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| **SERMON FOR TRINITY SUNDAY****Romans 5: 1-15****John 16: 10-15** |
|   | May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.   Amen I'm not sure what it is about Trinity Sunday but I seem to find myself in this pulpit almost every year on Trinity Sunday.  I notice from my files that I did this talk in 2004 and 2005 but not last year.  I'm beginning to think that I've drawn the short straw, given that the concept of the Trinity is one that has more than a few theologians scratching their heads and looking for elegant ways to explain in simple terms, a concept that is usually beyond human imagining. But I know from years of experience what a bright bunch you lot are.  I know you're not daunted by complex theology so we'll plough straight in and talk about - cooking. Now I don't know if you've got around to reading this month's Parish Link but if you have, you may have noticed an article in there about food that I had written.   Lucy has been pushing me for several months to write the article and I finally got around to it last month. For those of you who have not read the article, let me explain.   I was 50 last year and for my birthday, some friends got together to buy me a gift.  Knowing that I like to cook, they bought me a voucher for a one day course at the Cookery Shool at Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons near Oxford, Raymond Blanc's famous restaurant.  I finally got around to attending a course in October of last year and Lucy wanted me to share the experience with the readers of The Link and to include a simple recipe. So, first of all an apology to anyone who has tried the recipe and it failed.  I would hate to think I've spoiled anyone's Sunday lunch or up market dinner party.    The day at Le Manoir was wonderful.   The cookery school is basically a large fully equipped kitchen for 10 students adjoining the main kitchen of the restaurant, so while you are learning, you can look through the window at a top notch professional kitchen in action.   The course was run by a wonderful and entertaining chef called Steven Bulmer who used to be Raymond Blanc's sous chef until the inception of the Cookery school when he became the director. We learnt a whole range of techniques and even had to prepare our own lunch so that we could suffer for our own mistakes.  Our theme was an autumn dinner party and one of the things that I found most useful was that we spent some time in the morning learning how to make pasta.   Now making pasta has always been something of a mystery to me but also something that I've always wanted to be able to do.   For me, there is no comparison between the taste of freshly made pasta and that of shop bought, factory made dried pasta.   On the face of it, it should be the simplest thing in the world to make - there are only three ingredients and one of those is brute force.     I have at home a wonderful book on Italian cooking - the bible of Italian cooking.  It's called "The Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking' and it's by a lady called Marcella Hazan.   Now she devotes 28 pages to this simple task of making pasta and I had read those 28 pages several times without summoning up the courage to have a go.   So that was why I was so delighted when Steven Bulmer told us that we were going to actually make pasta. I will now share this mystery with you.   Now, as I say, the ingredients could not be simpler.  For one portion of pasta, you need 100g of pasta flour and one egg.   That's it.  No oil, no water, nothing else but your own two hands which you will now get very mucky indeed.   You break the egg into the flour and start mixing with your fingers.   With luck, it will all start to bind together and your finger mixing moves onto kneading the ball of dough.   Kneading should continue until the ball of dough feels as smooth as a baby's bottom and then you need to cling film the dough ball and leave it to rest for 30 minutes in the fridge.   You can then take it out and start to roll and stretch the ball of dough into sheets of pasta.   This you can do by hand if you are an Italian matriarch with 30 years experience, a 3 foot long rolling pin and a 12 foot long scrubbed oak table - or you can be sensible and use a machine.   This is a bit like a mini version of an old fashioned mangle and you keep feeding the pasta through the rollers, tightening them each time until your lump of pasta dough becomes a beautiful long sheet of perfect pasta. Now that sounds simple enough - so why had I not had the courage to try it prior to being shown how to do it by Steven Bulmer?  Well of course, whilst it sounds simple, there are lots of things that can go wrong.   Take your two basic ingredients.   If you use the wrong type of flour, it won't work.  If your eggs aren't perfectly fresh - it won't work.   If your eggs are not just the right size then the ratio of 1 egg to 100g of flour won't work.   If you take your three basic ingredients of flour, eggs and hard graft, each has to be present and each has to be just right or that perfect pasta just will not appear.   Each ingredient has a key role to play, take one away and there is no pasta.   No egg?   You can knead your pile of flour until doomsday but it will still be a pile of flour.   No flour and you may as well just boil the egg and have that for tea.  No graft and the flour and eggs remain as a congealing mess on your kitchen worktop. So yes - here is yet another Trinitarian analogy.   The nature of our God is a three fold one.   God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.   Remove one and God is not complete.  The very essence of our God is His Trinitarian nature.   The doctrine of the Trinity separates us as Christians from all other religions.   