

Trinity Sunday 2021

Isaiah 6:1-8, Romans 8:12-17, John 3:1-17

A great English theologian and scholar (whose name escapes me) was travelling in America on a lecture tour. He was a great intellect but totally muddle-headed and would often get confused about where he was. He got on a plane to go somewhere and checked his diary to see what the topic of his next lecture was to be, it was 'God in tomorrow's world.' Anyway he gave a great lecture from minimal notes and concluded with a rhetorical flourish by saying: 'if the doctrine of the Trinity didn't exist it would be necessary to invent it.' As he sat down his host at the university said, 'that's daring!' 'Oh' he replied 'I thought it was quite orthodox.' 'Yes,' was the reply 'but this is a Unitarian Conference!' Unitarians *do not* hold to the doctrine of the Trinity, Unitarian Christians, therefore, believe that Jesus was inspired by God in his moral teachings, and he is a saviour, but he was not a deity or God incarnate. There are plenty of Anglicans who think the same way it seems! Too few of us would look to the Trinity when asked to explain the nature of God, but Trinitarian thought pervades everything in our spiritual life. It is the central doctrine on which everything else hangs, our understanding of God indeed our understanding of human nature.

The God who is Trinity is at the same time both so simple and yet so complex. If we begin as a starting point with that short creed from John's first letter: God is love, then we can, I think, see what I mean. On one hand love seems the simplest thing in the world and yet we cannot even begin to scratch the surface of the literature, the music, the films, and the poetry that have been written about love, let alone our own personal experiences. Love defies a simple definition; even the Greeks with their precision, their different words for love could barely begin to give us the vocabulary to give voice to love. Is it then little wonder that we struggle to give voice to the Trinity, this God who is the very essence of love.

At the ascension, the angelic men in white say to the disciples men of Galilee why are you looking up? This is a starting point for us to begin our meditation on God. Karl Barth the great Swiss theologian of the 20th century famously once said 'you can't talk about God by talking about humans in a loud voice.' His was a theology born out of the horrors of the Great War when our sense of humanity was a low ebb. The world was traumatised by the events of the war and the level of destruction. There is truth in Barth, and his statement reminds of the contextual nature of theology. But the fact is that we do anthropomorphise because God has been revealed to us in the person of Jesus, a person whose Spirit rests in us and animates us. The Trinity tells us as much about humanity as it does about divinity. All of us have from time to time despaired about human nature, but in Christ we have had our faith in humanity restored. Humanity redeemed shows us the Trinity; human life lived in such a way that the creating, redeeming, sanctifying nature of God is revealed.

Of course, push this thesis too far and we are in heretical territory; but I find it very difficult to live out with any joy a spirituality which pushes the line that humanity is totally irredeemable. 'For God so loved the world...' surely that says something about human nature, surely that says something about human potential. Is not the Trinity about redeemed humanity nestling within the Godhead, as we say at Ascension Jesus takes our humanity home with him. Our ears might well prick up when in the Hebrew Scriptures God uses the 'royal we.' When God says in Genesis 'Let *us* make humanity in our image.' But is not Christianity about the new heaven and the new earth, and is not the new heaven and the new earth achieved by the reconciliation of the human and divine in Christ? We often speak about the famous icon of Rublev that adorns our votive stand. The space at the table, we are told, is for us. But the fact is we are already there in the person of Christ.

Now it could be argued that I'm simply pedalling a classic liberal line with its positive view of humanity. It could be argued that by now I should have woken up to myself and realised that humanity is doomed, we can't get anything right, we stumble from one crisis to the next. We are all dreadfully wicked! The problem with that low view, is that it is a short step from there to have a low view of the Church, and from there a low view of the person of Jesus and where does that leave us? How can we know God?

I am not a fan of the term 'High Church,' it is past its use by date. But let's be bold: we need to be High Church. We should have a high sacramental view, why are you looking up? Look around you! Everything we do suggests that God is present in our assembly. In word and sacrament and in the gathering itself. We are not perfect no, we are we being perfected; by forgiving one another, by the offering of peace we are acknowledging our potential. We don't condone when things clearly are not right, but we do not condemn because we know and believe in humanity's potential. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world.

If we hold to a high view of Church we cannot hold to a low view of Christ. If Jesus was simply the one chosen by God as a great moral teacher, how can his death be the means by which God's Spirit is unleashed, the means by which the Church is born, the means by which we receive his Spirit of adoption?

We can speculate about the Trinity, but that doesn't get us very far. We need to look around us at the world and hold fast to a high view of all that we see. See in the entire created order the work of God the creator, look at the Church and see the Christ who makes everything new in that creation, and allow the Spirit to breathe into our lives, the love that is God's very essence. Now we're getting somewhere! And who will speak of this God? Here we are, send us! Amen.