

“Synergy in Mystery” a sermon preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin on Sunday 11 June 2017. The texts were Matthew 28:16-20 and Genesis 1: 1, 2, 24 to 2:4

Today is the only day in the Church Year given the name of a doctrine, Trinity Sunday.

Sunday after Sunday of an absorbing story it seems a rude interruption. The story we began in Advent.

The call to Mary and Joseph, the announcing of birth, the moving in the womb, a couple seeking refuge, the birth, the escape, the growing up, teenage devotion, the baptism by John. A story of God with us.

The call to the disciples to follow, to give up, to leave behind, to cast aside, to move, to keep moving, to walk with Jesus, companion and guide.

And the call of Jerusalem, the forboding, the skyline of wall and cross casting their shadow over Jesus even as people were healed and forgiven, rescued and set free, and then the seemingly inevitable tragic necessity of crucifixion, the forsaking by followers, the violence of the empire.

The empty tomb, the appearing to disciples, the sharing of food and drink, recognising Jesus at the table, beginning to speak of him as alive, a breaking through from the future, uncontrollable, untameable.

The disciples in an upper room, together, the Spirit coming upon them, intensely, touching each person, propelling them together on to the street with the good news of Jesus, and people hearing it in their own languages.

And now, Trinity Sunday.

As Nadia Bolz Weber puts it”

“It’s like there’s this raucous party of Easter and Pentecost that comes to a screeching halt while an old crotchety man shuffles up to the pulpit, blows the dust off an enormous leather bound book, clears his throat saying *And now a celebration of church doctrine* causing the music to fade, the last of the Pentecost streamers still floating to the ground. Church doctrine Sunday.”

Do we need it?

The respected American preacher of a previous generation, George Buttrick, was once on an aeroplane scribbling out sermon notes on a note-pad. The man next to him asked what he was doing and so Buttrick said, “I’m working on next Sunday’s sermon – I’m a preacher.” “Oh yeah,” the man replied, “religion! I like to keep my religion simple—I don’t like complicated doctrines. ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’ The Golden Rule—that’s my religion!” “I see,” Mr Buttrick replied, “and what is it that you do.” “Well, I

teach in the science department at the university. I'm an astronomer." "Ah yes, astronomy," Buttrick said. "Well, I don't like to get very technical about such things. 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are.' That's my astronomy—why would anyone ever need more than that!?"

The doctrine of the Trinity is simply stated. That God is like three persons, three persons, with one being. God is one and yet three. The father is not the son or the Spirit, the son is not the father or the Spirit, the spirit is not the Father or the Son. But the Father Son and Spirit all are God and God is one.

The doctrine is simply stated; the reality to which it points is mystery.

It is not a mathematical puzzle, $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$.

And it is not really about the numbers, 1 and 3.

And it is not one person with three jobs.

To quote Ben Myers, the oneness refers to God's incomparable mystery, that the one God is mysteriously revealed in threeness.

And the threeness refers to the fullness of the life of the one God.

An interweaving community of three distinct persons.

As you can tell, it is a totally inadequate way of speaking about God, as are all concepts of God - it seeks to witness to the mystery of God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is our humble attempt to testify to a reality we cannot describe. It is as much about who God isn't, as to who God is. It is as much about what we do not know, as what we do know.

Matthew notes that some worshipped and some doubted. They may have been the same some, the same people, on different days.

For doubt comes into the space between God and our grasp of God, and it is in that space too that we worship, trusting ourselves to the little bit we see, risking our lives for what is revealed to us.

Tom Long says it is like walking down a forest trail.

To take up his image in New Zealand, we notice the majesty of tane mahuta, and the fragile ferns growing on the bark, and the colourful mushrooms at ground level, and the way the light shines through the trees, and the play of the light on this plant and that plant, and then we enter into the cold, dank, musty, part of the forest.

Now, says Long, the entrance way is Jesus, and in attending to Jesus we are drawn along the trail, to know the god of Jesus and the beauty and mystery of god.

A doctrine to shape our imagination and our behaviour, our way of seeing, our way of living. Which is why we are baptised, immersed, plunged, soaked in the name of the trinity. Not a concept to be grasped; a life to be lived. A mystery that envelopes us, in which we participate.

Like water to be washed with; food to be eaten; a path to be trod; a partner in conversation; a breath in our lungs; a wind across the paddocks; a future breaking in on us; a lover who sets us free, a beauty that silences us, a magnificence that awes us, a conscience that shames us. We participate in the mystery of God, the love flowing within the being of God.

Rublev's icon, a Russian Orthodox icon inspired by the Abraham story of the 3 visitors he welcomed. The 3 figures in the icon are depicted as angels seated at a table. They have identical faces but their postures and clothing differ as though we are looking at the same figure shown in three different ways. It is how they relate to each other. The father looks to the son gesturing toward this Word made flesh, Christ gazes back at the Father but points to the Spirit, and the Spirit opens up the circle to receive the viewer. In the front is an open space at the table in which we are brought to sit in communion with the God head. A relational circle into which we are welcomed.

A doctrine that shapes our imagination, how we live.

As an example of what it implies, here is the theoretical physicist turned Anglican priest and theologian John Polkinghorne in his book *Science and the Trinity*:

With physics moving in a more holistic direction, we might expect by analogy the need to challenge the individualistic atomism that is so characteristic of contemporary thinking about human nature. If electrons are counter-intuitively entangled with each other, we may need to contemplate the possibility that persons participate in some greater solidarity than atomised Western society is able to recognize. Such an insight is surely consonant with the Christian understanding of the community of the faithful as the Body of Christ, constituting a web of relationality vastly more comprehensive than the one-to-one exchange of I and Thou."

The doctrine of the trinity, seeking to witness to the expansive mystery, oneness, threeness, distinct persona, yet one in being, spilling out in how we are, how creation is, giving space for all to be included.

Ascription of Praise

Now to the One who by the power at work within us
Is able to do far more abundantly
Than all we can ask or imagine
To God be glory in the church
And in Christ Jessu
To all generations, forever and ever.
Amen

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