

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Trinity Sunday

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Isaiah 40:12-17. 27-31 Psalm 8 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Matthew 28:16-20

In writing and reading, speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee and a remarkable commission:

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them what I have commanded.....

Here we are, over 2000 years later, one of an uncountable number of church communities across the globe gathering on a Sunday to worship one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit: disciples in all nations each baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity. The eleven certainly fulfilled their commission.

Now we usually read this "Great Commission" as on-going encouragement in our current effort in evangelism, and in our fervour or anxiety at that we miss just how radical the commission was, and is.

All nations....baptise in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit...what I have commanded.

Jesus has been revealing to his disciples what God is like right from the start of his ministry. His first public appearance was his own baptism, at which a voice from heaven named him as the "beloved Son" and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove. All that we would see in his earthly life then, was a revelation of the Father who sent him, and the Holy Spirit at work through him in the single actions he made as the Son among us: the unity of God made

visible in the world. Here, as Matthew records the end of his historical ministry on earth, he emphasises this description of the God he is revealing: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, what we will now call the Trinity.

From the first, following Jesus was a way of understanding what God is like, not just the following of a good man, or even just the experience of a new inspiring inner spirit – it was a way of relating to and responding to God in God's fullness.

Jesus' central commandments get to the heart of this too, because they are repeatedly the command to love:

To Love God with all that we are and our neighbour as ourselves

To love one another as he has loved us

In John's Gospel, pre-eminently as we heard through Easter-tide, Jesus explains that this love has its source in the love of the Father for him, and his love for the Father, and he call his disciples to abide in that love, aided by the Spirit who will dwell with them . The great commandments to love, find their source in the love of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the hundreds of years in which those who love God have pondered and explored how to give words to the mystery of the unity of a God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, many theologians have focused on this relationship of love that Jesus speaks of. St Augustine gave a number of images which taken together might help us grasp how three persons in one unity might be understood. One he talked about was the image of lovers: there is the lover, the beloved and the love they share. The relationship of love is incomplete without any one of these, yet the lover is not the beloved or the love between them. A lover is not a lover without a beloved of the love between them, a beloved is not beloved without a lover and love, and love is not love without a lover and a beloved. The identity of each is found in relationship.

Jesus' ministry helps us see more of what this love of God in Trinity is like. The love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is ecstatic, outgoing – in Creation, in Incarnation, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit – what medieval theologians called the missions of the Holy Trinity. This perfect love of God is not love for its own sake, love for those enjoying it, but love which outgoing and generative, life giving in its fullest sense for the whole creation.

All is caught up in that love by the simple fact that we are God's creation – the first outworking of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus reveals what it looks like when a human being lives in the knowledge of receiving that love of God, of returning that love of God, and of drawing others to share that knowing relationship of live in God's love by the love he extended.

So, perhaps it is no wonder that his commission to those who know they are being drawn into the love he shares with the Father in the Spirit, is to draw others towards that way of knowing, living and loving – to bring them to baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In other words, to bring them knowingly to share through the pattern of his life, the love he pours out on the word.

A radical invitation – go to all nations and bring others to be sharers and bearers of divine love.

And from the understanding of differentiated unity that we find in God:

the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, neither are the Spirit, yet the Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God, and their distinction is dependent on their relationship

We can learn something deep about love and its place at the heart of community. For a loving relationship to be a loving relationship is requires difference, distinctness between those in

love, allowing love to be the bridge between. That's why being in a loving relationship is not always easy or plain sailing.

Often we mistake love for the comfort of similarity – the more like me someone is, the easier it is to be around them. Many social groups and communities begin like this, and because difference can be difficult, they draw up defences and begin to consolidate power as a like-minded group. We begin to like those like us, and dislike those not like us, keeping them at a distance. This is a simplistic description of what becomes more complicated across history, through war, through oppression and in structural discrimination and the racialized injustice which has again been shown for what it is in the murder of George Floyd.

Jesus sent his disciples to all nations.

I don't think this was a command to world domination (even if in some eras of Christian history it has been read in this way!). It is a reminder that if we are called into the love of God we are called into a love of God for all creation, for all peoples. A love that reached even our nation – miles from the ancient middle east and culturally far away from the norms Jesus lived within. A love that is ever extending, ever ecstatic, without boundary and embracing of the uniqueness in which every creature is made.

This is the Trinitarian love in which the church is founded. This is the love we are baptised into and called to share with those of all nations, with the whole earth.

As human beings we can only love like this in God's strength. By God's grace our own capacity to love will grow if we let God's love work in and through us. If we allow ourselves to be drawn ever closer into the life of the Trinity. Knowing this love is both our deepest joy and the cause of costly pain and sorrow when events in our lives and in the world seem to fly in its face: the death of a loved one, difficult relationships, confrontation with those who don't share our vision, conflict, poverty and injustice throughout

the world. The love of the Trinity embraces even this pain – we see that in Jesus' cross.

Over two thousand years after Jesus' great commission, our calling as members of the church, is to allow our baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to be an active force in our lives, drawing us ever more deeply into God's love, and enabling us to love those around us with the love God has for them, in our own way, drawing them into the love God has for them and in turn, by seeing them as through Jesus' eyes, and listening to them as through his ears, allowing them to draw us more fully into that love too. That way of life starts with our own churches in the way we learn how to share this remarkable kind of love which God draws us all into, but it doesn't stop there. It extends to bringing the love of God we know into relationships with all those around us – becoming the means by which they experience the love of the Trinity, and finding through them new glimpses of the love in which God holds us, but it doesn't stop there.

It extends to the places of pain in our world which need God's love, like the deep felt pain of all who suffer because of their racial identity or the colour of their skin. What is the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit calling us to as this pain is revealed to us again? As a white woman I can only begin to understand the advantage in our society that being white has given me when I listen to the experience of black friends and colleagues explaining what growing up was like for them. And that listening to learn from those in pain how we can make the changes in our society Trinitarian love demands, is the calling of that love to me now.

Whether it is in your prayers, in your home, in your friendships or in your action in the wider world, how will you allow the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit work within and through you this week? And I wonder too, how you might be drawn further into a knowledge of that love by unexpected people, or surprising moments too.

May we live to the glory of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in all we do this week, and always. Amen