

A Trinity Sunday am
Place: St Mary's
27-31

13th June 2017
Isaiah 4. 12-17,

Theme: Living with mystery
2 Cor 13.11-13, Matt 28 16-20

Psalm 8

- ◆ A little boy was asked by his teacher to recite the 7 times table. He stood up and started 'der, der de der, der der de derder.' His teacher stopped him and asked him what he was doing, 'Oh,' he said, 'I have learned the tune, but I can't remember the words.'
- ◆ Today is Trinity Sunday and unfortunately the Doctrine of the Trinity is seen by many Christians as a kind of impenetrable maths problem. When I first started studying theology I thought that if I only tried hard enough and read enough and thought about it long enough then I would come to understand it. How mistaken I was!
- ◆ Our first reading and Psalm both tell us something of fundamental importance about God, as we seek to reflect on the mystery of the Trinity this morning. They both remind us of the grandeur and enormity of God and of how insignificant us mere mortals are by comparison. They remind us of the essential unknowability and otherness of God. In comparison to

2

God the whole of humanity is ‘less than nothing and emptiness.’

- ◆ Yet Psalm 8 goes on to tell us that us mere nothings have honour and glory conferred on them, not through any merit of our own, but by virtue of God’s relationship with us. This is the core of Grace. Grace is the gift that forms and makes us into persons of significance through the gift of God’s love for us. We become something because of God’s love for us. It is our relationship with God, or more specifically God’s relationship with us that makes us something of account.
- ◆ The ultimate expression of this comes in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. God loves us so much that he comes to live with us in the person of Christ. When people meet Jesus they are transformed by it and their lives are made new.
- ◆ All of this is something that the Church only begins to understand after the resurrection. The Doctrine of the Trinity is something that grows out of the church’s reflection on its experience after Easter. The first person who began to apprehend what God was doing was Thomas, who responds to meeting the risen Christ and being invited to put his hand in His

wounds by falling to his knees and declaring ‘My Lord and my God.’

- ◆ In our gospel today we are shown the disciples with the risen Christ 40 days after this on the mount of transfiguration. We are told that ‘when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.’ I think that this is often read that some of the disciples doubted that Jesus was risen, but that doesn’t make sense. They can see him. What they doubted was that he was God incarnate. The disciples are worshipping him because that is who they believe the risen Christ to be, but some of them doubted it. The question is not around the presence of the risen Christ, but its significance. As devout Jews they would be certain that scripture told them that there was one God and that God alone should be worshipped. It is the first commandment. Yet for most of them, despite this, the only way they can account for who Jesus is, especially since the resurrection, is as God incarnate.
- ◆ They are told by Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration to go and make disciples and baptise in the name of ‘Father, Son and Holy Spirit’. Nine days after this, when the Holy Spirit comes to them at Pentecost, they will experience God’s

presence with them in another new way. It is this experience of meeting God in transcendent Father, in the incarnate Son and through the indwelling Holy Spirit that leads the Church to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity. They want to assert that there is only one God, yet they come to describe the one God in terms of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When they reflect on the time they spent with Jesus before his crucifixion they remember the closeness of his relationship with the Father, the times when they heard the Father speak of him as his 'beloved Son'. They also remember Jesus telling them he would send the Holy Spirit, the comforter, the advocate.

- ◆ This is the doctrine of the Trinity. It does not even attempt to explain the mystery of God, to account for how one can be three and three are one. The councils of Nicea and Chalcedon do not define the Christian understanding of God, rather they set the boundaries. They say these are the bounds of understanding and belief beyond which we should not stray, but they do not presume to understand the mystery that lies within those bounds. The doctrine of the Trinity helps us to know

what is and what is not God, but not what God is.

- ◆ One of the most beautiful things about the doctrine of the Trinity, something grounded in the life of Jesus, is that relationship is essential to God. God is love, because God is three persons, but God is one substance. This is the great insight of Christianity, in comparison with the other monotheistic religion. God is not an isolated, singularity for us but essentially in relation, reaching out to draw us into that relationship of love. That is why for Christians God is Love.
- ◆ One of the challenges of faith, one of the tasks of growing into our full humanity, it to accept our dependence on God for our understanding of who we are, despite our not being able to understand God and compass God with our intellect. Like the doctrine of the Trinity itself, we need to be content with knowing enough, confident of what we do know of God through the person of Jesus Christ without needing to know and understand everything in order to be able to trust and have faith.
- ◆ We need a similar attitude towards our life together as the church. We need to know enough to know who we are and what we are called to, but be open to the

understanding that we do not and cannot know everything, but that God is leading us together through his Holy Spirit into his Kingdom.