

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Deep in the mystery of God there is community. There is only one God. Yet there is relatedness within this one God. That capacity for relating, for loving in communion, within the one being, is extended to include us. Jesus prayed for us to have the same unity that is the unity of communion within the one God. He said, *The father and I are one* – yet they are in relationship. That is the beginning of our understanding of the Holy Trinity – of communion within unity. A similar mutual relationship of the Father and the Son is expressed with the Holy Spirit, who is promised in the gospel reading today and elsewhere in Christ's farewell to the disciples and in the final prayer of Jesus.

Today is Trinity Sunday – the day we celebrate the unique three in one nature of our God – Parent, Child, Breath – Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. How can we describe a God who is one and three at the same time?

All our language about God is appallingly inadequate, but Christians have clung tenaciously to the doctrine of the Trinity as a way of preserving the many tiny truths God has revealed to us. Maybe our formula of the Trinity is a mere glimpse of the truth about God, but it is a critical glimpse – one that makes all the difference.

Trinitarian theology offers a profoundly relational and communal understanding of God as well as of life created and redeemed by God – God as self-expending, other-affirming, community-building love – God in terms of shared life and love. The Trinity also expresses the thoroughness, the pervasiveness, with which God wants to be part of our lives. Not just as our Maker, God wants to be with us in human form – and not just as a human incarnation, God wants to be within us as our very breath. Let's not get mired in defense of the doctrine but seek to enter into the spirit of Trinity.

We struggle when we try to express the mystery of God in human terms. God as Creator and Parent – God the Father – how did we come to such an understanding our God? Jesus brings the Aramaic word *Abba* into the centre – not a patriarchal, kingly head of the Hebrew people – *Abba* is the tender, forgiving, welcoming, persona; the one who comes down to the small child's level and sits on the floor; the one who plays games, tells stories, and picks the child up and carries him or her on shoulders. *Abba* is the extravagant parent of the prodigal, who throws dignity to the wind and runs to meet and hug and welcome

When we come to the Son, there are still some hurdles. With Jesus we have a real human being with a real story. He is not a religious concept but an unforgettable life. Jesus is a human being in whom God dwelt without reserve. Look on Jesus in action and you see God at work. Here is a God who can laugh and cry, thirst and suffer. Here are tears rolling down the cheeks of a unique visible expression of God.

God the Son is not an outsider who redemptively drops us a lifeline from above, but is one of us in the hazards of human existence. Humanity is being saved from the inside. God in Christ is the Divine insider. Jesus – the Son – gives himself absolutely so that through his love – through his saving grace – we might know God – the Father – in the fellowship of the Spirit.

Just as inadequate as Father and Son – Creator and Redeemer – is the *Holy Spirit – Sustainer*. It is a slippery concept, yet there seems no better word in our language through which we can describe the God who is invisibly and intimately here now and always. When we say Spirit we remove all barriers to contact between divine and human. By the power of the Spirit we can meet and be nurtured in community. God unseen, untouchable, uncontrollable, yet nearer to us than any thing – any person – any doctrine or idea – can ever be.

In the Bible, the word Spirit is used to describe God's presence in the world – God's very breath – creating things and creatures – recreating that which has fallen into degeneration. The Spirit is that fire in the belly which makes prophets discontented with the injustices of society and leads them to speak hard truths to people who do not want to hear. The Spirit is the holy witness that endorses Jesus at his baptism and sends him to preach, teach and heal. The Spirit is the divine intimacy that empowers the church at Pentecost – empowered us again as we celebrated Pentecost last Sunday. The Spirit breathes faith in each one of us.

If this imagery of Father, Son and Holy Spirit sounds too masculine to be true of God, notice the feminine character of *Wisdom* as she introduces herself in the lesson from Proverbs [Laura's paraphrase]:

***God created me at the very outset, I have been with God from the dawn.
I was shaped even before the world was formed. When there were no depths, I was born.
When there were no springs abounding with water,
Before the mountains or hills had been piled up, I was born.
When God had not yet made the earth or the fields or even formed the soil,
When God separated God's reality from the reality of humanity, I was there.
When God separated the sky from the ocean and the ocean from the land,
Then I was beside God like an eager child.
I was a source of joy to God because of my exultation of creation,
I celebrated God's creation and rejoiced in humanity.***

We hear the voice of *Wisdom* calling to all creation – to hear her voice and live. She has built her house; she has baked her bread and decanted her wine; she has set her table. She calls us to come – to eat and drink, to lay aside immaturity – to live and walk in the way of insight. *Wisdom* calls us – God calls us – the Spirit calls us – Christ calls us – and today in a public manner, in a holy and sacred manner, we celebrate as a community of faith the answering of that call.

The one who is calling to us is personified *Wisdom*, creation's first street preacher, known by the Greek name *Sophia* in Biblical literature. She is that female representation of the mystery of God called *Wisdom*. She is the most developed personification of God's presence and activity in the Hebrew Scriptures, much more acutely described than Spirit, Torah, or Word. She is consistently depicted as sister, mother, female beloved, chef and host, preacher, judge, liberator, establisher of justice and a myriad of other female roles in which she symbolizes transcendent power ordering and delighting in the universe. She is that presence which pervades the world, both nature and human beings, interacting with them in an effort to lure them along the right path.

Wisdom noisily proclaims her message to anyone who will listen. She is a prophet, crying aloud in the market – on street corners and at city gates – with a message of reproach, punishment and promise. *Wisdom* is a smart, justice-driven, passionate figure who wants nothing less than that everyone should follow in her playful, determined footsteps as she seeks to both transform and delight in the created world.

Wisdom is that creative energy of God – continually inviting us to abundant life – calling us to celebrate a relational awareness of our God who seeks to be woven into all of our being – imbedded and enveloping. This is the understanding that Trinity allows: **God to whom we come, through whom we come, and by whom we come to celebrate the love of God, the mercy and forgiveness of God, the healing power of God.**

Wisdom is meant to represent a right relationship with God – a relationship in harmony with the created order – a relationship that recognizes the power and authority of God – a relationship that values the mutual joy of the participants. *Wisdom* is a promise of the right relationship with God that is possible through God’s creative power.

We have come to see the inspiration of God the Father, the healing grace of God the Son, and the intimacy of God the Spirit – one God, yet a community of persons revealed in varied creation messages throughout scripture. The Trinitarian formula insists that the nature of God is closer to a loving community than to a lofty individuality. The highest form of existence, of personal being, is communal – God is communal.

If this is the God we worship, then true greatness lies in the direction of community and mutuality rather than in self-sufficient individuality. We find the true meaning of being human – of *being* – in relationship with others. The community of faith reflects God far better than any one person; no matter how gifted that one may be. In theological terms, individualism is a way of limitation, diminishment, and death. Abundance, growth and life take place as we give and receive – as we recognize our need for others and their need for us. Please join your voices to affirm our faith in the mystery of God...

As a community of faith we proclaim that the Lord our God is One

We will love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul and strength

This is the One who patiently and lovingly created and nurtures us

The One who prepares a future for us beyond all imagining

This is the One who amazingly and lovingly came to us in Jesus

The One who teaches a brighter, more blessed way – who lives and offers grace

This is the One who is intimately and lovingly among us in Spirit

The One who continually creates the community of faith – inspiring justice and mercy

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer – Divinity, Humanity and Wisdom

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We will love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul and strength

Amen