

# The Trinity ...

## *... what it tells us about God*

---

*A sermon given on the Trinity Sunday, 15th June 2025, by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster.*

*John 16:12-15*

It has been suggested by one theologian that we should avoid using the word 'God' altogether because it causes so much misunderstanding and when people are asked why they don't believe in God, the reasons given often show that the God they don't believe in is not really the God of Christianity at all - it's not a God you or I would believe in either: in particular, the idea that God has to be some all-powerful authority figure wanting to make everyone conform and be the same. For that reason, another theologian once said that the only antidote to atheism is a full-blooded doctrine of the Trinity: that there is one God, but that the oneness is expressed in three persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So Trinity Sunday is the obvious opportunity to explore what that might mean - it's important to say that the idea of the Trinity isn't the result of some abstract academic discussion in the Senior Common Room - It's the result of the way people have actually experienced God over the centuries, and the way that experience has been expressed in the Bible.

So what does the Trinity tell us about God?

Well, first of all, I think it tells us that God is Big, at the risk of oversimplifying. God is the creator; He's not part of this world; He stands outside it; He can't be compared to anything else - we have to live within the limits of time and space and reason, but God doesn't because he's the source of those limits, those first principles, those axioms. He set them up, and so he transcends the reality we know - in other words, he's bigger and that means our knowledge of God is not like our knowledge of other things. It's not based on the rules of logic and reason and evidence, because they are part of the created order and they don't tell us anything about the creator himself - any more than a painting by Picasso tells us what Picasso was like: if you study Picasso's great masterpiece, Guernica, you're not going to get any sense of what it was like to hang out with Picasso in a café.

Because God is bigger than our reality, He is mysterious and unknowable. He is the source of everything that exists, which means He's there, whether we believe in Him or not and we can't confine Him in a little box marked religion or spirituality - He is the God of everything that exists; He is what is ultimately real. But we can only know him if He chooses to make himself known to us and when we call God 'Father', what we're reaching for is this sense of the God who is so much bigger than us, who is mysterious, but who is the source of everything, and can only be known through the Son, who always points away from himself to the Father.

The second thing the doctrine of the Trinity tells us is that despite being too big for us to grasp, God nevertheless has a history with us - He's active within the world he's made. So for example, we can say that God is the creator - He's made the world freely and out of generosity; creating the world out of nothing; giving it space to exist and freedom to respond in its own way; giving you and me the freedom to love or not to love. And God has entered this world He has made, not only

sustaining it moment by moment by his Holy Spirit, but actively sending his son into the world - the Jesus story is God's story; the story of the divine becoming human; of heaven meeting Earth; or in more homely terms, it's the story of the Good Shepherd coming to search for what was lost; the divine lover, longing to be with the beloved.

God's story is the story of God making Himself known through Jesus by accommodating Himself to our limits. The Unknown God becomes knowable through a human person, Jesus Christ and as an aside, the flip-side of that is that every human person bears the divine image, so that although we are capable of knowing each other in relationship, there is also something ultimately mysterious and unknowable about every human being - we only know what we choose to reveal to each other. My point is that the Trinity means God has a history with us - there is a story about God and the world in creation, and in Jesus coming to be with us, and in Jesus coming in order to bring us home, to lead us back to the Father whom we cannot find by ourselves.

On the night before Jesus's death, Thomas says, *"Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?"* Jesus replies, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* And that's what Jesus's ascension is all about - it's not about the end of the Jesus story as he leaves us and goes back to heaven, the ascension is about Jesus, the God-Man, taking our humanity to be in the presence of the Father forever; it's about bringing our humanity home and making our story part of God's story - the Holy Spirit helps us to relate our story to the story of Jesus and the Father.

Now, you'd expect a sermon on the Trinity to have three parts, one sermon, but three points.

So the third thing I want to say about the Trinity is that it gives some meaning to the statement that God is love. If God is Trinity - three persons in one God - then God is a community, a network of relationships, perfectly united in love. There is only one God, so whatever Jesus does involves the Father and the Spirit as well. But within the Trinity, there are distinctions. So when we say God is love, there can be giving and receiving of love within God's own being: it's because God is love that he has made the world and you and me; it's because God is love that he wants to expand the circle of love to include what is not God, and that is you, me, and the world. And we are made in the image of this God who is Trinity, which means we find our true purpose and meaning not in being independent and self-sufficient and stand-alone, but through the gift of ourselves to other people. That's why parenthood is such a defining thing for so many people, because that's where many of us learn to give ourselves unconditionally and that's why the church is still important despite all of its shortcomings. If God is love, He can only be authentically known in communities where we are learning to love those who are different from ourselves and if I may be bold, that's why a decision to skip church on Sunday or to think that whether I come to church or not doesn't really matter and only affects me - I want to suggest that's a profoundly mistaken view: coming to church isn't just about seeking a spiritual experience between me and Jesus; church is where we discover the love of God through each other, with all our quirks and eccentricities and sharp edges. If we are to be saved, we need our neighbour, because it's only through our neighbour that we discover the God who is Trinity.

So the Trinity tells us that God is big and mysterious and not like us. Yet it also tells us that God has a history and that our story is part of God's story with an endpoint in heaven. And the Trinity tells us that God is love, a love that is expanding and all-embracing, a love that invites you and me to enter its circle, a love that gives meaning to our community life together and to all that we might give to one another.

# Reading Text

## John 16:12-15

<sup>12</sup> *'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*