

St George's Anglican Church

Trinity Sunday Yr C 26 May 2013

Proverbs 8.1-4, 22, 31 Psalm 8 Romans 5.1-5 John 16.12-15

During the past week we clergy attended our annual conference. It was an excellent time. We had three substantial lectures and two seriously good bible studies in John's gospel, both from people who seriously know what they are talking about.

The three lectures were on the unique Christian revelation about God as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and yet one God. The Book of Common Prayer says that on this one Sunday, called Trinity Sunday, we should recite the Creed of St Athanasius. It is still included in every Anglican prayer book since. It is on page 487 (the green pew edition) of A Prayer Book for Australian

The Athanasian Creed says that unless we believe in God as Holy Trinity we do not hold the catholic faith of the Church. That sounds harsh to our modern, liberal ears. We think it is too hard to say, believe this complex teaching or you aren't a true Christian. But think of it this way; the Christian belief in God as one God yet three persons IS what sets our religion apart from any other, including the other religions that spring from the same foundational story of Abraham: Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

Most people in the street when asked will say they believe in God. All Jews and Muslims believe in God. Only Christians believe in God revealed in Jesus Christ and made present by the Holy Spirit. This is our unique Christian, Trinitarian faith.

The first people to believe that in Jesus of Nazareth, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell were devout Jews. They had a prayer called the Shema: Hear of Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. The shift in their faith was colossal. It was a huge upheaval in the way they believed, and prayed and read the scriptures. But it was an upheaval they were willing to die for.

Now, the Trinity is a difficult teaching. And truth to tell, Jesus was the problem. For the Jews, since God alone is God and One not many gods, then no one and nothing else is to be worshipped. When they forget that, the story of the golden calf served as a reminder. And anyway, the prophets were always calling them back to God alone and not all the other things people trusted - foreign alliances, foreign gods, national identity - to name just a few. Then along comes Jesus of Nazareth who does the things that God does - he heals, he forgives sin, he offers redemption and assures people of their salvation. He calls people to follow him, and he speaks to God on intimate terms and says 'I and the Father are one' and 'those who have seen me, have seen the Father'. And to cap it all off, after he is dead and buried, he appears to those who had known him in this life and even some who had not, and they know who he is and that is risen from the dead. They know it with enough certainty that they will not deny it even in the face of their own execution. What's more they proclaim that God's own Spirit now makes Jesus present when they break bread when they baptize in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit as he commanded them and when they pray and read and write fresh scriptures together.

So, our faith teaches that God is – and is – experienced in these ways: as creator of all that is, as Word made flesh and dwelling among us, and as breath and empowering presence, we Christians worship and know God since God chooses to be known in this way. In each experience we know all of God that we can know, and in each experience we know a particular dimension of God’s revelation or self disclosure to us.

No one pretend to understand this fully. Ever since Easter morning and the day of Pentecost we Christians have been trying to find words for what is ultimately a mystery beyond our full comprehension. Serious theologians in every generation try to help the Church with their reflections.

The Church has also nuted out creedal statements to set forth our faith as clearly as possible. The three creeds we have inherited all come from a time when the Church was moving from Hebrew ways of thinking about ‘life, the universal and everything’ to Greek ways of doing philosophy, thinking about all the same important matters in another culture and language. The early fathers – and it was mostly fathers- argued and fought (there were even riots in the streets) before they to settled on the agreed statements we now have today – the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed and the Apostles’ Creed.

These are things we need to believe – or at least be trying to believe as best we can in our times and culture – if we are to grow in our trust in God coming to us in Jesus the risen Christ and in love poured into our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

At the heart of our faith is a person, Jesus of Nazareth. Those closest to him in this life came to believe – contrary to everything in their previous religious upbringing – was both fully human and fully God. There had been hints and intimations of the true nature of God as holy community of three yet one, in the Hebrew experience. But until the first disciples affirmed all that Jesus had done and said by worshipping him in his risen presence, the seismic shift in God’s revelation of Godself to us, which we take so readily for granted, had not occurred.

So today we affirm what we cannot fully understand but can fully trust – that God who is One yet three Persons, reaches out to us as the loving Creator of all that is, seen and unseen, in the humanity of Jesus, risen Christ, and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is not only a problem to be solved with our minds (although we should give it reasonable thought) but also a mystery of God’s self disclosure , to be pondered and to deepen our love of God who loves us. Be willing to bring mind and heart before God who is known in this way and you ARE holding the catholic faith of the Church.