

Trinity Sunday

It is Trinity Sunday and it is our feast of title. We are the Cathedral of *the Holy and Undivided Trinity*. We became a cathedral in 1542 and got our name then. The Abey church used to be dedicated to St Augustine. And, when that building was founded, in 1140, this day, Trinity Sunday, was a very novel idea.

Pentecost, the feast we kept *last* week, was there from the beginning. Trinity Sunday was not. Pope Alexander II was once asked if there could be such a thing as Trinity Sunday. Now, he was a man who knew his own mind. Alexander was the Pope who told us we must never say alleluias in Lent. He was the Pope who blessed William the Conqueror before he invaded England. This Pope could commit to something new. But, he thought you could not have a Trinity Sunday. You could not have a Trinity Sunday he said, because you say *Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit* every day. In fact, he was fighting a losing battle and, by the time of Thomas a Becket, Trinity Sunday was here to stay.

But Pope Alexander was on to something. And, if we can just get our heads round what he was trying to tell us, we might begin to understand why the Trinity matters. Pope Alexander thought that every day was a day for the Trinity. What Pope Alexander understood is that all day, every day, we live *within* the Trinity. On other feast days we tell a story. Wednesday is the day the church remembers Richard Baxter. I could tell you about him; I could explain him to you. On Trinity Sunday however, we just can't do that.

When we want to get to grips with something complicated, we talk about *getting perspective, finding an angle*. If it is getting near lunchtime and Chapter is forty minutes into a tricky debate about the cathedral strategy someone is bound to suggest we take *the long view*. To get hold of an argument, you set it out in front of you. You cannot do with the Trinity. The Trinity is not a story we tell. The Trinity is the story about us. The Trinity is our beginning and our end, our meaning and our existence. We can no more get an angle on the Trinity than a halibut can get an angle on the ocean.

That is why we heard that passage from Isaiah

To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?

Isaiah 40:18

As you may have heard me say before, we do not know God. Christians (and indeed Muslims and Jews) are the people who do not know God. As Isaiah reminds us. You cannot liken God to anyone or anything. So description fails.

We say God is *like* a Father, but of course God is nothing like the way I am a father, always rushing off to meetings, grumpy about what you want to watch on television and just possibly prone to cheating at Cluedo.

Let's go back to Isaiah. He wants us to know that there is love and justice and righteousness at the heart of everything and it has always been there.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? Isaiah 40:21

From the beginning, to the end, there is one explanation, one reality and it is God. There are not lots of explanations there is one. Christians do not believe in the gods. We do not believe in fate, or good luck, we do not believe in mother earth or crystals or the Market. We do not believe in a God who likes the English and dislikes the French. We do not believe in a God who is inclined to vote Tory (or Labour). We believe in *one* God.

We will come to the Trinity, I promise, but we need to stay with the one God for a moment. Our God is not one of the gods, not one thing to set against others. Everything that has happened and will happen, all existence, every idea I have, all your hopes and dreams, they all exist simply and only because of the God who creates and tells us *you must have no other gods but me*. I cannot, you cannot, step apart from this God and examine what God is like. We do not know God. But, we can know that from the beginning to the end God is God. There is one God at the heart of all that is.

That is important. In all the confusion of a hung parliament there are multiples stories about what it means for Brexit and who now governs. In the wake of terror attacks we have become people who live not just in fear, but in a culture of suspicion. We see the world as them and us. We talk about fake news, we think there is no common narrative any more. We see diversity and beyond it confusion. We should not do that. We believe in one God. We believe in the absolute integrity of all that is. It is our job as believers in the one God, to rescue the common narrative. It is our job to reaffirm the conviction that we are more united than divided. We should be doing that.

It really matters that we believe in one God.

But and it is a big and significant but... the one God in whom we believe (and who we do not know) is a God who reveals himself. We do not work him out, discern or fathom. We are dependent on what he communicates of himself. Isaiah again,

Those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, Isaiah 40:31

Christians are forever bustling about, getting in the way and telling you what God wants. They should stop that. It is those who wait on the Lord who get renewed.

God reveals himself so there are things we *can* know.

The first thing we know about God, is that God creates. All that exists because God pours himself out in creation.

And then, the God who creates is also a God who communicates. You could, I suppose, have a God who creates and then stays silent. Our God speaks. *In the beginning was the word* says St. John. So, another thing we do know is that God speaks. And the word that God speaks is Jesus. Which changes everything. You see the love that is at the heart of all things, the mysterious love of a Creator that pours itself out in the joyful business of creating, is also the love we encounter in a human being, Jesus. The God we cannot know, the love we cannot describe we met in Jesus and we recognize it.

Jesus is not created; he is not a creature. He has the same life of the Father and, in him, that life, the life of God himself, is perfectly united to the whole lively and messy business of being human.

And then, that mysterious life and love of the Father, which is lived in front of us by the Son, is also lived within us. We do not just see it, we share it. We are drawn into that life and love. That is the third thing we know. We know that the life of God breathes in us, that we are taken up into the life of God.

We may not know God. We do not know God, but we know what we need to know. We know that we meet God in three ways. We have to say that the one God is a Trinity. The one God is Father, Son and Spirit.

The one God in whom, and for whom, all things exist, is visible in Christ, and is at work within us living his life in us. We have to say that God is one and that God is three. Anything less is less than the truth.

And that is, in about twelve minutes, the doctrine of the Trinity. Thanks to the Trinity we can insist in the face of terror that we are not divided. Thanks to the Trinity we can insist in the midst of political confusion that there is still one story that unites us.

Thanks to the Trinity we know that the mystery of the God we cannot know is revealed in Jesus Christ. Thanks to the Trinity we can even look at one another and glimpse, in the love and conversation between us, something of the love and life of God himself. Ubi caritas et amor. Deus ibi est. *Where there is charity and love, there is God.*

Pope Alexander was right – every day is a day lived in the glory of the Trinity. It is a fine thing to be the cathedral of the holy and undivided Trinity.