Muslims believe in God but not in the Trinity - how could they when they see Christ as a prophet not the Son of God. Sarah Maitland had another analogy that demonstrated the interdependency of the Trinity.  She compared it to the plait in a young girl's hair where the three strands of hair intertwine to form the plait.   Remove one strand and the whole plait collapses, it ceases to exist.    Just like the pasta, remove one of the three ingredients and there is no pasta. Now we could keep looking at analogies to help us with our understanding of the Trinity but I'm not sure it's really that helpful.   After a while, you will all sit there thinking, "All right, all right - we get it and start coming up with your own three fold analogies to describe how something can be three things as well as one; the three sides of a triangle, the three musketeers, the three stooges - I don't know. The reason we have all these analogies is because the popular belief is that we need to understand this complex concept of three in one before we can believe it.  After all, we are all rational people, why would we believe something unless we understand it?   I didn't believe that I could make pasta.  I didn't believe that the instructions in my book would be sufficient.  I was, rather like my namesake, a doubting Thomas, unwilling to believe in this minor miracle of transforming flour and eggs into this strange rubbery sheet that's good to eat until someone who knew what they were doing showed me - held me by the hand and showed me that it was not as hard as I thought. We are by nature, a doubting bunch we humans.   We like proof absolute before we believe something - or at least that's what the rational side of our brains say.  So we can't believe in God until we can understand how this three persons into one riddle actually works.   But there are lots of other things that we believe without really understanding them aren't there?   Do we all understand how a television works - how those pictures fly through the air and get to our screens or do we just believe that someone cleverer than us has sorted it all out so we can believe that when we press the on switch, the picture will appear. Do we know with certainty when we meet our future partner that we will be perfectly emotionally, biologically and intellectually compatible?   Or do we just believe in our instincts that it feels right.   If we're willing to take so many things on trust, why is it that the doctrine of the Trinity has been such a barrier to people's faith.   Why do we go to such lengths to explain it to people before they can truly believe? It is an alien concept for us to comprehend but then so is the concept of a virgin birth.  So is the concept of a man rising from the dead.  So is the concept of a man who loved us so much, he was willing to endure a chillingly painful and protracted death for our benefit.   Our faith asks many questions of us and asks us to take a lot on trust.   Every Sunday, we declare that faith in the words of the creed and every time we say those words, we are proclaiming that we don't need to understand everything in order to believe it.  Our creed is a statement of all those things that make up belief - a belief based, not on empirical evidence but on faith.   We all say, "We believe in one God" but then go one to state that we believe in three, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.    We need to believe in the words of the creed.  The creed is much more than a recitation of ancient sayings handed down to us over the last 2000 years.  It is a proclamation. A proclamation that we, as Christians accept the mystery of our three fold God.   A proclamation that we don't need to understand the concept of Trinity in order to accept it and a proclamation that we glory in the Triune nature of God. We are so privileged that our God can be not only the Creator of Heaven and Earth but also a man.   Our God loved us so much that he became one of us in order to show us the path to salvation - to show us how love works.   Our God can be not only our Father in Heaven but also an invisible Spirit who is here with us now - offering to enter into us and guide us on the path to salvation. We don't need to understand how God does this in order to reap its rewards, any more than we need to know how our TV works in order to watch the Ten O'Clock news.   You've all got on your weekly sheets, a symbol like this.   It's called the Scutum Fidei or the Shield of the Trinity and is a very ancient symbol that has been used through the centuries to explain the Trinity.   You might like to dwell on it later - not because it will bring you to any better understanding of how the Trinity exists but because it may help you to rejoice in the wonder of its existence. I thought making pasta was a mystery that I could not unravel - until someone held my hand and explained that it was all about having a go.   Don't try to understand too much about how it all works just do it and enjoy the results.  Maybe we would do well to do the same with our notions of God this Trinity Sunday. Let us pray. God the Father, we thank you for the wonders of your creation.  We thank you for the gift of life that you have given to us and the abundance that you have provided for us on this earth.   Jesus, God the Son.  We thank you for leading us along the path of righteousness.   We thank you for the ultimate sacrifice of life given for all of us,.   God the Holy Spirit, we thank you for your saving grace within our hearts at our times of greatest need.   Be with us now and always.    God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we bow in wonder at your feet and give thanks for all of your great gifts.  Amen.  **Tom** |  |