

# The Trinity - is about who God is, ...

*... His purpose and how He's going to achieve it.*

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*A sermon given on Trinity Sunday 4th June 2023 – by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster*

*Matthew 28:16-end*

Well, today is Trinity Sunday, and for some reason that's put me in mind of a certain football match that took place yesterday. I believe it was the FA Cup final, yeah? Manchester City came out on top and I'm thinking if somebody landed from Mars knowing nothing about it, and they talked to a member of that winning team, they might say, "Who are you?" And the answer once they'd given their name might be, "I'm a professional footballer, that's what I do, that's what I've dedicated my life to. I eat, sleep, drink, live football. It makes me who I am. If you cut me in half, you'd find football written through the middle. That's my identity." And your visitor from Mars might scratch their head and say, "Well, that's very interesting, but what's your purpose? You've told me you're a footballer, but what are you trying to do?" And the footballer might say, "Well, I'm trying to win games of football; I'm trying to score goals; I'm trying to help my team to be the best it can be; and we want to win the cup; be the top of the league; be the best that we can be - that's our purpose." The Martian says, "And how are you going to do that? What's your method? How are you going to achieve your purpose?" And the footballer says, "I'm going to train hard; I'm going to go to bed early; I'm going to have the right sort of diet; I'm going to learn from other top players; I'm going to make sure I do everything I can to be a better footballer."

And it strikes me that those three questions about identity and purpose and method are really important questions. They're questions we can apply to ourselves and they're questions we can apply to God. If you can imagine that we're bold enough to say to God, "Who are you?" God's answer might be, "I am Love. That's who I am."

But when you start digging into that simple statement, 'God is love', it starts getting quite complicated, because in order to love, you kind of need to have at least two people; love is something that has to be given and received; it's something that's exchanged; it's something that brings people together. And so the statement 'God is love' suggests that God isn't just a single unity, but that God is a community; God is a fellowship; God is communion; God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the three of them equally giving and exchanging love -" but all of them together as one God. And it's interesting comparing Christianity with Islam, because a Muslim might say, God is loving, god can show love." But a Muslim would never say God is love, because a Muslim has a sense of God as just the unity, very strong monotheism that God

is one - but there's no sense of God sharing love within himself, which is what we have with the Trinity. So when we ask God, "Who are you?" - that question of identity, He says, "God is Love."

So what is God's purpose in having made you and me and having made this amazing universe we live in? I think the answer is the same: God's purpose is love; that the world has been made to receive his love, to respond to it and to share it; God has made the world out of love; and God's purpose for the world is love, that everyone should know that they belong, that they are precious, that they are special.

But again, there's a slight sort of tension there, because on the one hand, God wants everybody to be free, everyone to be unique and individual - we each of us have our own gifts, our own experiences, our own preferences, our own calling - we're all different. And yet there needs to be an underlying unity too, if we're not just to keep falling out and arguing with each other and coming to blows. And so God's purpose for the world is unity in diversity, there should be a celebration of everything that's different and varied, and yet a recognition that we all belong to each other, we belong together. And part of the challenge of living in this world is coping with those who are very different from us, but giving them space, giving them the freedom to be who they are while still seeing in them the image of God that holds us together.

So who is God? God is love. What's God's purpose for the world? His purpose is love. How is he going to do it? Well, He achieves his purpose by showing love. And that's what the story of Jesus is all about. The gift of God's Son coming to show, to reveal God's love for the world. A love that wasn't cheap or sentimental or idealistic, but a love that was costly and tough. A love that took Jesus to the cross, into death and out the other side. A love that was costly for the Father letting go of his son, being separated from the Son, seeing his son being treated and humiliated in such a way.

And then the Father gives the Holy Spirit to continue the work of Jesus in the world, to help the Church be the Church, to show God's love, but again, to show it in that self giving, sacrificial, generous way - that love that translates into mercy and compassion and generosity and patience and kindness.

And so Trinity Sunday is when we celebrate who God is, what His purpose is and how He's going to do it, and we can apply that question to ourselves, who are you? Who am I? And the answers come out the same. If I'm a child of God, then I'm made to be loved and to show love. If I'm a beloved child of God, I've been made to receive his love and to reflect it back. What's my purpose? Then my purpose is to share that love with others and to be God's means of showing his love in the world. And how am I going to do that? What's my method? Well, it's to do it like Jesus did it, to do it by reaching out to the stranger and the outcast, by showing mercy and

forgiveness, by allowing the Holy Spirit to grow his fruits within us, those fruits of patience and kindness and gentleness and long-suffering and forgiveness.

Trinity Sunday is an incredibly rich thing, but it's not abstract. It's not about clover leaves or steam, ice and water or how can three be one? That's irrelevant. It's about who God is, what his purpose is and how he's going to do it. And it's about who you are and what your purpose is and how are you going to do it.

And we can only manage this unity in diversity if we come before the throne of the one who is one God, but three persons. And we come and share in the body and blood of Christ, and we open our hearts again to His Holy Spirit to help us to be more like Jesus, to guide us in the ways of the Father, and to help us to reflect that unity in diversity.

It's such an exciting, wonderful world we live in, and so often our temptation is to narrow it down, to stick with those who are like us, to make it two dimensional - and Trinity Sunday blows it open. It helps us into the fullness of the life that God intends for you and me.

And it begins by contemplating the amazing truth of His oneness and His relatedness, His communion, His fellowship - that He invites you and me to join this morning.

# Reading Texts

## **Matthew 28:16-end**

<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'