

Encircled by Love

(Preached by Cheryl Williams on Trinity Sunday, June 7th, 2020 at Footscray Baptist Church)

Today is Trinity Sunday.

Today we celebrate the oneness of God whom we know as Creator, Jesus and Spirit.

As a child I heard many people try and explain this mystery – 3 leaf clovers; water in its 3 forms – ice, liquid and steam. No matter how it was explained the maths simply didn't add up.

Many years later in a Christology class I voiced my unease and ending up writing a paper called 4 into 1 does go. Now I hear you say my maths was really out of whack. Then my professor convinced me to explore the concept of Trinity in an honour's thesis, which I did and still remain highly confused.

Along the way I learnt some clever Greek philosophical concepts, even a Greek word or two. I learnt that you will not find a definition of the Trinity in scripture – only illusions to it. I learnt about the importance of this idea to those in the 3rd and 4th centuries – there were large Council debates and other fights and eventually it was in part one of the reasons the Eastern and Western churches split. I learnt about the Cappodocian Fathers – Greg, Greg and Basil. I learnt as feminist theology was growing so there was a renewed interest in the concept of the trinity.

Today on this Trinity Sunday I want us to try and understand what it means for us to call God 1 in 3 and 3 in 1. To think about why it matters.

To do that I want us to look at a picture, an icon and see what we might learn. The picture will be on your screen. This is called 'The Trinity' and was painted or written in the early 15th century. Icons are not idols, they are windows into God, they are religious pictures that convey inner spiritual meaning.

So, come with me on a journey.



At first glance this looks like a representation of the visit to Abraham where he entertains 3 visitors and in so doing understands that he is visited by God. They give him a message that he and Sarah will have a child, even in their old age. Sarah and Abraham offer the three hospitality. See the Oak of Mamre in the background, where the three were fed. And it is a representation of that. However down through the ages it became known as 'The Trinity'.

So, let's look and see what it reveals about God as Trinity.

Initially we are drawn to the three figures in the picture.

If we were to draw an outline around the three, we would have a circle.

All three, wear blue – the colour of the sky, the colour of divinity

All three have halos – light

All three have staves – authority

All three have wings, which even overlap – wings, angels, messengers of God

All three are gathered around a cup – a chalice, the eucharist

All three are seated around a table – the place of communion, welcome and hospitality

All three seem to be looking at each other, look at the way they gaze, their eyes defer to one another – loving relationship, mutuality, giving themselves to each other

All three are angled toward each other - interdependence

All three faces are the same, the bodies are the same just angled differently
- equality

None of them speak

What else do you see?

Let's look more closely at each person.

First, the figure on our left – a blue garment covered with a translucent outer garment that changes with the light – no one has seen the Creator, how do you capture the image, Scripture says we shouldn't anyway. And a house behind – the house of God?

Second, the figure at the centre – a blue garment with a red garment – symbol of incarnation and crucifixion. Red the colour of the earth, blue the colour of the sky or the heavens – the two united, two natures – human and divine. A gold band over the shoulder – the government will be upon his shoulder. Behind the figure a tree – the Oak of Mamre, the root of Jesse, the tree on which one is crucified – or all three.

The figure on our right. Blue and green – the colours of life, the colours of heaven and earth, of sky and water, of living things. Green the colour of regeneration. And mountain behind – I will let you ponder what that might mean.

Finally, a space, an empty space into which we are drawn. It is as though in order for the circle to be complete we need to enter into it, we are being invited in, we are being welcomed into the very life of God. Once in the circle we are surrounded by God's presence. We are caught up in the circle of love, we are encircled by love.

In the words of Anne Hunt (FaithGuide – The Trinity), the Trinity is not a puzzle to be solved, rather it is a mystery to be pondered.

Let me share with you just a little of what I see.

In this representation of God, I see – an open circle calling me in, I see mutuality, respect, love, being together, equality, unity in diversity. I see a community of equals offering hospitality.

In this representation of God and in the idea of the trinity I see a model and an example for the church. I see a way of being in the world.

Matthew tells us in the reading we have had today to go out into the world and baptising others in the name of the Father, the Son and the Spirit or in the name of the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sustainer, in the name of the 3 in 1 and the 1 in 3, in the name of the Trinity.

Therefore, to be the church, the people of God, made in the image of God my and our life should be characterised by mutual respect, equality interdependence, openness, an understanding of our interconnectedness with all that is, of unity in diversity, of love.

An understanding of the trinity is formative for me – it calls me to say that black lives matter, in fact all lives matter. It calls me to welcome the stranger in. It calls me to say stop mining the earth for all its worth and let it breathe. It means I cry when I see my brothers and sisters on bended knee or calling for an end to deaths in custody. It calls me to love. Amen.