

## Call to worship

Blessèd be the Lord God of heaven and earth, for he has visited and redeemed his people. He has raised up a mighty salvation for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*[Silence]*

The Father is with us.

**Amen.**

The Creator is with you.

**And also with you.**

Jesus is with us.

**Amen.**

The Saviour is with you.

**And also with you.**

The Spirit is with us.

**Amen.**

The Strengtheners is with you.

**And also with you.**

God is with us.

**Amen.<sup>1</sup>**

### [Matthew 28:16-20](#)

One of the best things I've read this week was an extraordinary sermon on the doctrine of the Trinity, entirely in words of one syllable<sup>2</sup>.

I thought, that's bonkers! The Trinity is such a complicated doctrine, how can you do that? And yet he did. And what's more, the author was a university professor, so if he can use simple language, is there a challenge here for the rest of us?

Some people don't like the fact that the idea of the Trinity is so brain-bending. Muslims don't like it. Their basic creed denies it, when they say, 'There is no God but God.'

Jehovah's Witnesses don't like it either and they point out that the word 'Trinity' isn't in the Bible. Some of you have heard my standard response to that claim. If a JW says that to me on the doorstep I reply, 'Neither is the word 'trousers' in the Bible, but I'm not taking mine off!'

The fact is, the church in the early centuries looked at the scriptural evidence about God and concluded that when you put it all together, you had to use new words and special terms to speak of this extraordinary God.

And why should we be surprised if the doctrine of God is difficult to comprehend fully? This is the Creator of the universe we are talking about, the God who always was, always is, and always will be. We are but creatures.

However, here's a key to understanding the basics about the Trinity. You can say that the doctrine of the Trinity is based around three statements: there is

- One God
- Who exists (or 'subsists') in three Persons
- All of whom are equally divine.

Do not see these three statements as definitions – although you should see them as true! See them instead as boundary markers. If our understanding of God falls within a triangle bounded by those three lines, then there is likely to be a reasonable statement about God. If it falls outside any of these boundary lines, it is a false statement about God.

I could say much more if I were preaching a series of sermons about the Trinity (and many years ago I once did), but that will have to do for now by way of introduction. This morning, I want to leave you with two important truths that we learn from believing in the Trinity.

**Firstly**, the Trinity tells us **the name of God**:

baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (verse 19b)

Did you notice that? Jesus doesn't tell his disciples to baptise new disciples in the *names* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in the *name* [singular] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together is God's name, according to Jesus. If you want to know God, you need to know God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Together, they are God.

If you read the Bible, you can see this. Together, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all involved in creation. That is the combined witness of books like Genesis, Proverbs, John, Colossians, and Hebrews, amongst others. And together, they are all involved in salvation. The Father sent his only begotten

Son. Through the Spirit he raised him from the dead. The Father sends the Spirit through the Son to us so that we can live the Christian life. And so on.

So you can put aside the old heresy that the Old Testament was the era of the Father, the Gospels were the era of the Son, and everything from Acts of the Apostles onwards is the era of the Holy Spirit. That separates them out: the truth is that together they are God.

And it means that if we want to grow in the Christian life, it's important that we get to know God better as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and not just to pick out one favourite member of the Trinity.

What could be more enriching than getting to know God better as the Father who lets us call him by the affectionate name 'Abba', who paid the cost of giving up his only begotten Son for the salvation of the world? What could be better than knowing more deeply the Son who took on human flesh and lived our existence? What could be better than being more acquainted with the Holy Spirit, who makes the Son known to us, and enables to live and serve more like him?

If we know God's name as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then our faith, knowledge, and love will be enriched.

**Secondly**, the Trinity tells us **the nature of God**.

If the One God is at heart a relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then is it surprising that the most basic statement we ever read about the nature of God in the Bible is 'God is love', as John says in chapter 4 verse 8 of his First Epistle?

God is love. Make no mistake. You could not say that of the Muslim account of Allah. Allah being alone before creating anything could not love.

But the One God who is relationship in his most basic inner nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – you can say that God is love, because the Trinitarian God could express love within the Trinity between the three Persons before ever there was any creation. Other religions can claim that 'God is loving' but only Christianity can claim that 'God is love'. Love is not simply something God does, for us love is the most essential nature of God. The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father. The Father loves the Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Father. The Son loves the Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Son. God is love.

What happens after that is that the inner love between the three Persons of the Trinity had to move outwards and love beyond those boundaries, rather than remaining inward. Therefore creation was an inevitable consequence of the God who is love. And as I said earlier, all three Persons were involved in the act of creation, according to Scripture.

If we believe in a God like this, how should we live? I suggest it means we need to love both inwardly and outwardly. Inwardly, within the fellowship of the church, it should be of our very nature to be a community of love. We have just celebrated Pentecost, and when the Holy Spirit came in Acts chapter 2 and Peter preached, a community grew in which its members shared food, possessions, and property. No wonder they enjoyed the favour of the people (Acts 2:42-47). So we need to rid ourselves of the impediments to love in our churches and we need to build relationships of love.

Outwardly, we cannot contain that love within the church community. As love had to go forth from the Trinity, so also must it proceed from us to the world. Yes, we already do that corporately as church with food banks and clothes banks, but this also poses the question for each of us as we disperse into the world each week: what are the particular ways in which I could show the God who is love among the people to whom he sends me?

In **conclusion**, I may not have been able to repeat the feat of the university professor who preached his sermon on the Trinity entirely in one-syllable words, but I do hope I've shown you how the brain-bending doctrine of the Trinity leads us to some straightforward consequences in the life of faith.

Will we seek to deepen our knowledge of God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Will we build up the inner life of love in the church community?

Will we live in the world as people who believe in the One God in three Persons who is love?

May we have the grace to do these things this week and in the years to come, if God grants them to us.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

That the church may show her unity in Christ,  
Lord hear us.

**Lord, graciously hear us.**

That all churches may work together for the benefit of all peoples,  
Lord hear us.

**Lord, graciously hear us.**

That all movements towards unity may prosper,  
Lord hear us.

**Lord, graciously hear us.**

That divisions and conflicts may cease,  
Lord hear us.

**Lord, graciously hear us.**

That the world may find a lasting peace,  
Lord hear us.

**Lord, graciously hear us.**

That none may hunger or thirst,  
Lord hear us.

**Lord, graciously hear us.**<sup>3</sup>

Almighty God, give us wisdom to perceive you,  
intelligence to understand you,  
diligence to seek you,  
patience to wait for you,  
vision to behold you,  
a heart to meditate upon you,  
a life to proclaim you;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.<sup>4</sup>

### **Benediction**

Lord, be with us to guide us,  
within us to strengthen us,  
without us to protect us,  
above us to raise us,  
beneath us to uphold us,  
before us to lead us,  
behind us to guard us,  
ever about us,  
this day and evermore;  
this day and evermore.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Adam, *The Rhythm Of Life*, p84.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Mike Higon at <https://www.psephizo.com/preaching-2/can-the-trinity-be-explained-in-words-of-one-syllable/>

<sup>3</sup> David Adam, *op. cit.*, p87.

<sup>4</sup> A prayer of St Benedict reproduced in Adam, p87.

<sup>5</sup> David Adam, *op. cit.*, p88.