

An awesome, mysterious God, Trinity Sunday 2018

Psalm 29, John 3: 1 – 21

Trinity Sunday is the last special church festival for some time. On Sunday week we will enter 'Ordinary Time'.

That is the season of the church – where we tell the stories of the people of God and we'll consider who we are as a church and how we fit. It's gonna be fun.

But in the meantime: the Trinity:

How would you describe the Trinity?

Someone has described Trinity Sunday as The Festival of Belonging.

I love that phrase.

We could be looking in the wrong direction if we spend all our time trying to define the Trinity. The Trinity is not something to be figured out. The Trinity is not theological algebra. The Trinity is all about relationship; dynamic, inclusive relationship.

Usually when we try to describe God we use nouns – names. (Maybe we could consider using verbs more often?) We have a lot of names because none of them does it. God called Godself I am who I am or I am who I will be – thanks God! Really helpful! Language is incomplete. Words fail us – even if we think we understand who God is.

And actually we don't. Or what we do understand is kind of like one pixel in a picture with millions of pixels.

Think of the last storm you experienced.

I have lived in Canterbury for a third of my life and love the Southerly Storms that sweep across the plains. The clouds gather and become darker and darker. Standing outside, the wind is completely still. The dark clouds move closer and closer – anticipation grows. Perfect still ness.

Then boof!!!

The wind smacks into you.

And if you linger, the rain is not far behind. Great huge drops of water pelt the ground in a wave that washes over the plains.

Psalm 29 paints a picture of a huge storm crossing the geography of the nation that is Israel. The writer doesn't so much try to describe God; but the effects of what is called 'God's voice', in other words the power and majesty of God. God speaks and God's words are powerful. (Some think it's a response to Psalm 28 which contains the plea that God doesn't remain silent.)

God speaks and creation is powerfully moved.

The beginning of the psalm a call to worship an indescribably powerful God. And the ending tells us of the impact of this amazingly awesome God upon God's creation and God's creatures.

10 The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;

the Lord is enthroned as King forever.

11 The Lord gives strength to his people;

the Lord blesses his people with peace.

Implicit in the text are the three persons of the Trinity.

How does God, the Trinity, bless his people with peace? The Holy One has done that through Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension.

Our gospel reading makes that clear:

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God gives eternal life through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Trinity, is working powerfully for all of humanity; for all of creation. One day peace and justice will reign on God's good earth.

But how our God works is often mysterious. We often don't get it.

The story of Nicodemus is a classic example isn't it? Here is this religious dude, a scholar, a leader, well respected in his day, and he has no clue who Jesus is or what he is about. We've gotta give him credit because at least he comes to find out; even if it is under the cover of darkness. (Darkness often points to a lack of understanding or even spiritual blindness btw. Only Judas Iscariot, the apparent traitor, comes to Jesus in the darkness.)

But Nicodemus is up there in society. He's respected in the Jewish world, maybe he even represents some of them because he says "we all know".
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This clever dude has no clue what's really going on. But he is prepared to give Jesus the benefit of the doubt.

I like that.

Nicodemus begins respectfully and Jesus, sigh, Jesus throws him a curve ball. He talks about being born again.

What is that about? We've made the phrase 'born again' into a regulation. We've set a formula for it:

According to some evangelical Christians, being born again is all about saying the sinners' prayer. And when you've done that you are in. and if you haven't done that you are out.

What a crock. I guess many of us here have not said the sinners' prayer – in the prescribed formula anyway.

Does that mean we are not Christian? Of course it doesn't. Many of us have

known the Lord our whole lives and have made countless decisions to follow Jesus. Every time something new comes us, we decide again. Of course there is merit in the prayer but it's not the be all and end all.

Whoever gets to edit how the Bible is presented, the apparently wise ones, have labelled this story 'Jesus teaches Nicodemus'.

Well Jesus does that. But so much more than that. In Jesus invitation to be born again, born of the Spirit into the Kingdom of God, he's inviting Nicodemus into relationship with the Holy, Mysterious Trinity. And he's inviting Nicodemus to give up his life as he has known it so far so he can enter into that relationship.

So he can live out, day by day, what that relationship means. That relationship is costly.

Jesus invitation to Nicodemus means a complete change of the whole person in a way that is actually incomprehensible. Coming into relationship with Jesus, and with the Trinity as a whole, demands our whole lives. 'Being born of the Spirit' is about submitting ourselves to an awesome, majestic, terrible and loving God. We worship a God we only partially understand.

Maybe we should give up trying to understand and be part of the experience of love that the Trinity offers?

Maybe we should recognise that God is indescribable really.

And God continues to act in ways that we don't understand. God is awesome and mysterious.

As I walked across the top of Spain on Sabbatical, I thought and prayed a lot about where God wants me and I realised, (I think I already knew), that it was no longer here in Richmond. I've done what God wanted me to do.

I think the Lord may have been saying that for a while but I was not able to hear properly. You generously gave me space to be with our awesome, mysterious God and God spoke.

My leaving may not be the outcome you expected nor wanted.

But it is what it is.

I was conscious of your support and prayers as I walked. One thing this church is very good at is being warm and welcoming and accepting. You have welcomed me and overlooked many of my mistakes.

You will create a warm welcome for the next person I know and you will pray for and support the Wardens, the Vestry and the Nominators as they work through the process of getting a new leader.

Kevin and I know we belong in Canterbury closer to our children and grandchildren. We are selling our house and both leaving jobs that we love. In our individual ways we are taking a step of faith and are willing to find new places to serve.

Sorry to drop a clanger on you but the Wardens and I felt that there was no point trying to delay the news. Covering things up creates difficulties; things leak. So over the next three months we get to work with God, with the Divine Trinity, the awesome, mysterious God, towards what the future looks like for us all.