

Address, Boolaroo Uniting Church 30 May 2021

Bible passages: John 3:1-17 and Romans 8:12-17 – Father, Son & Holy Spirit

Trinity Sunday marks a turning point in our observance of the Church Year. This Sunday ushers in the Pentecost season, approximately twenty-six weeks from now until Advent, a time when we focus our attention on Jesus' ministry and teachings.

On Trinity Sunday we have the opportunity to explore the nature of our threefold God. This is not a matter of arguing over words and definitions, but understanding afresh that God exists in relationship. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As such we see that it is the nature of God to be in relationship. And we are drawn into that relationship in different ways. God is over us, God is with us and God is in us.

We can tie ourselves up in knots trying to understand how that can be. We can come up with various analogies to help us. The analogy I like is to say "one God is magnified by one Son who is magnified by one spirit." The symbol for magnify is X, the same as multiply. So we then have one multiplied by one multiplied by one equals one. But in the end, every analogy falls short of the reality of God and we end up no nearer the truth and perhaps even more confused.

But Trinity Sunday should be easier than that. Perhaps, instead of trying to work out *how* God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we should concentrate instead on the wonderful fact that this is how we *experience* God...

I experience God as my heavenly Father; loving me, holding me, guarding my life.

I experience God as the Son; forgiving me, praying for me, leaving an example for me to follow.

I experience God as the Holy Spirit; empowering me to live for him and to live for others.

It is the experience of God that I hold onto in faith, and it is that experience of God that I want to share with other people so that they can experience God for themselves.

So Trinity Sunday is a day not to tie ourselves up in theological knots, but a day to celebrate our experience of God in our everyday lives: God of love, God of forgiveness, God of empowerment.

That is something truly worth celebrating and truly worth sharing with others!

The passage that we read from John's Gospel this morning is a perfect example of someone making exactly that transition. **Nicodemus** was struggling to understand the exact nature of Jesus and his relationship to God the Father. But Jesus turns the conversation into one about how Nicodemus can experience God, which is far more important.

The gospels are full of accounts of Jesus moving among ordinary people and having conversations with them. Most of the conversations that Jesus had with Jewish rulers and people of high standing were rather confrontational. The good news carried by Jesus did not sit well with all their rules and judgemental attitudes. Nicodemus seems to be an exception. He was cautious, but nevertheless was a sincere seeker after truth.

Unseen by others, Nicodemus came to Jesus late one night with his heart full of questions. After Nicodemus acknowledged that Jesus was sent from God, Jesus cut straight to the chase and said, "Listen up – you must be born from above before you can see God's kingdom."

It seems that John gives us the story of Nicodemus to represent those who come to church or attend church events or Bible Studies and are intrigued by Christ, even attracted to him, but never seemingly make up their mind about him: they stay on the edges of the Christ-event, and never totally commit...

What does Nicodemus say about Jesus in verse 2? "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God..." There is respect there: he calls Jesus 'Rabbi'. He even recognises the special nature of Jesus' ministry: "We know that you are a teacher who has come from God".

And yet Jesus knows the heart of Nicodemus and he knows that respect and affection and partial rational understanding is not enough. "If someone is not born from above, they are not able to see the Kingdom of God." What does he mean by this?

We want to reclaim this verse from those who have misinterpreted and misused it throughout history. "What must I do to be saved?" "You must be born again!" That is not what this verse is saying...

It is not saying that we need to be baptised in the Spirit as a separate, conclusive event after being converted to Christ. It is not saying that this new state of being must be evidenced by speaking in tongues.

It is much more simple than that. "Unless you are born from above, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

We are not to be observers – we are to be participants: to participate in the life of the Church, to participate in the resurrection of Jesus, who died for us, to give our lives to God, who fills us with his Spirit so that we might live in an intimate relationship with him and serve him better in the world. Being born from above is a radical transformation that brings newness to how we live.

And that newness of life is what we celebrate today, this Trinity Sunday. What we are sharing together is our lived experience of God, in which we participate every day of our lives and through regular worship together. And it is what we share with others when we leave here today as we go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Jesus frequently spoke about the kingdom. When he spoke in parables, nearly all of the stories he told were about God's kingdom. But he wasn't talking about a geographical area. God's kingdom is where God rules, where he is in charge. So Jesus was raising the question of who is in charge, who is ultimately the boss.

This is the point of Jesus' conversation. We need to get ourselves out of the driver's seat and put God there. When we do that God rules us. We become part of the larger place where God rules – we are in God's kingdom. This represents such a radical change that it is like starting life all over again. It's like being born from above.

Jesus said in John 3:7-8: "Don't be surprised when I say that you must be born from above. Only God's Spirit gives new life." Now we have Jesus talking of God the Father as well as the Holy Spirit. The whole of the Holy Trinity is involved and Nicodemus was being invited to join in with a new kind of life. There is love and life that flow between the Father, Son and Spirit.

Jesus explained that the love that comes from God is big enough to extend to all people, "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

The invitation to eternal life is not just to a life that goes on, and on, and on. That could be boring. But it is an invitation to a life of a different quality, an eternal quality. We can begin to experience this in the here and now as we consciously put our lives under the rule of God and in line with his purposes.

As we read from Romans 8:15 "For the Spirit that God has given you does not make you slaves and cause you to be afraid; instead, the Spirit makes you God's children, and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God, 'Father! my Father!'"

Amen.