

Welcome to everyone on this Trinity Sunday.

No doubt we are all familiar with sermons covering the topic of the Trinity: the concept of God existing as three identical yet separate entities within the Godhead. This is not an easy concept for us to grasp.

Over the millennia since Christ lived on earth as the Son of God incarnate, humans have struggled to explain the Trinity in earthly terms. This has resulted in us being fed on a diet of simile. What's more, none of the similes have worked well, from the oldest; St Patricks simile of the single leaf yet three lobed clover or shamrock, to the most commonly used simile today of ice, liquid water, and steam all having different physical states yet nevertheless having the same chemical state as water.

To quote St. Paul in his first letter to the Christian Church in Corinth, *¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.*

St Paul is telling us here that the time to be thinking of all things in immature terms ends when we come to maturity. This applies especially when it comes to looking to understand our own faith. We believe in God, a difficult enough concept in itself, but as we contemplate the nature of God, which exists beyond the space and time in which we are bound, we start to face even more difficulty.

One of the difficulties we face is coming to decisions or definitions in this regard.

We know that the concept of "trinity" is not biblical. Nowhere in the bible does anyone, not even God, tell us categorically that God is Trinity.

There are, though, hints.

In the Old Testament. In the first chapter of Genesis, God is referred to as *Elohim*, a Hebrew word that is a plural, even though it is always used with a verb of the singular case. My favourite hint is when God

says to God's self in Gen 1: 26 "*Let us make human kind in our own image*". Not only does God have a conversation within God's self, something that for humans requires two or more people, but God uses the word "image", meaning "a particular single view". Humans are not made identical in all aspects to God, but only in a single image or aspect of God.

There are constant references to the "Spirit of God" throughout the Old Testament from Genesis, where God's Spirit hovers over the waters of creation, to the writings of the later prophets such as in Isaiah 48: 16 and Zechariah 4: 6

In the New Testament, such hints at "trinity" are much more common, again, from the first book, to the very last. I invite you to check out Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14, 1 Corinthians 12:4-5, Ephesians 4:4-6, 1 Peter 1:2 and Revelation 1:4-5.

Even in today's reading from the letter to the Romans, we see St Paul writing about ¹⁴ *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God, then When we cry, "Abba! Father!"* ¹⁶ *it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and finally* ¹⁷ *and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ: Father, Son and Spirit are all spoken about in the one context.*

As people over the generations have read such passages as these, and others, they have been thinking about God as Trinity, with the result that the church "catholick" has come to a formularised understanding of a Triune God given in the words of the Apostles' Creed, the so-called Nicene Creed, the Athanasian (or Latin) creed and the Chalcedonic Determination. We in the Anglican arm of the Church of God, have adopted all these, even reciting the Apostles' creed in our Daily Office of Morning Prayer, and saying, together, the Nicene Creed in Sunday Services.

The Doctrine of Trinity has been arrived at after centuries of inspection, interpretation and translation, and is part of the foundation of our Anglican faith.

But, and this is a really big “but”, the fact remains that these statements of the Doctrine of Trinity, in themselves are statements of faith. The two that we commonly use both begin with the word “believe” not “know”.

Trinity is, in earthly terms, a paradox. In time/space, which limits our physical universe, it is not possible for three “persons” to exist in a single eternal being. But because God has to be beyond time/space, because he brought time/space into existence, God can therefore exist in ways which we do not have even the words to describe. Trinity is a mystery that we can perhaps glimpse, in part, in limited ways, but cannot know about, for sure, in any way.

St Paul prefaces his words concerning childish understanding, with these words, ⁹ *For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part;* ¹⁰ *but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.*

What he means is that although our understanding of the Doctrine of Trinity is necessarily incomplete, our experience of the Mystery of the Trinity, although limited by our circumstances, is necessarily very real to us. Incomplete knowledge does imply non-existence. Incomplete knowledge can grow, and will also come to completion when we meet God face to face.

I see no reason to attempt an understanding of the Doctrine of Trinity by using “baby” words., because that will only lead to a baby’s understanding.

We stand before God as mature humans, and mature Christians, with a growing understanding of Theology and all that entails. We are able to accept paradox, we can live with the Mystery of the Trinity: we can hold the paradox for now, in a mature way, until we will experience full knowledge once we leave this Physical World and enter God’s Spiritual Realm.

Belief in anything not yet proven is hard, but as we work on it, good things come as our knowledge grows. It’s the same with our belief in a Triune God. It’s hard. The world often calls us at best, babies, and more often than not, dupes. We who hold to the mystery, know better.

We are neither babies, nor dupes. Rather, we believe in the truth through our *experiences* of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We may not be able to put our belief into exact words, we may even from time to time fall back on childish concepts when forced to explain our understanding of the true nature of God, but we need not be ashamed. We are mature Christians. “Experience” rather than “definition” is our reality.

I pray that, whoever we hear in the voice of God calling out to us, whether it is the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit, we are all mature enough in our understanding of the nature of God to recognise the truth of that call and have faith enough to answer, “Here am I; send me!”

A very holy Trinity Sunday to you all.