



## Trinity Sunday

19<sup>th</sup> June 2011

*Exodus 34: 1-8, Song of the Three, 2 Corinthians 12:11-13,  
Matthew 28:16-20*

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

On the day of the parish AGM we're blessed with short sermons! Trinity Sunday punctuates the liturgical calendar like a full stop. Placed, as it is, following the colourful seasons of Lent, Easter and Pentecost, it seems to give us an end to the sentence of colour before we move into the endless Sundays of green. I was also thinking that Trinity Sunday should also be named 'Seize-up Sunday', because after we've explored Easter, the Ascension and Pentecost you get given the Trinity and try to get your mind around it and everything seizes up. But it does also bring together, or appears to sum up, all we have celebrated and encountered: the Father-Son narrative of Easter and the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost all come together in the Trinity, the Full Stop of 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. And maybe that is one of the functions of Church doctrine - to give us a simple 'bumper sticker' that makes explicit our common belief.

For much of the church's history the Trinity has served well as a doctrinal full stop; it very neatly parallels the three-tiered universe that people believed they inhabited: Heaven above, Earth - the world at the centre, and Hell below. God lived in Heaven; his son came down from heaven to earth, and in the same literal sense that we heard in today's first reading:

*'The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there'*

You can picture it, slowly coming down from heaven in a cloud, gets to the top of the mountain and steps off! Then, after the Son, (who came in that similar fashion from Heaven), after the Son had accomplished all that the father had asked, he ascended back up to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit – a ghost-like phantom version of Jesus whose purpose was to keep us all from going to hell. The Trinitarian full stop was a fitting 'bumper sticker' to complete that simple sentence of belief.

Now our encounter with the universe has become more 'full', in that the three tiered universe has changed shape, along with the curvature of the earth, into a new appreciation of wholeness, and so the sentence has changed but the full stop remains. Trinity Sunday might therefore be an invitation to look again at all that it seeks to bring to completion. And that's quite a delightful way for us to be as we approach the AGM – to look again at every thing we are seeking to bring to completion.

The old sentence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is eternally being rewritten as we encounter life and encounter the Divine nature that gives life. Rather than a bumper sticker of doctrine, the abstraction of the Trinity can serve as an invitation that tempts us to look beyond the obvious. It is also an invitation to heresy – to an encounter with

the Divine in a sentence that is yet to be written, an encounter that is beyond all the imaginings of those who inhabited a flat earth.

The movements that are describable within the punctuation of the Trinity were not enacted in time and place; rather they are identifiable movements in a life that's lived in the wholeness of eternity. The Trinity is an icon of life unbounded by death, an icon of life that is alive in the spirit of resurrection. As we rewrite the sentence to which the Trinity provides a full stop, we discover some heretical insights:

Jesus is not the Son of God – get over it

God does not reside in heaven and never did

Hell is not the place where the fallen will go

And humanity is not that smallness of existence to be found under the clouds of heaven.

Rather we discover an intimate dynamic that echoes the very fire of Pentecost - a dynamic of birth, of death, of re-creation. The Trinity is an invitation to more truly dance with the stars.

To ground the Trinity into the doctrine of our everyday lives and to impersonate the threesome into Father, Son and Holy Ghost is like reducing the wonder of a symphonic masterpiece into an octave of eight notes. Rather than ground the Trinity into our understanding, we should open our understanding into the sentence that it brings to completion, and then into the paragraph that it brings to completion and then into the entire story that is punctuated by the Divine - the creator, the redeemer and the sanctifier of Love.

It was some twenty years ago I preached for the first time in the parish church at which I worshipped; the priest invited me to preach on Trinity Sunday. I knew then so much more than I know now, much more, and I give thanks now that there is still so much more to understand.

I just want to share a prayer from St Anselm (1033-1109):

*Lord Jesus Christ; let me seek you by desiring you,*

*and let me desire you by seeking you;*

*let me find you by loving you,*

*and love you in finding you.*

*I confess, Lord, with thanksgiving,*

*that you have made me in your image,*

*so that I can remember you, think of you, and love you.*

*But that image is so worn and blotted out by faults,*

*and darkened by the smoke of sin,*

*that it cannot do that for which it was made,*

*unless you renew and refashion it.*

*Lord, I am not trying to make my way to your height,*

*for my understanding is in no way equal to that,*

*but I do desire to understand a little of your truth*

*which my heart already believes and loves.*

*I do not seek to understand so that I can believe,  
but I believe so that I may understand;  
and what is more,  
I believe that unless I do believe, I shall not understand.*

Amen  
Peter Humphris