

Trinity Sunday 11 June 2017

[Exodus 34:1-8; Psalm – Song of the Three; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20](#) Vanderbilt

[Trinity A June 11, 2017](#) Textweek

Peter's Final Sermon as Rector of St Paul's

Today is an auspicious day, as I preach here for the last time as rector of St Paul's on Trinity Sunday, and there is an auspicious wholeness and a reminder that today is a beginning rather than an ending, for the very first time I ever preached was in St Mary's Church, South Perth, some quarter of a century ago, on Trinity Sunday.

Today's readings give an amazing insight into the reality of today and as I have contemplated the Gospel reading so too I have seen in the text today an affirmation of the path that lies unseen before me, and also before us all.

And again quite auspiciously, the final lines of Paul's letter to the Church also echo my own last words, for they speak not of good-bye, but rather of a blessing for all.

And in the first reading today we are given an ancient 'passion play' that illustrates the handing over of the Divine word; or another way of putting it we see an illustration of the acceptance of the Divine word, a receiving of the Divine into the hands of humanity.

If we were to sit down and pick readings to mark this auspicious day, we could not do better than the readings that are set down for us; and that serves as a reminder for us all that there is wisdom to be found if we only spend time bringing these ancient texts to life in our lives.

So the readings very much fit for the reality of today, but what of the whole theological meaning of the Trinity.

As I discovered when I first preached on the Trinity, long long ago; it is complex formula and in the early church a formula that cost lives both in establishing it as an orthodox doctrine and then subsequently as a device for weeding out heretics.

Most people have a simple understanding and can readily recite "Father, Son and Holy Spirit", but very few will go much beyond that in describing the theology that underlies the formula; and no wonder, for as we approach this doctrine as follow its traditional development we seem to get caught up into some three dimensional theological Sudoku that pointlessly seeks to make one plus two plus three equal one; and as we do the maths we end up wondering what's the whole point of the various proofs that the tradition offers us.

Like the readings today, and bear in mind they were chosen to illuminate 'The Trinity', like these readings, we have to read both text and doctrine into the present, and as

we seek the living word of God, so too we take ourselves beyond the tradition into a deeper knowing and also into a deeper unknowing.

The first reading, the story of Moses and the Ten Commandments, is just that, a story; and if we read it as history we'll never find ourselves reflected in that story and the living word will remain in the past.

Today we will engage in a "Rite of Sending Forth" a handing over of authority; and if we contemplate the text from Exodus we will discover the same process; a giving of the Divine Word and a receiving of the Divine Word, the ultimate authority, and the very real author of life.

The Moses story is retold in the birth narratives that we celebrate at Christmas; the Divine word, the very breath that authors all life is given into the hands of humanity; given in trust and faith that the very same 'Word' the very breath of life will be returned to its Divine origin; a trust that is made manifest at Easter.

Today we enact this life giving transaction; I will give back to you the authority you gave to me some 22 years ago; and therefore know yourselves as the Divine origin of that same authority.

Likewise receive from me all that has been given; not as tablets of stone delivered on a mountain, but rather as the word of this community that I have sought to hold; and a gift that I can now give back for I know that the 'Word' of this community is a Divine Word

"abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation".

The text of Exodus that we find ourselves in describes a path toward the 'land of promise' and in our Giving and Receiving, we seek that path together for our continued journey.

In the second reading; again rather than reading history, we see that Paul has given me the final words of blessing to voice for us here today.

And that is auspiciously important, they are not my words, rather they are Words of Scripture, Divine words that we bring into life and into reality here today; a reminder and a remembering that this is our very calling in being Church.

Remember that we did not choose these readings for today, they are set readings and how amazing that at St Paul's on this final day for me, we have Paul's final words to share with each other.

And in that same sense we have a really short, and yet very appropriate, gospel reading; for as we listen to the story of Jesus sending forth the disciples, so again, we enact the same in the "Rite of Sending Forth" that is our reality today. In the gospel we are not reading of a past historical event, rather we are finding ourselves written into and authored by the Divine Word.

And two very important insights come to light in the reality of today's gospel; the text shows Jesus doing the sending forth, and in our reality today, it is the community of St Paul's that makes manifest this action; a reality that here in this community we are the Body of Christ; and in being sent forth I go as your disciple, for my journey from here is to continue and broaden our work.

The other insight we can make real today is the closing remark; "*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" As we engage in the reality of the Divine Word we make real an eternal reality and we realise that Love abides, we will continue our journey together for as we will read in another part of the gospel, and as is made explicit in the doctrine of the Trinity, the one sending and the one sent are one.

So we have three readings from the Bible, and rather than seeking some past historical reference we find that we are living the reality of God's Word; there is no tradition to be maintained, rather we seek to discover ourselves reflected in the very Word of God.

And perhaps the same holds true for the Doctrine of the Trinity.

Biblical scholars and theologians will split the hairs of arguments that demonstrate that God is three consubstantial persons or *hypostases*; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and so "*one God in three Divine Persons*". Then go on to argue that the three persons are distinct, yet are one "*substance, essence or nature*"; or homoousios. And yet we know that God is not a daddy who lives in the sky; so the argument is actually more an academic exercise to create credibility rather than a contemplation for ourselves to discover an enlightened way of life.

In the field of psychoanalysis the model of 'transactional analysis' identifies three distinct ways that we interact in relationships; we can interact as Parent, Adult and Child, and of course we readily move between all three.

Such a model is similar to the Doctrine of the Trinity in that it serves to illustrate and illuminate the dynamics of relationship; and such models can also shed light on each other even though they are grounded in different fields and languages. A bit like the way in which Christians and Muslims can shed light for each other even though they too come from different reference points.

The reality we might seek in the doctrine of 'The Trinity' today is that it serves as a model to illustrate the eternal dynamics of the Divine life; it is not about people or persons but rather illustrates a dynamic of life as an all embracing eternal relationship.

Now in the traditional dynamics of a Church Community, the parent, Adult child model of interaction has been corrupted by the Tradition and also by the patriarchal stress on the Priest as 'father'.

Many churches operate with a 'father knows best' approach; and the congregation become like lay-children, passively doing what father wants them to do.

Well, here at St Paul's we seek a more adult model, and also a more dynamic model; and with 'Father Peter' being sent forth we all have an opportunity to embrace a more adult model; each taking our place in the Parent, Adult, Child roles that make us whole; realising ourselves and each other as the dynamic dance of the Holy Trinity..

The reality of God the Father was re-written in the words of Christ, for the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth; and so the dynamic dance that the Trinity illuminates is our dance; it is an embrace that will hold us if we take our place on the dance floor.

Today we see in the Scriptures and in the Doctrines of the Church that we, here today at St Paul's actually write the very texts that we read, we are the story that is being told and if we truly give ourselves to the Divine story then we shall be one "to the end of the age".

Amen

Peter Humphris