

Revd. Simon Lewis

Sunday 30 May 2021

Theme: Trinity Sunday

Isolation Radio Talk

May God deny you peace, but give you glory

Good Morning

The great festivals of the year, celebrated by the Christian Church the world over, focus on the great events in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; they end when the Disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which was celebrated last Sunday. Today is festival but of a different sort, today is Trinity Sunday.

I make no attempt today to explain the Holy Trinity; in any case, whole libraries of books have been written about it. No, what I want to do, is to concentrate on the idea of the Holy Trinity as a sign and a symbol of the glory and wonder of God.

The Trinity appears quite early in the Christian story; a little over a 100 years after the Day of Resurrection, Tertullian, the first Christian Scholar to write exclusively in Latin, seems to be the one who introduced the word, and the idea of Trinity, into thinking about God: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit; three persons, but one God.

At the very centre of the Christian faith, and unique to it, is the idea that it is God who takes the initiative; God comes to you rather than you go looking for God. You are asked to say your 'yes' to what God has already done; you respond to that in ways that match your present day understanding of the kind of world you live in; the kind of world you *want* to live in.

The key to understanding what the Christian faith is all about comes, curiously, from thinking about the Holy Trinity; it is about wonder; to be filled with wonder is also to be overwhelmed; that is where it begins; it is about *mystery* and *holiness* and *beauty* and, above all *love*. You can go on to say that it is about those things you cannot find words for, because they are buried too deep to be expressed.

Think of religious faith as light, say, from a single source, the sun. Because you cannot look directly at the sun the deeper truth is that you appreciate light because of objects that reflect it. You might say the Christian faith is about the simplest thing in the world; loving God and being loved by God no matter who you are or what you have done; at the same time, it is extremely complicated, because that love reflects on absolutely everything you do, or say, or think. Like the Trinity, faith is both as simple and as complex as the world you live in; when you are able, you say 'Yes, now I see.' The moment you say 'Yes, now I see', you are drawn into wonder, glory, thanksgiving; and the word for that, is worship.

Let me come at it another way. In the history of nations, there are significant times when life becomes a tempest; I suggest COVID-19 is such a one. It is true also on a personal level; excitement or great sorrow, great rejoicing; a death, a marriage, a birth; a change of work, a tragedy, a celebration; milestones in life's journey, whatever you wonder what the event means for you. The significant, recent death of Prince Philip has led some, especially at a nation-level, to think about the past, what kingship means, what the future may hold. I will tell you about a similar event from long ago.

Seven hundred and fifty years before Christ; (that is about as long before, as we now live, after our churches in Blagdon, Compton Martin, and Ubley were built), there was a Hebrew Prophet called Isaiah. He tells how

an event set him thinking about his life and his relationship to God. It was at the time he mourned his friend King Uzziah. You can read about this in Scripture, in The First Book of Isaiah, chapter 6, verses 1-9. Uzziah, the 10th king of Judah, died from Leprosy; he and Isaiah had known one another for the past twenty years; now the throne is vacant; Isaiah reflects on the nature of leadership; of power, of authority. He does so against a background of outward material prosperity, moral decay, and much corruption (2 Chronicles. 26): maybe this sounds a little familiar; any parallel with our own times you will no doubt regard as coincidental.

In his musing about the origins of power, politics, society, and the future, Isaiah describes in glorious language a vision of God, 'high and exalted'; heavenly bodies cry 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts', words taken up in the great hymn sung on Trinity Sunday, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty'. Yet Isaiah recognises how inadequate he is: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips (Isaiah 6.5).

The vision continues and expands until he hears God ask 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Isaiah replies, 'Here am I; send me!' (Isaiah 6.8). I tend to think that God asks the same question today of all who claim the Christian Faith; sometimes those who hear are faint-hearted. Isaiah later goes on to say, God tells you to, 'bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners' (Isaiah 61.1).

If this was the cry, then it is ever more urgent today. It seems a truth that, to our shame, the poor have borne the greater burden of the COVID-19 epidemic in our own nation, indeed the world over; it is always the poor who pay the price; while countries disgracefully engage in a playground squabble over Vaccines, impoverished countries have none. The distance between poor and rich grows; it should not be so. Communities everywhere hear the cry of the broken hearted; lives and families devastated by loss and grief. Set against this, wonderfully there have been enriching acts of great kindness offered and received by family, friend, and stranger alike who feel deeply compassionate.

By a strange twist, there is emphasis now, on past enslavement; do not ignore today people and nations held captive against their will; or individuals too, enslaved, as St Paul puts it, to their selfish desires (Romans 6.20-22).

A settled life will only be found in the graveyard where little happens. God however, is the grave breaker, the tombstone roller. God calls you to leave the graveyard and go with him; it is an exciting life.

Another author put it like this, 'May God deny you peace, but give you glory' (Miguel de Unamuno).

'Whom shall I send?' we are asked.
Send me.

Thank you for listening

Prayer

If God had a face
what would it look like?
And would I, would you want to see
if seeing meant that you
would have to believe in
things like heaven and in Jesus and the Saints
and all the prophets?

[One of Us, by Joan Osborne]

The quest to see the face of God, to find out what God is like and to be admitted into God's presence, belongs to the fundamental religious instinct of humankind - yes this does exist.

Let us pray

Eternal Light, shine into our hearts;
eternal Goodness, deliver us from evil;
eternal Power, be our support;
eternal Pity, have mercy on us;
that with all our heart and mind and strength
we may seek your face
and be brought by your infinite mercy
to your holy presence;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Or

Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you:
pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself,
where we shall see you fact to face;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.