

Trinity Sunday 2018 (8.00am)

Trinity Sunday that day beloved of preachers, the day when you invite someone else to deliver the homily! The vicar of the parish in which I formerly worshipped reputedly mounted the pulpit on Trinity Sunday gazed piously to the sky and said 'The Father', (holding out his right hand), 'the Son', (holding out his left) 'and the Holy Spirit' (whilst imitating falling rain with both hands). He then returned to the sanctuary! I would have loved to see someone try that at our conference on preaching last week!

Beginning study at theological college is a daunting prospect for many. Whilst there is the excitement about what you may learn, there is also the trepidation about what you may have to unlearn. And perhaps at the top of the list is the question of God.

Among our first lessons at St Mark's was Introduction to Theological Studies, in it we were introduced to two giants of the theological world in the last two hundred years. The first was Frederick Schleiermacher: Born in Poland in 1768 he was child of the enlightenment, a time when Christian belief was to undergo great scrutiny. Philosopher of the enlightenment Immanuel Kant wrote: 'The doctrine of the Trinity provides nothing, absolutely nothing of practical value, even if one claims to understand it; still less when one is convinced that it far surpasses our understanding.' Thomas Jefferson, about this time, called it 'mathematical nonsense' and promptly became a Unitarian. So when Schleiermacher wrote his great work 'The Christian Faith' his chapter on the Trinity came at the end.

The second giant was Karl Barth. Writing between the wars he once again brought the idea of God as Trinity to the fore in his Magnum Opus 'Church Dogmatics,' he wrote a chapter on the Trinity at the beginning. For him it was *the* Christian doctrine. The problem was that my book on the subject of God had no chapter on the Trinity at all!

When I went to St Mark's I bought a copy of 'Wenham' it was *the* text on New Testament Greek, but I couldn't understand it; and I wasn't alone. Many of us had not been taught the rules of grammar, we were perfectly able to speak and write in English but we didn't know the rules and we struggled to learn our Greek. The doctrine of the Trinity has been described as the grammar of the Christian faith. Before St Mark's I had spent years singing lustily about the Trinity, Holy, holy, holy; I had recited the Creed more times than I care to think, I had prayed in the name of Father, Son and Spirit but I didn't understand the grammar and I failed to grasp the greater meaning of what I was saying, singing or praying. As one writer put it: The Trinity, easy to sing about difficult to understand!

As I mentioned just this last week the clergy of the diocese have met in conference. The main presenter was a teacher of homiletics and he spoke with passion about preaching the word of God. We listened to a number of sermons and we worshipped together. Our leader spoke about illustration and application as essential points of a sermon and when we broke into small groups we discussed these weighty matters. When my turn came I spoke of my immense good fortune. I am a part of a parish that enjoys a fullness in its worship, we value our preaching yes, but then we point to the sanctuary and the altar, to the baptistery and the font...its illustration and application. Ultimately what we are on about when we speak God's word, when we speak about God, is profound communion. This is the grammar of the Trinity, this is what it means!

John today describes Nicodemus' struggle to come to grips with the profound truth of communion. God is reaching out to the world he loves in the mission of Jesus to bestow upon all people the relationship which has been the prerogative of the Son from all eternity, in the Spirit. And because of this Paul is able to write in that purple passage in Romans that when we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that same Spirit at one with our spirit saying that we are children of God, heirs of God with Christ. Gosh! The great Trinitarian icon by Rublev adorns our votive stand today it shows the Trinitarian God, there is a place at the table it requires of us to join to close the circle. Profound communion, the grammar of the Trinity.

Rowan Williams once said our calling is find out what God is doing and get involved. So if we take our place at the table if we get involved, if our spirit is at one with the spirit of God our calling is to play a role in the great movements of God, the movements of creation, redemption and sanctification. So we can never gain abuse the creation that sustains us all, we can never again fail to play a part in lifting up those in need and we can never again fail to see the special, the sacramental in the ordinary. We might, indeed we should, find such a calling a daunting prospect; but it is ours. Like Isaiah and many of the prophets we might try and escape our calling, woe is me I am a man of unclean lips! But called we have been, lips cleansed and called to take our place at the table. To speak the truth 'God so loves the creation and to prove it he entered it, so that everyone will have the opportunity to join in and take a seat at the table forever.' Profound communion, the grammar of the Trinity.

Can I encourage us all to consider our own baptisms in which we were born anew in the Spirit? And when we come forward to the altar can I encourage you to imagine we are indeed taking our places at the table in communion with God the Trinity....and with each other. Profound communion, the grammar of the Trinity. Amen.

Trinity Sunday 2018 (Baptism – Sam Mahony 10.00am)

When I recall my initial experiences at St Mark's, when I began to study theology there are two that stick in my mind. We were introduced to two giants of the theological world Fredrich Schleiermacher in the 1700's and Karl Barth in the 1900's. We learnt that Schleiermacher, a child of the enlightenment, had relegated the Trinity to the very last chapter in his great theological tome. Barth by contrast devoted the first chapter to the Trinity. My book had no chapter written on the Trinity!

My second recollection is that I bought a copy of 'Wenham' it was *the* text on New Testament Greek. But I couldn't understand it; and I wasn't alone. Many of us had not been taught the rules of grammar, we were perfectly able to speak and write in English but we didn't know the rules and we struggled to learn our Greek.

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the Trinitarian God, there is a place at the table it requires of us to join to close the circle. Profound communion, the grammar of the Trinity.

Today is a very special day, and those of you who were here a few weeks ago will know that I like the word special. Our church is dedicated to special Philip and very soon another person will be added to that list of those we call special. But is that person not already special you might well ask, is that person not already an exemplar of specialness and the answer is yes, he is. Lancelot Andrewes an English Bishop during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, once preached: 'Christ's baptism is about all of us becoming Christians. So perhaps just as at the altar we re-present the event of the Last Supper can we say at the font we re-present the baptism of Christ? We acknowledge that specialness. Many of us are baptised as children we cannot affirm our faith but we are acknowledged as special and under the care and love of parents and Godparents we are encouraged in that faith. Sam is to be acknowledged today as a child of God, his parents and sponsors will commit themselves to care and encourage.

What might that mean for them and for the rest of us? Rowan Williams once said our calling is find out what God is doing and get involved. So if we take our place at the table if we get involved, if our spirit is at one with the spirit of God our calling is to play a role in the great movements of God, the movements of creation, redemption and sanctification. So we can never gain abuse the creation that sustains us all, we can never again fail to play a part in lifting up those in need and we can never again fail to see the special, the sacramental in the ordinary. We might, indeed we should, find such a calling a daunting prospect; but it is ours.

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Very soon Sam will be baptised in the name of the Father and of Son and of the Holy Spirit, he will take his place at the table with all of us. Profound communion, the grammar of the Trinity. Amen.