

Trinity Sunday 2 Cor 13 v11-14 and Matt 28 v16-20

Today is Trinity Sunday and so we think especially about this doctrine, which is key to all Christian denominations - Anglican, Catholic, Free Church, Orthodox, Reformed, Lutheran and so on. It is so key that we can say, if you don't believe in the trinity you are not a Christian. The Early Church struggled to understand the doctrine and formulated a set of words in 325 which were amended in 381 at the Council of Nicea and we know them as the Nicene Creed. And all Christian denominations say these words with meaning and belief. This is in 3 paragraphs which begin:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.

These truths are in the Bible but you won't find the word "trinity" in the Bible. The OT begins with God saying "Let us make man in our image". Note the plural. And both our Bible readings today are trinitarian - they mention Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There are a number of other verses we could have chosen to highlight trinity.

To help us understand, we can think of 6 aspects of God:

- There is One God and One Only
- God exists in three Persons
- These Persons are Equal and Eternal
- All are worthy of equal praise and worship
- They are distinct yet acting in unity
- These 3 constitute the one true God of the Bible

The Early Church reduced this to two short statements. They concluded that God is ...

- One in Essence
- Three in Person

Some think that we Christians worship 3 Gods and ridicule us by saying that $1+1+1=3$. But we, too, can play the numbers game: $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$

Let's be clear, Christians don't believe in three separate Gods. That's a heresy called Tritheism. Second, we don't believe that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are three "forms" of one God that can't coexist. The chemical H_2O , water can exist as steam, water or ice but not at the same time. That's the heresy called Modalism. Third, we don't believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "parts" or "pieces" of God. That would imply that Jesus is 1/3rd God, the Father is 1/3rd God, and the Holy Spirit is 1/3rd God.

Sometimes, theologians use the word "Godhead" as a way of referring to Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three divine persons in one God.

But since Jesus has come into the world, it is easier to see the trinity - At Jesus' Baptism, the Father spoke and the Spirit came. And Jesus sent out his disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" If we truly understood the trinity, we would truly understand God - but he is beyond knowing. However, let me share some illustrations you might find helpful. But remember, they are only illustrations.

I already mentioned that water can exist as solid, liquid, or steam. But usually water only exists in one state at a time, so not a good example.

What about an egg? It is made up of a shell, the eggwhite, and the yolk. All three are needed for an egg to be complete.

Maybe a better example is the different roles a person can play. I am a father, a son and a husband at one and the same time. Yet I am only one person.

Someone said that the pretzel is a good illustration because it consists of one piece of dough with three holes. Take away any one of the holes and the pretzel isn't really a pretzel anymore. (According to some people, the pretzel was actually invented in Europe several hundred years ago by a monk who wanted to illustrate the Trinity to the children of his village

so he took some dough, looped into the familiar three-hole shape, baked it, and gave it to the children as an edible object lesson.)

Maybe the best illustration comes from noted scientist Dr. Henry Morris. He says that the entire universe is trinitarian by design. The universe consists of three things: matter, space, and time. Take away any one of those three and the universe would cease to exist. But each one of those is itself a trinity.

- Matter = mass + energy + motion
- Space = length + height + breadth
- Time = past + present + future

Thus the whole universe witnesses to the character of the God who made it.

It's important to remember that all illustrations fail eventually. They don't "prove" the Trinity, they simply help us understand the concept.

So, why is the trinity important?

We can see that even before creation, God was in relationship - Father, Son and Spirit. God created Adam and Eve for fellowship - "Where are you?" Was the question asked of Adam and Eve after they had sinned.

And God wants to draw each of us into relationship with him. That's what the cross was all about - Jesus was making a way for us to be in relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are called to worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity should cause us to bow in humble adoration before a God who is greater than our minds could ever comprehend.

Let us rejoice that we have a Triune God who has provided for a Trinitarian salvation. When we were lost in sin, our God acted in every Person of his being to save us. The Father gave the Son, the Son offered himself on the Cross, and the Holy Spirit brought us to Jesus. We were so lost that it took every member of the Godhead to save us.

We won't ever fully understand the trinity, but we involve the trinity in our worship and in our praying - we come to the Father, in the name of the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit. We please the Father when we become like the Son as the Spirit helps us.

And we can pray blessing one another with the words of our first reading - May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Mike Stanbrook