence, of mystery. And we must—absolutely must—maintain a fundamental humility

before the Great Mystery. If we do not, religion always worships itself and its formulations and never God." (~Richard Rohr, "The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation")

The Church is perhaps gaining that fundamental humility but it is a slow journey and feels somewhat too late. We have to trust that God's hand is in this, that we will be transformed to be light and salt to the world, the love that the world needs.

On the cover of your service sheet, you have an version of the Icon of the Trinity. Rublev's Icon is the most familiar but it is a common Eastern Church icon. In the past, it would have been inconceivable that Western churches would have used such an icon; the use of icons long separated the Church of the East and West. Today, we acknowledge that there is truth contained within icons that may help us in our faith journey.

Kelly Latimore's Icon has some notable differences, it draws on the traditional symbolism to provide challenge and inspiration. Icon means 'writing' and like our writing are to be read from left to right. Unlike the traditional icon, or writing, The Creator, Redeemer, and Giver of Life, are not painted with the same face. Their different faces remind us that all races are one in God. Rather than being ambiguous in gender, the three persons are clearly feminine. In God there is neither male nor female, but we often need reminding that both are found in God. The femine of this icon is a conscious counter to the masculine of traditional images. The rainbow flag is on the table in the midst of God, in case we were in any doubt as to the inclusivity of God.

More interesting is that the Redeemer and Giver of Life, right to figures, are not looking inwards towards the Trinity but outwards to us. They are God in the world. The creator, left, is looking towards the Redeemer, God's message to the world, while also reaching out a hand of blessing towards us. The persons are holding hands. The Giver of Life is holding out a hand inviting us to join hands with the Trinity. That is our calling. Kelly's beautiful icon provides a commentary on the traditional icon. It invites us into God in a fresh way.

We cannot fully understand the mystery of the Trinity. Our words are inadequate. We seek understanding with purpose, to know how to live lives of love, the love that has been shown to us in the Redeemer, to live life in all its fullness.

We may never understand the Trinity but in moments of grace we may experience it in our heart, mind, and body as we participate in the work of God in the world, in relationship with the image of God in others, joined as one in unity.

May all of us join with the life of the Trinity, holding hands, revealing love in relationships of unity and service. As love is revealed in God the Trinity so may it be revealed in our love and our relationships. Truly, truly, truly.