

Living Out the Vision of God as Trinity

Trinity Sunday 2019



Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

1 Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? 2 On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; 3 beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: 4 "To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.

22 The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. 23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth-- 26 when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. 27 When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, 28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, 29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, 30 then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, 31 rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

Romans 5:1-5

1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

John 16:12-15

12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Message

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of God as Trinity

Intro:

We have just heard three readings set for Trinity Sunday rich in reference to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the Epistle and the Gospel that is easy to hear while in the reading from Proverbs about wisdom it is anticipated in the way that something of God is known about but not yet known in person, like a baby anticipated in a pregnancy. Even before the coming of the Jesus reflections on the experience of God led to aspects of Yahweh, such as wisdom, being personalized and celebrated.

In the Romans passage we are focused on the reconciling work of Jesus through whom we have peace with God and encouraged in the love of God poured into us by the Holy Spirit given to us.

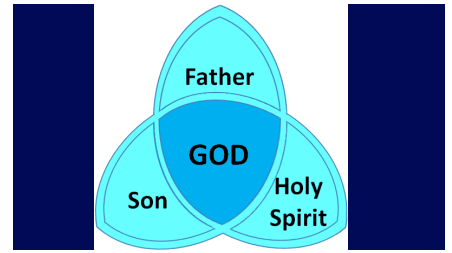
Then in the Gospel Jesus spotlights the coming Spirit of Truth as one who in turn throws light on Jesus and what the Father has given him and represents this to disciples seeking to know and live the truth provided in Jesus Christ.

As we are Trinity Church I take this opportunity every year to appreciate the Trinitarian vision of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a way that we can live.

Body:

To begin: There is a profound truth about worship that I often mention: We become like whatever we worship. We are made for worship and become shaped by the object of our worship. But, while humanity is hardwired for truth and love in the image of God revealed in Jesus Christ, we still become like the god we actually worship in our hearts. So this morning I want to open up a vision of God as Trinity to inspire us in becoming more like that Trinitarian God represented by Jesus.

The key insight I want to stress in this is that God is fundamentally relational. God, in and of God-self, is so relational that God is a sweet society in one. Within God's being are the most perfect relationships of love working out between entities named to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is a three-way interaction so perfect that it is a perfect unity. There are no cracks in God.



That makes God to be a small group of three persons which can be a mutually sweet fellowship or something too complicated to really enjoy.

A few well worn jokes suggest we know this already:

A joke used to be told about Israelis that two Jews would give rise to three political parties!

Something similar could be said for Dutch Calvinists and their talent for splitting churches over doctrinal disputes!

The English expression of 'two being company but three a crowd' also brings out what happens when we go past any binary arrangement.

Relational Trinity is a step beyond what we humans can imagine. The God designed human love limit is the married couple. Deep friendships are possible in other arrangements but the deepest unity in love is found in the bonding of man and woman in Holy Marriage. So when we speak about a perfect threesome that is a step beyond what we can envisage. I can give myself to one other but I cannot give myself to two others or receive love from two others with any integrity.


Jesus lived within this perfect three-person unity and that unity among distinct persons is the very being of God. The reading we heard from John reflects this so well how the Holy Spirit is so joined in unity and purpose to the Son as He is to the Father.

When the Spirit of truth comes, (John 16:12-15)

- He (*The Holy Spirit*) will guide you into all the truth;
 - for he (*The Holy Spirit*) will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.
- He will glorify me (*Jesus*),
- He (*The Holy Spirit*) will take what is mine (*Jesus as received from the Father*) and declare it to you.

Living in human frame Jesus knew more than anyone that he had to keep his eye on what his Father and the Holy Spirit were doing. He lived his life on earth out of that awareness and as a reflection or manifestation of his God-community. Consider these words of Jesus from John 5:19:

John 5:19



"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise."

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise."

That is the confession of someone so totally plugged-in and perfectly networked that together they form a totally integrated unity. Jesus was not an innovator. He was not the Lone Ranger. He was part of a team - the perfect team.

