

Holy Trinity

7 June 2020

Introduction

Though the word *trinity* is not found in the scriptures, today's second reading includes the apostolic greeting that begins the liturgy: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. In the gospel Jesus sends his disciples forth to baptise in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. More than a doctrine, the Trinity expresses the heart of our faith: we have experienced the God of creation made known in Jesus Christ and with us always through the Holy Spirit. We celebrate the mystery of the Holy Trinity in word and sacrament, as we profess the creed, and as we are sent into the world to bear witness to our faith.

Prayer of the Day

God of heaven and earth, before the foundation of the universe and the beginning of time you are the triune God: Author of creation, eternal Word of salvation, life-giving Spirit of wisdom. Guide us to all truth by your Spirit, that we may proclaim all that Christ has revealed and rejoice in the glory he shares with us. Glory and praise to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.

Genesis 1:1--2:4a

At the beginning of time, God the Creator, God the powerful Word, and God the life-giving Spirit form the earth and all its inhabitants. God sees that all this created work is good and then rests on the seventh day.

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." ⁷So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every

kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." ²¹So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." ²³And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

²⁷So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." ²⁹God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{2:1}Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ²And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

^{4a}These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Matthew 28:16-20

After his resurrection, Jesus summons his remaining disciples and commissions them to baptise and teach all nations in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Sermon

Holy Trinity A – Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a, Matthew 28:16-20, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Wonder-Full

God provides blessings that inspire wonder and gratitude.

Our Christian roots are established in Judaism.

Jesus was a Jew from Nazareth in Galilee,
who recruited twelve other Jews to be his disciples,
and who made frequent reference to the Jewish prophets.

And from our Christian origins in the thirties AD
until about the nineties
we were considered by many to be a sect within Judaism.

The God we worship is the One who created the world and human beings.

Who made covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Who set Moses and the Hebrews free from Egypt.

Who led them to the Promised Land.

Who accompanied them into Babylon Exile.

And who spoke to them through prophets.

And chief among the beliefs about God
we share with our Jewish cousins
is the affirmation that God is One.

We are monotheists.

But we've got a problem,

of sorts.

While some New Testament passages speak of Jesus as a son or a capital S Son of God, others speak of him as a God in his own right, and of the Holy Spirit as a new player on the scene.

It didn't happen right away, but after Christians and Jews became two separate and distinct groups, we began to try and describe and even define God;

One, but revealed in Three discrete persons

So that in the third century fierce debates about God's identity as One in Three and Three in One, had to be settled at the Council of Nicea, which formalised the Nicene Creed.

And believe it or not, the controversy started with a sermon, delivered by Alexander of Alexandria, in Egypt.

Another church leader, by the name of Arius condemned Alexander of heresy for suggesting that God the Father and God the Son had a great deal in common; that they were essentially of one substance.

In it's place Arius proposed that God the Father existed first, and later begat a Son, and then sent to us the Holy Spirit.

He stressed their distinct aspects.

In contrast another young leader named Athanasius championed an alternate view, which eventually became know as Trinitarianism, enshrined in a third creed that bears his name.

Athanasius sought to find a balance between our inherited monotheism, and the three distinct but inter-related faces of God.

Of One being... but known to us in three ways: creation, salvation, and presence.

Although there are some Christian communities today who rejected the Trinity as an apt description of God,

but most
have adopted the Athanasian view.

With today's festival finally made official by the Roman pope
in the thirteenth century.

The question I hope you're asking
at this point,
is "So what?"

What difference do these ancient debates have
on those who seek to be Jesus' disciples today?

Why bother with Arius and Athanasius,
Council's and doctrines?

I would suggest three reasons:

First, being more precise about who God is
enhances our experience in worship.

As we sing praise,
listen to the Word,
seeking guidance,
and go out as servants in the world
having a name or names,
distinguishing the works of God,
helps us be clearer.

Names, titles, chief accomplishments
may enhance our sense of awe and wonder before God,
and lead us to deeper gratitude.

Second, regarding God as One and Three
allows us to keep our Jewish, monotheistic roots,
and take into account the unique identity of Jesus
and the Holy Spirit.

As one fully human and divine
we are able to profess that Jesus' life and teachings,
his death and rising,
are like a bridge between an invisible, immortal Creator
and us flesh and blood creatures.

And even as we see the Spirit at work before Pentecost,
our Christian sense of this Advocate and Counsellor
is especially devoted to helping us appreciate and be inspired
by Jesus' sacrifice,

and the mercy that it expresses.

There is something new here.

Third, our Trinitarian doctrines point beyond themselves to other ways of describing God.

To say, in the end,
that the Trinity is a mystery,
is to say that we can never really pin God down.

There are some things we know about God,
some things that have been revealed to us about God's character and activity,
but we mortals will never figure it all out.

God the Father continues to create;
often surprising us.

God the Son continues to save us from ourselves,
one another,
and a fallen world.
shaking up the self-righteous in every generation.

And God the Spirits moves within,
and around,
and even at times against us,
to encourage and equip us love and serve others with grace
reflective of the love and mercy which saves us.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared world.

A brief silence.

God of community, you form us as your church. Guide our bishops, pastors, deacons, and all the baptised in sharing your life-giving good news with all the world. Strengthen us to be bold in our proclamation. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of creation, you called everything into being. Sustain this world with your renewing care. Inspire us to see waterways, plant life, birds, fish, insects, and mammals and call them good. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of counsel, all authority belongs to you. Encourage the leaders of this and every land to seek peace, equality, and unity. Instill wisdom in advocates who work toward justice in often ignored communities (*like Chief Seattle, whom we commemorate today*). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of care, you created us in your image. Help us see your likeness in one another. Open our eyes to see and attend to all who face oppression and suffering. Console, heal, and nourish all in need (*especially*). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of companionship, you accompany this body of faith. As the rhythms of summer begin, protect all who travel, renew all who will enjoy a time of sabbath, and shelter all who will not be protected from the sun's heat. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God of compassion, you comfort us in our grief with the promise of the resurrection. We give you thanks for the saints of all time and in our lives (*especially*). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Blessing/2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Paul closes a challenging letter to the Corinthians with an appeal to Christian fellowship grounded in the triune harmony of Christ's grace, God's love, and the Spirit's partnership.

[Paul writes:] ¹¹Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹²Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

¹³The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

Thanks be to God.