

## Trinity Sunday 31 May 2015

Isaiah 6: 1-8

Psalm 29

Romans 8: 12-17

John 3:1-15

[Pentecost +1 / Trinity B May 31, 2015](#) Textweek

The first reading includes the divine address of “Holy, Holy, Holy”; the second reading of Paul’s letter to the Romans mentions “the Spirit”, “Abba! Father” and “Christ”; and the gospel likewise includes “Jesus”, “God” and “Spirit”; so together they all have some reference to what we celebrate today, Trinity Sunday.

For us ‘Trinity Sunday’ comes between Easter and our AGM, and so is perhaps a time for us to reflect on all that Easter enlightens, and also an opportunity, before our AGM, to consider the future and reflect on what we will become, or are becoming.

The doctrine and theology of the ‘trinity’ can be easily written off and consigned to the ‘not particularly interested’ category; and yet it can be incredibly helpful to us as we explore our faith, and as we explore ourselves.

As an interesting aside, the navigational process for determining position (simple common one) is called ‘triangulation’, in that it requires three points of reference; we might wonder if the ‘trinity’ gives us three reference points to determine our own ‘position’.

To get a perspective on ourselves, to determine our position, where we are at, and to discover our direction and our movement, are very much a part of our seeking God, and also provide us with an appreciation of our part in the unfolding of tomorrow

So, what is the ‘trinity’; for most the answer is a simple formula of “Father, Son and Holy Spirit”; however, scratch the surface of that simplicity and we embarrass ourselves by the lack of depth to our understanding.

We might pause to appreciate where our understanding is given some exercise, for our understanding of the physical world has, and continues to grow at an amazing rate. What we know about the world has grown exponentially, and this expansion gives us a completely different sense of being and a perspective, or worldview, so very different from previous generations. It is that growing, and that movement, that gives us an awareness that we are very much a part of, and integral to, creation’s unfolding.

We participate as creators of the world’s unfolding; and we are subject to, or creatures of that same unfolding.

A delightful quote of Rumi illuminates this process as even more mystical: “What you seek is seeking you”

The image on the cover created via a mathematical formula is a ‘fractal’ in that it exhibits a repeating pattern that displays at every scale; the whole is in the part and the part is in the whole.

Fractal geometry is a field of mathematics that gives expression to a number of naturally occurring physical realities; and so at the same time an opportunity for us to glimpse theological realities in another language, the language of maths.

☒ Fractals illuminate the similarity between the whole and each and every part of the whole; a mathematical expression for the ‘Body of Christ’!

☒ They are created by iteration, repetition and the creativity of their changing and emerging shapes is due to variables, and expression of creative liturgy and perhaps also of a creative life!

☒ Fractals come from fractured dimensions, or fractions, they are birthed in being broken; and so reflect the Easter story.

☒ And they have the counter-intuitive property of being everywhere continuous but nowhere differentiable, an insight into eternity’s timelessness.

The history of the development of the church’s doctrine of the Trinity is a litany of struggle to establish an orthodox definition and a common faith position; it was a life and death struggle for many, and very much a part of the schism between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches.

There is much for us to learn, or contemplate from that struggle, and also much that has yet to be learnt; it is therefore even more sobering to consider that we have reduced so much effort to that simplistic mantra of “Father, Son and Holy Spirit”.

The appearance of fractal geometry gives us a new language for exploring the Trinity; and that is only one example of listening to ‘other’ languages to improve our understanding; icons provide another entry point for us to contemplate and explore.

Rublev’s icon (on page one of the service sheet) gives another view of the ‘Trinity’, it is another language, and rather than focusing on definition, icons somehow invite engagement and exploration...

In the icon, the persons of the Holy Trinity are shown in the order in which they are confessed in the Creed. The first angel is the first person of the Trinity - God the Father; the second, middle angel is God the Son; the third angel is God the Holy Spirit. All three angels are blessing the chalice, in which lies a sacrificed calf, prepared for eating. The sacrifice of the calf signifies the Sacrificial death on the cross, while its preparation as food symbolizes the sacrament of the Eucharist.

3

Others had painted this Biblical story, but Rublev was the first to paint only the three angelic figures, there is no depiction of Abraham and Sarah who the three angels were visiting.

And quite deliberately the three are of equal size; each holds a rod in his left hand, further symbolizing their equality; and each wears a cloak of blue, the colour of divinity.

Just to underline his theological understanding, the face of each is exactly the same, depicting their oneness. Rublev depicts the three as One Lord in a way that goes beyond the struggle for orthodox definition.

The overall position of the three at the table, and the geometry of the icon almost seem to invite us to join them and to share in the meal. perhaps the 'movement' in the icon also suggest movement to us, for the scene is of giving in hospitality and in sharing that hospitality, and the sameness of the figures seems to underline an equality of inclusion.

The small rectangular space in the front of the table is quite unusual in an icon; for traditionally, icons are written in a "flat" style of two-dimensions, with no conventional perspective used at all; Rublev has chosen to show 'perspective', or are we being encouraged to find our perspective?

Whatever language you speak, be encouraged this Trinity Sunday to seek an encounter with the Trinity, knowing that "What you seek is seeking you".

Icons invite contemplation, they somehow draw us into the place of prayer and that is the place where we find the reality of our unfolding.

As we contemplate the 'Trinity', we become aware of the evolution from a world filled with multiple gods, to the Abrahamic perspective of One God, now we have a fractal representation of many and one being the same. Have we embraced this evolution or are we still referring to a more primitive 'other' who is one above and beyond?

Rublev has taken an Old Testament narrative and brought from it a glimpse of eternity, do we bring our past into a realisation of tomorrow?

Read again the gospel story of Nicodemus, for in it we find encouragement to seek understanding.

The unfolding of the future, and the reality of eternity, the life of resurrection is only realised in and by our attending to it; we are part of a Divine whole, and if we are drawn into the living embrace of the Trinity then (and maybe only then) will we share in the hospitality of angels.

Peter Humphris