What he models for us is the way he patterned himself on what he saw in the Triune-Godhead. He patterns for us life in the pattern of God as perfect unity among multiple persons.

This is very different from the single being or monist vision of God such as held in Islam. It may not surprise you but a live question in Islam is whether one can have a personal relationship with Allah. Is anything possible beyond submission? That is very different from the God and Father of Jesus Christ as witnessed to in the Gospels and lived out by those baptized in Jesus Christ. The God of Judeo Christianity is inherently relational.

Application:

Q: So where might this Trinitarian vision of God lead us?

A: I am going to give two answers to that with reference to identity.

A₁ Identity and Unity.

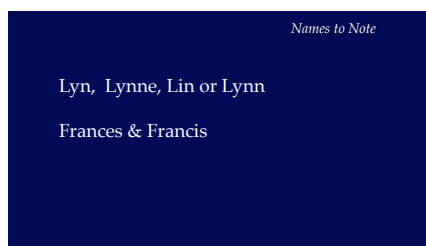
Let's think about our own identity and how we hold that.

I have noticed that when we are wrongly addressed it draws a reaction - sometimes even fierce.

For some reason I have often had the experience in the Netherlands of introducing myself as someone from New Zealand and with in a few minutes the person I am speaking to has turned me into an Australian. Then when I point out the confusion I have sometimes been told, that there is not much difference! At that point I need to clarify if not 'rescue' my identity.



Meanwhile:



- I have had to master four ways to spell a certain name: It can be 'Lynne', 'Lin', Lynn or Lyn. These all sound the same but are spelt differently. If I get it wrong I am told so.
- Then for some reason people from England often write to me as 'Frances' which I live with but eventually correct if it persists.

- I also see reaction from children when they are confused with their siblings. This can also be fierce and I see their annoyance!
- People from East Asia are easily wrongly identified so Koreans and Japanese get confused as do Chinese, from Taiwan, Mainland China, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong and beyond.

When your identity is not correctly recognized that can be a sharp issue and not one to let go. That is the basis for the identity politics of today whatever the identity issue may be.

The way we typically set out our identity is with our story. We can tell our personal story grounded in our family story and when that's done we can sing the songs of our people whether that's Brabant carnival music or commercial pop music from some era. With stories and songs we can set out our identity for ourselves and others.

When we say in today's communion liturgy: "This our story, this is our song." We are saying that our common story is the gospel story of Jesus Incarnated, crucified, risen and ascended. Our stories of identity all meet in his story making us one in Christ.

How flexible is this? The reality is that people are prepared to negotiate and bargain around prices, we may even consider compromises of values and principles, but when our sense of identity is touched it can

get intense very quickly. We cannot compromise on identity. If you take away my identity you are leaving me naked and empty at the level of my soul. Identity is rightfully non-negotiable.

One illustration of this may be seen in much identity-politics which engages if not exploits how people feel about their identity by making issues appear to be at that level of significance. So when a politician or a political movement defines an issue as being about identity wider thinking stops and the political discussion is then in trouble! This is nothing new but seems to be rising around us today.

The basic problem I see growing in the tumult of the nations around us today is the inability to accept or endorse identities that may not be appreciated because they complicate one's own sense of identity. How can we be us when they are here? How can we be us when they are who they are?

Tolerance is limited by the confidence in one's own identity. If our own sense of identity is weak, the different or distinct other may be seen as a threat.

We are living in an information age but many people are often not so sure about who they are or what is essentially them. Without a greater transcendent vision, any sense of personal identity will weaken.

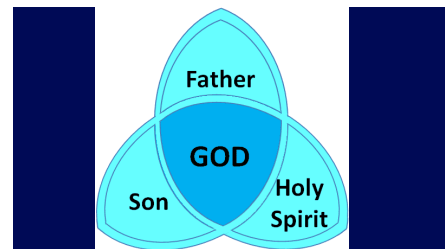
This is very important for teenagers who are struggling to establish their identity in an age where the story presented to them has gotten very thin indeed and the songs they are offered are nothing worth singing.

