

Trinity

How do you explain the unexplainable?

How do you explain the unexplainable? How do you find words, or pictures, or numbers to describe the mystery that is God? From the very beginning, humanity has always been fascinated by the divine. And today, as we celebrate Trinity Sunday, we are invited to reflect upon the particular image of God as 'God in three persons, blessed Trinity'. I don't know about you, but if I'm honest, I find the whole thing mind-boggling! The Trinity is, at best, an inadequate attempt to capture in word and number the mysterious nature of God. It has something to say about both the unity and diversity of God's work and being, and about the importance of community to God and all those whom God has created and loved.

From the very beginning, deep inside classic Jewish monotheism there lies a strange, swirling sense of a rhythm of mutual relations within the very being of the one God: a to and fro, a give and take, a command and obey, a sense of love poured out and love received. God's spirit broods over the waters, God's word goes forth to produce new life, God's law guides his people, God's presence or glory dwells with them in fiery cloud, in tabernacle and temple. And in today's OT reading from Proverbs, God's wisdom is his handmaiden in creation, the first-born of his works, his chief of staff, his delight. Through the lady wisdom of Proverbs 1-8, the creator has fashioned everything, especially the human race. So to embrace wisdom is to discover the secret of being truly human, of reflecting God's image.

It's from this rich seam of thought that early Christians went quarrying for language to deal with the phenomena of Jesus. They adopted the language of Spirit, word, law, presence, and wisdom, and developed them in relation to Jesus and the strange personal presence of the Spirit. And soon a strange logic was developed, and a theology of the Trinity was born.

Early theologians viewed the number 1 as no number at all because it had no diversity. It possessed no discernable strength. The number 2 was weak as well in that it was only a dualism. At best, it could only be two sides of the same coin. The number 3, then, was considered the first real 'number' in that it had an innate stability, a complexity; a diversity, if you will, which made it durable and strong."

The Latin phrase, "omne trium perfectum" (everything that comes in threes is perfect, or, every set of three is complete) conveys the same idea. There is a Norwegian proverb that says, "All good things come in threes." The rule of three is a principle that suggests that things that come in threes are inherently funnier, more satisfying, or more effective than other numbers of things. Research suggests audiences and readers are more likely to consume information presented in threes. From story books to three part dramas, many things are structured in threes, with a

beginning, middle and end. Throughout the centuries, theologians have found The Doctrine of the Trinity a pretty rich seam to mine.

Most famously, Saint Patrick is said to have explained the Trinity to the Celts by using a shamrock, three individual leaves, yet still one plant.

Tertullian, before Patrick, waxed lyrical as he used the metaphor of The Trinity as a plant, with the Father as the deep root, the Son as the shoot that breaks forth into the world, and the Spirit as the force which spreads beauty and fragrance on the earth.

The Trinity is one of the great antidotes to the tendency of some Christians to see God as apathetic, a-historical, and unchanging in contrast to the passionate, evolving, and transitory world of time and space. In contrast to Aristotle's unmoved mover, the lively Trinitarian God is, to quote philosopher Charles Hartshorne, the "most moved mover," the one to whom all hearts are open, and all desires known.

I like Augustine's understanding of the Trinity as the Lover, the Beloved, and the love which exists between them. He writes, "know that when you love, you know more about who God is than you could ever know with your intellect."

Luther builds upon this and speaks of God in terms of a language of love, with the Father as speaker, the Son as the word, and the Spirit as the listener (Luther's Works, Vol. 24, pp. 364-365). I love the idea that we have a God who literally can't stop talking, and his word is love.

Contemporary Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff understands the Trinity by describing it as the first community - a model for human society, a model for how we are called to connect with one another, without prejudice, without inequality, without competition, and always with a perfect love that drives out fear.

He writes, 'There is an aliveness, a dynamic movement within God: speaking, reaching out, flowing forth, receiving back. God is liquid motion, a dynamism in which everything is changing always, yet remains always secure because it is rooted in love—because it is love. We are invited into that circle of love.'

Rowan Williams says, 'Knowing the Trinity is being involved in this circling movement: drawn by the Son towards the Father, drawn into the Father's breathing out of the Spirit, so that the Sons' life may be again made real in the world.'

The idea of being drawn into a circle of life and love, helps me appreciate today's gospel reading.

In today's gospel, John's image of the Trinity is of a circle, in which each figure is only illuminated by the light of the torches that the others are holding. Each desperately wants us to see and love the others. What the torches reveal is both how much they love each other and how alike they are, with a deep family resemblance that makes us look from one to the other with a sense of true recognition. And the circle of light does not

exclude us. It spills some of its warmth out to us. It invites us forward, into the light, and the transforming light begins to make us, too, resemble the main players, not by right, but because of the generous light reflected on us, the light of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Today, Trinity Sunday is traditionally a day for baptisms in the church. And so we pray for all those who will be baptized this day, especially little Jacob here at St Boniface this afternoon, that as he begins his Christian journey, and receives his baptismal candle, he would know God's light and love, and God's Spirit alive in him.

But today, Trinity Sunday also means that we have crossed once again into the season known as Ordinary Time - the season which encompasses the more commonplace sense of the ordinary. We are encouraged to seek the God who shows up not only in the more dramatic times such as Lent and Easter, Advent and Christmas, but who also meets us in the rhythms and routines of our daily lives; and in the relationships and connections we make with others - friends and strangers - in that circle of love.

And today, we also say an official goodbye to our youth worker Kim. We thank you Kim for getting to know us, for caring for our children and young people, and in your relationships with them, helping us all to see a little bit of God's light and love, encircling them, enfolding them.

I pray that as you begin a new chapter in your life, you too may know deep in your heart and mind - the love that claims you and calls you; the love that invites you to enter into relationship with the One who dwells in mystery yet seeks to know us in the midst of everyday life; and the love that enfolds us and encircles us and draws us into new life.

And so I finish with a poem for us all...

'The fire of God's hospitality' by Trevor Dennis

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