**Relationship – The Heart of the Trinity.**

If you have ever shared your life with a two to three year old, you can probably remember their incessant questions, particularly the but why questions, but there are various others. One of my sons was great at them, I remember when driving past a letter box one day he said, How does the postman make himself small enough to get inside there to collect all the letters? Questions drive our curiosity and frame our lives.

The early Christian church had powerful, life transforming experiences of God. We have been looking recently at how their world had been turned upside down by Jesus, particularly by his death and resurrection. Last week we looked at their experience of being filled with the Spirit of God and how this enabled them to boldly share the message of Jesus throughout their known world even in the face of persecution.

The Church was experiencing God in ways that didn’t quite fit their former understandings of God. The Christian church began out of Judaism, a monotheistic faith, yet very early in the life of the church they are speaking of Jesus as being equal with God, Jesus spoke of being sent from God and also spoke of the Holy Spirit as being sent from God. Jesus spoke of being one with the Father, and that he must return to the Father so that God’s Spirit may come and stay with his followers.

The Trinity is the doctrine which developed from the efforts of the church to articulate their understandings of God in the light of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church and their own experiences of God. Before there was ever a doctrine of the Trinity, there was an experience of the Trinity.

The Trinity is a mystery, not a puzzle. Puzzles can be solved, but the more you explore mysteries, the deeper they become.

Over the centuries people have tried to develop helpful ways of describing the Trinity, some of which have proved valuable and others have just seemed to probe the depths of mystery in such an intensely technical manner that yielded little of value.

Can we really ever find adequate descriptions of God?

As followers of God we want to do so, because God is so intensely important to us. Our experiences of God draw us together, to worship and explore our faith in settings such as this each week. We want to be able to describe to friends and family why God is important to us in language that is intelligible to people who may rarely think about God at all, or who believe that a belief in God is a delusion.

And so one of the things we are reminded of each Trinity Sunday is that it is impossible to do justice to the nature of God in words alone. Language alone is simply inadequate. The triune God needs to be experienced. God chose to fully enter into participatory relationships with humankind. In this way,God expresses true empathy and relational love to humankind, but also the vulnerability to be hurt by the actions of humanity.[[1]](#footnote-1)

One of the reasons we can say that God is love is that we have seen that God exists in a constant communion of love, in the three persons of the Trinity, and has done so even before there was anything else in the universe to love. Love is never alone, and in the triune God, there is a constant mutual giving and receiving of love. There is an active and interactive unity within the Godhead.

Expressions of this love within the trinity are expressed most powerfully when we read of Jesus praying, sometimes hearing some of what he prayed, and when we see the blessing of God upon Jesus particularly at times like his baptism and at the transfiguration.

Our passage from Romans reminds us that God draws us into relationship with God. The intimacy of this relationship comes out in the language used, we are called children of God, adopted into the family of God, ones who cry out to God as a young child would cry out to a loving father, we cry *‘Abba’ ‘Father’.*

The masculine language which tends to dominate our Scriptures would not have seemed peculiar in its time, however in our age it can give a patriarchal flavour to concepts of God which may convey the idea that God is male. On this Sunday in particular we recognise that God is beyond the power of our words, God is beyond gender, all our efforts at describing God are limited.

However we do see in Scripture that there is a great intimacy in how God is described in relationship to humanity. God is holy, wise, powerful, creative, and active, but also loving, gracious, nurturing, patient, and kind. God can be described as a motherly Father and a fatherly Mother, certainly consistently reaching out to draw and embrace us, to relate to us out of the depths of immeasurable love.

To be adopted into God’s family, would remind the first hearers of the influential and wealthy of their day, including Kings would often choose to adopt an heir into their family. They chose carefully often bypassing their biological children in preference for one who is seen to be better suited to carrying on their dynasty. So the concept of adoption points to a careful, objective choice, and a choice that will result in a complete reversal of fortune for the one adopted.

These verses in Romans remind us that God knew us before we were born, God had plans for us, God wants us all to be like Jesus. Even more, we are called co-heirs with Christ. We are called into God’s family, as adopted heirs, not slaves, but sons and daughters. Jesus has made this possible, his life, death resurrection and ascension, has forged a path whereby we can personally relate to God. Some of our newer translations speak of Jesus in this passage as *“the firstborn within a large family”.[[2]](#footnote-2)*This passage also speaks strongly about prayer. It is in prayer that we gain insights about God and that we experience God. The prayers we have in Scripture teach us about the nature of God. The prayers of Jesus give us an amazing insight into the nature of God and particularly into God’s irrepressible desire to relate to us and to all humanity.

Jesus’ disciples interactions with God in prayer forged their understandings of what God was doing in this newly emerging Christian community. Prayer is a vital part of our relationship with God. This communication with God also reminds us of the communication within the Godhead.

We are reminded that God’s Spirit helps us in prayer, we don’t know what to pray, but God’s Spirit intercedes for us, according to the will of God, God knows the mind of the Spirit and searches what is in the human heart. God’s Spirit actively assures us of God’s love for us and God’s acceptance of us. God’s Spirit reminds us of how God has been revealed to us through Jesus and of how Jesus death and resurrection deals with the problem of sin and separation from God.

There are no specific passages mentioning the trinity in our scriptures, but we do have some passages that mention the persons of the Trinity in such a way that their oneness and “three-ness” is apparent. This passage in Romans is one such passage.The mystery of the mighty God of the cosmos, the vulnerable God who walked among us, and the God nudging and whispering within us are all the same mystery, the same God. God will always exceed in every dimension our capacity to articulate an adequate description of God.

Why is the trinity important? Because we want to understand God and our faith in God as fully as possible. Worshipping a relational God reminds us that relationship is at the heart of our Christian faith, therefore working at relationships is core to who we are called to be. Working at our relationship with God and working at our relationships with others is a key aspect of following Jesus.

Worshipping a relational God who walked amongst us in human flesh, reminds us of how God understands our challenges. Worshipping a relational God who continues to walk with us reminds us that God is always keen to engage with us, to teach, encourage, challenge and inspire us.

1. Fiddes, *Participating in God,* p.208 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Romans 8:29b NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-2)