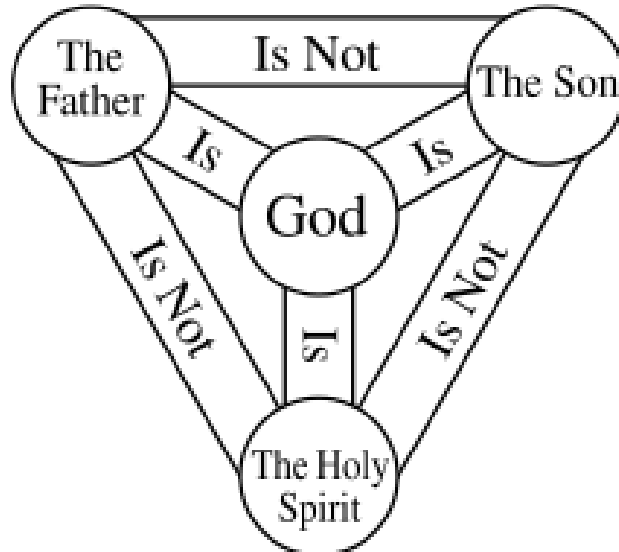


**Sunday, 22 May 2016**

[Trinity Sunday](#)



Trinity Sunday is a difficult Sunday for preachers. We are given the task of taking a complex idea, like the Trinity, and communicating it simply and clearly. The idea of the Trinity is this- God is one in nature, but three in persons. ... If you ask what God is, we say “God”. There is only one such being in that category. If you ask what we are,... we say human. God is in His own category. ... If you ask who God is, we say “Father, Son, Spirit”. ... As we speak we have to be careful not to mix the persons of the Trinity together. However, we also need to be careful that as we describe the Persons of the Trinity that we don’t divide their nature- which is God- one and unified. That’s the basic idea. Three persons. One God. It is not necessarily an easy concept to hold in your head.

As we try to make it easier to understand we quite often get into trouble. We try to make it easier by imagining that God changed

into three forms. So he was The Father, then he became the Son when Jesus was born, and once Jesus ascended he became the Holy Spirit. But we get in all kinds of trouble when we do that. For example, who was Jesus praying to if he really was the Father? This is what makes it's also difficult to find a picture to help explain it. Sometimes people will talk about an egg- shell, yolk, and white, but still one egg. However the separation is too distinct. We might talk about light going through a prism and being separated into the colours of the rainbow. Or, a musical chord made of three notes. Or, Neapolitan ice-cream.

The difficulty is that we are describing the God of the universe. Imagine an ant trying to understand who you are and what you do. The understanding between the ant and the human being is actually closer than that between us and God. Sometimes we don't take the time to realize how much God is beyond us. Imagine how unbelievably amazing a being we are talking about. This being is beyond time. He doesn't just live forever, he is outside of time. He created time. He is beyond the physical universe. He doesn't have a physical nature. This being created the universe. When we start looking at how massive the universe is, we get a little glimmer of the power of the being we are talking about. This being is beyond our understanding. This being is beyond our words. Anything we say about God is like a crudely drawn picture.

When my sons draw a picture of our family I come out somewhat recognizable, but I don't think I could use it for my passport photo. Our words about God are like that. Anything we say about God is a crudely drawn image, and has very little ability to really describe God. Calling God "Him" is even

problematic because he is so different and beyond other “hims”. We call God “Father”, or “love” and all of this is just not good enough. We can never get our language beautiful enough, or accurate enough, or profound enough to really describe what we are talking about. Even using the word “God” is problematic, because it can bring to mind the Roman or Greek gods, but we are talking about a being that is beyond all that.

When Moses was introducing the people to the God that rescued them from slavery, one of the commands they were given as they learned to become God’s people, was that they were not to make an image of God to be used in worship. Any image would not be good enough, no matter what image was used. ... Idolatry is confusing God with what is not God. Any image or description of God risks idolatry, or confusing God with what is not God. This is sometimes called Apophatic Theology, which is a theology that says we are really on safer ground when we say what God is not, rather than saying what God is. In India there is a tradition where they will say in Sanskrit “Neti Neti” which means “not this, not this”. God is not this. God is not this. It is easier to say what God is not then to say positively who or what God is. God is so beyond us we have a very difficult time really gaining a clear understanding of who God is. We might look at the world and wonder where it all came from, but what can we really say about the source of everything we know... except to say that it must be other than it? It must be other than a tree, a mountain, a star, me. It seems logical and necessary to point to the source... beyond creation, and beyond our own thoughts to that something or someone else out there way beyond is all-beyond time and space even. All we seem able to do is point, but even that is a problem because we aren’t really sure what we are

pointing at.

