

The Trinity - a community of love and reconciliation

(Preached by Cheryl Williams f@ Footscray Baptist Church, June 4th, 2023 - Matthew 28:16-20)

Welcome to Trinity Sunday. The day where we ponder the oneness of God who we know as Creator, Son and Spirit. Where we ponder how God is one in three and three in one. Our reading today calls us to go out and share God's message with all and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit.

This is called the doctrine of the Trinity and whilst there is no real explanation in Scripture for the doctrine there are allusions to it throughout Scripture – from the moment of Creation, to Jesus' baptism and his resurrection.

For hundreds of years theologians have tried to explain the trinity. Tri – unity – how God is both three and one all at the same time. In the fourth century some theologians came up with an idea that has now become the idea that most contemporary theologians use to understand God as trinity. However, there were many discussions, arguments, churches splitting over this idea along the way.

Belief in a tri-une God is what sets Christianity apart from the other religions that believe in one God.

So how do we understand this idea without thinking about three Gods or three faces of the one God – which all in the past agree were heresies.

Many have used images from the natural world to explain this. St Patrick used a three-leaf clover to explain it. Some pointed to an egg to help us understand – shell, yolk and white – one egg. Others pointed to water in its three forms – ice/solid, liquid, steam/gas. Even I have tried to show it with my mixing of food dye and water and vinegar and bi-carb soda. Others have used various images like you see on the screen, like the celtic knot.

I would like this morning to try and explain the idea with reference to a Russian icon I have shown you before, because it is the best image I know that reveals the understandings of the theologians of the fourth century, their understanding of the Trinity was about relationship, how all three related, were connected with each other.

Don't be worried about the idea of looking at an icon, an icon is an image or picture that provides a window into God, that helps us see God in a new way – there is no magic here.



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. 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. They are all similar and yet different. Notice that all three wear blue, which is the colour of divinity, they all have halos, they all have staffs. They are all gathered at a table around a cup. Their faces and bodies are the same, they are just angled differently.

Yet they are all different, they each wear another colour.

First, the figure on our left – a blue garment covered with a translucent outer garment that changes with the light – perhaps symbolising glory. This figure represents God the creator.

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. This figure represents Jesus.

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. The figure represents the Spirit.

Let's look more closely at the three.

Their similarity (face and body) indicates equality.

They seem to be looking at each other, deferring to each other indicating a loving relationship between them all, indicating mutuality and love.

They are all angled toward one another, see how their feet point to each other, it is like looking at one leads you to the next around the circle – they are interdependent.

They are all seated around a table, the place of communion, the place of welcome, the place of hospitality – but there is a space, an empty space which draws us in, it is like we are being invited to join the three.

This picture or image is exactly what those theologians 1600 years were trying to say about God, about God's life, about God as trinity. The three persons in the trinity were equal, existed only in relation to each other, were interdependent, were one. They are a circle of love, and it is into that circle that we are invited.

This image helps me understand both God and what I think we are called to be as the Church. I see – an open circle calling others in, I see mutuality, respect, love, being together, equality, unity in diversity. I see a community of equals offering hospitality.

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. And this has implications for how we think about our relationships with other Christians, with people from different races, cultures, situations, understandings.

We are now at the end of National Reconciliation Week and our country is preparing to hold a referendum about the Voice to Parliament. Our belief in God as Trinity should affect our understanding of race relations in this country – we should be working toward finding a way to celebrate diversity, our connections with each other should be respectful, loving and welcoming. This also applies to the way we treat all people (asylum seekers, the homeless, the addict, the prisoner etc) and indeed to the entire creation.

God is love and calls us to share the message of that love with others. The Trinity gives us a picture or image of what that love looks like. God calls us into his circle of love and welcomes us in.

Go and do the same. Amen.