

Life in God - understanding the Trinity and its implications.

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist, May 26th, 2024 - John 3:1-17 & Romans 8:12-17)

Welcome to Trinity Sunday. The idea of God as three in one and one in three has fascinated me since I was a child. This idea was just so complex and mysterious I wanted to know more.

The fascination stayed with me all the way through my theological studies and in the end, I wrote my Honours thesis on the subject.

Now I am not going to subject you to all the ideas and theories I have read over the years, that will only serve to confuse us all even more.

I do want us to try and understand the doctrine a little bit for a couple of reasons. First, it is what sets us apart from other religions, the idea that God is Creator, Redeemer and Guide all at the same time. Secondly, the way God relates in the Trinity is a model for us as church and I want to argue that we too are invited into that unified and diverse life.

You will not find the idea of Trinity spelt out in Scripture, but you will find echoes of it, we see some of it in our readings today. In John we see Jesus talking to Nicodemus about the Spirit. And then we read that God so loved the world he gave Jesus. In the Romans reading we hear how we are adopted into the family of God and a co-heir with Jesus. Clearly there is some important interrelationship and unity between God who creates, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and us.

We see the unity in Creation – God speaks, and things are created, in this process the Spirit broods or hovers over the waters and John tells us that Jesus was also present at the beginning. In Jesus' baptism we see Jesus in the water, hear the voice of God and have the Spirit descending like a bird.

Throughout the ages many have tried to explain this deep connection. Let me share with you some of these thoughts, some which I used before in the Children's Talk.

1. 3 leaf clover – St Patrick used this, to explain the separate parts yet how they all combined to be one clover.



2. Egg – shell, yolk, white equals one egg



3. Apple – skin, flesh and core equals one apple



4. Water – three states – liquid, steam and ice but all water



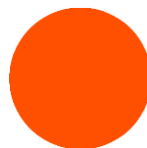
5. Triangle – three sides, three angles but only one triangle, however we want to be careful what kind of triangle. If we use an isosceles triangle we find not all sides and angles are the same, there is a kind of hierarchy.



If we use an equilateral triangle all the sides and angles are equal and there isn't really a hierarchy. If I move it around nothing really changes.



Perhaps a better image might be a circle. A circle has no beginning and no end, it shows interconnectedness more easily.

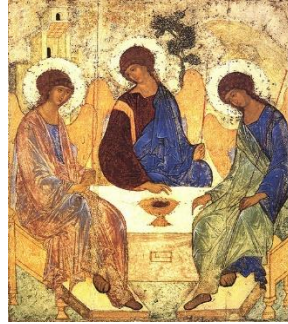


This is getting closer to the idea developed in the 3rd and 4th centuries, an idea they called 'perichoresis', now this is a complicated word so I will try and summarise it. It literally means round-about, a circle that one goes around and around. They combined this idea with another idea of personhood. Personhood to them implied relationship and mutuality, quite different to how we understand persons today, as individuals, self-contained, private, our understanding of persons was quite alien in the third and fourth centuries.

More recently (in the last 100 or so years) people have started to use different images to understand what life in God is like.

Let me try and illustrate again.

This is a picture from Russia. It was originally a picture of Abraham entertaining the three angels or visitors. More recently it has become known as an image of God as trinity. Let me try and explain why.



We have three figures that are similar yet different. They are equal. They seem to be looking at each other, deferring to each other, indicating their mutuality and connectedness. If you look at one you are drawn to the next one in the circle. They are seated around a table, a place of hospitality and welcome and there is an empty place, a space for us, like we are being drawn into the life of God. This is what they meant, in the third and fourth centuries. Unity and diversity, deep connectedness and caring relationship. A community of equals. If we were to draw an outline around the three figures we would have an open circle.

Another image might be that of a dance, different people doing different things but together they are the dance, and anyone can join in.



So, if the life of God, within Godself is like an open circle or dance we see unity and diversity, equality, welcome, connectedness and relationship and that means there are implications for us.

First, we are made in the image of God. We are made for unity in diversity, made for relationship, equal with everyone else, connected to everyone and everything.

Secondly, we are welcomed into life with God. We are embraced by God, held in God, participating in the life of God.

Finally, we are called to be the church, to be the people of God, to be the continuing incarnation of God in this world. Therefore, we need to reflect God. Hence, we need to be an open circle welcoming others in. We need to be celebrating our diversity. We need to show one another mutual respect. We need to be a community of equals. We need to be connected to each other, not a bunch of individuals, we need to be sharing each other's joys and sorrows. We will have different thoughts, cultures, understandings but rather than trying to change people we should learn from each other and celebrate our diversity. We must offer the same kind of hospitality that God offers us to the whole world and not just Christians.

The idea of God as trinity is formative for me – it shows me how I am connected to everyone; it calls me to welcome the stranger in, it reminds me that I should try and understand the perspective of another, and to celebrate our diversity. It reminds me that we are all equal in the sight of God and should be in the sight of each other. It reminds me we are all brothers and sisters, adopted into the love of God.