But then what hope do we have in knowing this being, let alone having a relationship with “Him”? Anything we try to do really is pretty pointless. Our technology cannot help us here because all we can do is look at what this being has perhaps made.

We can reach out all we want, but it is a fruitless effort ....unless..... God reaches back. ... We cannot know God except through His self-revelation. God has to reveal himself to us if we are to know him at all. Revelation is God showing us what we couldn't possibly know any other way. Revelation is God expressing Himself through the person of Jesus Christ. Revelation is transcendence becoming immanent. A priest I know once said it this way. It's like being near a lake on a really sunny day and the sun is too bright to look at, but the reflection is slightly less bright so it is possible to look at the sun through the reflection on the lake. Jesus Christ is the reflection of God-the image of God. He allows us to see God in a more clear way. The God of the universe, who we can't say much of anything about, showed us Himself in Christ. Jesus is the pinnacle experience of humanity with God. God has reached out to humanity in many ways over the thousands of years, but Christ is the clearest expression of God's reaching out.

People have written their experiences with this revealing God and have gathered these experiences together in the Bible along with the experiences of others throughout thousands of years. That doesn't mean God doesn't continue to speak to people. The Holy Spirit is present with us and communicates to us, but the Bible allows us to measure our experiences against the

experience of the community that has been having encounters with God for thousands of years. So through those pages we see God reaching out to us across history and we can start to know this God when we read through the pages... especially when we have Jesus in mind as we read.

If the only way we can know God is if he reaches out to us, and if the Bible is a record (in some way) of God reaching out to us as a community, and Jesus is the most clear image of God reaching out to us that we have, then the Bible (read through the lens of Christ) is the best chance we have of knowing about God. One of the things we learn about God as we read through peoples' experiences with God, especially experiences with Jesus, is that there is a threeness and a oneness about God.

Jesus tells us to go out and make disciples, baptizing them in a threefold way- in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). Paul blesses the churches in a threefold way, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14). In Genesis 18 three mysterious visitors come to Abraham. It says the Lord appeared to him and then it says there were three men. In Colossians 2:8 we read that "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form". In John 14:9 Jesus says that anyone who has seen him has seen the father. In John 15:26 Jesus says "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me". There are plenty more passages we could look at, but I think you get the point. The way we hold all this together is the Church's teaching about the Trinity.

As the saints and theologians poured over the Bible they arrived at what we now know as the doctrine of the Trinity. It's not that they didn't have it before, it's just that it became more polished. It's really just direction to help us speak rightly about God. It is advice to show us where the boundary markers are in our language and thought about God. The doctrine doesn't remove the mystery of God. The teaching on the Trinity describes the mystery.

Our experiences with Jesus are like a tightly packed rosebud and the more time we take over the centuries to reflect on the church's experiences with God the more we learn to speak about God. Sometimes we get it wrong, sure, but I think we sometimes get it right too. And that is the Holy Spirit working to bring us into truth. After Jesus ascended he didn't leave us on our own to figure all this out. He said that the Holy Spirit would be left with us to help guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

This is how we can feel confident talking this way about a God that is so beyond our wildest imaginings. It is bold for sure. We are speaking about something that is beyond our thought and language. But, we boldly trust that God has reached out to us and that the Holy Spirit has helped us to see this, especially through our reading the Bible. And especially as we get to know Jesus who is the clearest image of God reaching out to us. We have to trust in his reaching towards us or we are hopeless to

know anything about Him. The good news in all this is that God has made himself knowable. And that dusty Bible sitting on most people's book shelves is the primary way to know Him (along with Prayer, of course), but the Bible is where we learn who we are praying to. It is not an easy book. Of course it is not an easy book to read. We are learning about the transcendent God. It is not easy, but I do believe it is worth the effort.