That is a depressing look at the world around us, the world we live in and follow on media.

Let's now look again at God as Trinity.

From what Jesus said and the creedal faith that arose in the early church, the vision formed of God as three persons in one.

Three persons implies three identities. We refer to them in the language of Jesus as: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



The Big Insight

The Trinity is a vision of God where three identities, three persons are so united in flawless love that they are one, totally one all the time. The Father loves the Son, The Son loves the Father, the Spirit loves the Son, the Father loves the Spirit without hesitation or limit. The self-giving and receiving of Father, Son and Spirit unites them without dissolving their identities or persons.

The Trinity is the ultimate unity in diversity. Any society or collection of humanity, any fellowship that wants to rise above the clan, tribe or nation needs to look to God for inspiration. That is why Christ is the hope of the world and one day all the nations will come to him.

A₂ Getting Practical:

What that means for us as church is that our identity in Christ -ie: our baptism- and our relationships are everything.

Church is to be a reflection of the Trinity with clear Christ defined identities relating in open loving relationship with all the baptized.

That is what we are about being as church.

That is the agenda.

If you have read the letters of St Paul and others in the New Testament this is what they typically focus on. They don't tell us to evangelize or campaign for worthy causes. The focus is on being a church of people grounded in their baptism and relating in genuine love.

Being in Christ and living out that fellowship in healthy relationships is how we as church reflect the image of God as Trinity.

That is the task at hand for a village church where generations live the faith in that place and everyone knows each other as it is for international churches where people are coming from all over the world and the fellowship is in flux.

In this church we do a few things to help that happen because it is a bit harder here than in a typical mono-cultural church. We have some provisions to make it easier.

We have a Welcome Team receiving people at the door. Madeleen and team extend a welcome to people which is about enabling relationship. From the main door threshold something of Trinitarian relationality is extended.

What they do makes a world of difference. Have you been to churches where there is no welcome and you slip in, find a seat then wait for something to happen?

That is not us. From the front door onwards an opportunity is given for relationship.

That is also why we have name badges.

The name badge is a simple way of saying: "This is my name and I am happy to be a known identity."

It is a way of saying: "I am open to relate."

This was the way God advanced his relationship with Moses and his people when He gave his name as YHWH. It was the equivalent of God providing a business card or showing his name badge.

Knowing God's name as he gave it meant that the Lord God almighty could now be personally addressed. The God who calls people by name could now be addressed in person.

As a school teacher I used to do playground supervision during lunch times. I learned very quickly that when it mattered calling out "Hey you!" did not get the attention of excited children up to no good. In a school of 500 it paid to quickly learn the names of all the trouble-makers so you could address them by name.

There is power in the name of God! There is power in knowing the name of our Saviour and we are told not to abuse the privilege of knowing that through wrong or inappropriate use of God's name. 'Jesus' is a beautiful name given to us with which to address our Lord and Saviour.

When we wear our name-badge we empower others to address us with confidence. Until then we limit the growth of relationship and run the risk of remaining at the 'Hey you' level. The name-badge also helps people connect face with name which is very helpful to me at communion.

One thing that works against all this today is consumerism. The younger you are today the more you are influenced by this. The consumerist approach reduces church to a supermarket or café. It becomes a place where one goes to get what one wants on terms set by the customer. I don't want to be personally known at the supermarket but church is meant to be different.

Another way of the world that works against church reflecting the Trinity is simply being closed to those whom the Lord adds to our number. This may be described as: 'I like who I know and know who I like.'

All this exposes the difference between being church or visiting church. I hear this heresy in Dutch and I hear it in English. We are not called to attend church or visit church but about being church and the vision of God as Trinity is our model for that.

Conclusion:

We are Trinity Church

We are a church of people from many places seeking to be church here functioning in English.

The way to do this is be solidly grounded in our identity in Christ and relate in love with all.

That is the business.

Let's do what we can towards that.