

## Trinity Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2020 – The Great Commission

Books on leadership often make connections between the personal character of the leader and the kind of community that he or she forms; between the leader's ideas and the activity that follows; between the way in which the leader teaches and what and how the community learns. School history books are full of people who have led from the front, giving their names and lives to pursuing their idea or course of action (for good or bad), and having the ability to persuade those around them to be followers; some pioneers, such as inventors, missionaries and explorers go it alone, believing that others will follow later; others lead from the middle, inspiring others by their own activity and passion to join in, like conductors of an orchestra or film producers. For some leadership styles are learnt; but for many the style is part of who they are from birth, as any parent will tell you. Leading has a lot to do with who you see yourself to be, and how, where and with whom you live that out; but it always involves relationships and responsibility for those who are led, who learn from respect and from example.

Jesus said, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations'. Now to be a disciple is to be a follower, learning from the one who leads by teaching and example – our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. So what does Jesus teach us about God, and especially on this Trinity Sunday about the way in which the Godhead operates, so that we can use this to model our lives? Well, immediately after Jesus instructs his disciples to make disciples of all nations, he continues 'baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. This is the most explicit reference to the doctrine of the Trinity that we have in the entire Bible – but what does it mean? Perhaps the first thing to say is that the Bible gives us only glimpses and hints about the nature of God in order to remind us that we simply cannot pin God down, and all attempts to do so – however noble and brilliant and beautiful, however close they may come to an actual description of the inner life of God – come up short.

Jesus' teaching and example though is a great help because Jesus teaches us that God is His Father whose will he will always try to obey, and a Father who because of his role as creator and sustainer, has an infinite love for His creation. Indeed for me one of the most amazing statements in the whole Bible is John 3:16 when Jesus says

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Here we begin to see what the Holy Trinity is all about – for we begin to understand that the being of God – who and what God is – is revealed in what he does, teaching and example going together perfectly, hand in hand. First of all then we see God the Father, who is always linked with the work of creation, and loves his creation so much that he is prepared to send his only Son to save the world and show people the true way - both how to be and

how to behave - and thus to make the world complete. God the Son then – Jesus – shows us what God looks like in human form – and loves the world so much that he is prepared to suffer himself so that he becomes a focus for healing all the world’s hurts and wrongs, and to be the source of eternal life, freely given to all who believe in Him. Jesus’ life, death and resurrection results in the coming of God the Holy Spirit on the disciples bringing new birth, new identity and the invitation to join in the dance of love and delight that is God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Whilst it’s perhaps understandable to see how God is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Scripture what is more difficult to perceive is what it is that unites the Godhead and makes God one. Leaving Scripture aside for a moment I’ve always found a story about Christopher Columbus to be of great help. For when that great explorer was on his third voyage to the Americas he saw what seemed to be three islands rising up out of the sea. It was only as the ship drew nearer to them that the crew realised that in fact what they were looking at was three mountain peaks joined together by a low strip of land. There was only one island and not three. Columbus thus called the island Trinidad, the Spanish name for Trinity, because he said this is what the Trinity is like. While we are still far off in our faith we can only see three persons; it’s only as we draw nearer to God and see God as He is, that we find that the three persons are really one God.

Moreover in fact the Bible tells us explicitly that the quality that binds the three together is love. As we heard in John 3:16- the Father’s love for His creation is demonstrated by the sending of his only Son – the beloved. The Son’s love is shown by his being prepared to die on the world’s behalf to bring healing and eternal life. The sending of the Spirit to the disciples was the result of the mutual outpouring of love by the Father and the Son upon all who believe in Him. The Spirit was sent to the church then to create in it that unity of love which reflects the eternal love which is at the essence of the Godhead. The one who loves – the Father – and the one who is loved – the Son – are joined together by love itself – the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Trinity in action then is like a loving Father, taking the initiative in sending his Son to save a world that may not know it needs saving. The Holy Trinity in action is like Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man. He shows us what God looks like in human form and identifies himself with human pain and suffering. The Holy Trinity in action is the Holy Spirit, bringing new birth, new identity and the invitation to join in the dance of love and delight that is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Trinity Sunday then invites us to contemplate the loving unity and dynamic creativity that is both at the heart of the Godhead and the link between God and us. What are the implications of this for us as the body of Christ? Surely one of the most important is that we should, as Christ’s body on earth, try at all times to mirror the love that is at the heart of the Godhead in all our dealings with others. How do we do this? Well by trying to live out the two great commandments – to love our neighbours as ourselves – because of our love of the Godhead.

What is this sort of love? Well it's tenacious, resolute and persistent – it always goes the second mile; always turns the other cheek; does not coerce but also does not give way. It goes on loving no matter what – it either loves or it stops being love – it has no choice. It also means that my needs, wants, desires must sub-serve the greater good because of the unity that love demands.

My prayer on this Trinity Sunday then, my final sermon as your Rector, would be one with the famous hymn which entreats:

O Holy Spirit, Lord of grace  
Eternal fount of love  
Inflame we pray our inmost hearts  
With fire from heaven above

As thou in bond of love dost join  
The Father and the Son  
So fill us all with mutual love  
And knit our hearts in one. Amen.

