

7 June 2020 Sermon – Trinity Sunday

2 Corinthians 13.11-end | Matthew 28.16-20

Rev'd Caitlin Thomson

Trinitarian theology is complicated: with every attempt at explanation there seems to be a matching heresy.

I'll never forget one doctrine lecture when a colleague was describing his understanding of the Trinity and our tutor peered over his glasses and replied: "*That would be a modalist understanding...*" That incident, I feel, describes well the anxiety that many of us feel when venturing into the deep waters of our faith: being told that we are heretics.

But the reality is that heresy is not something to be scared of – heresies actually help us understand what we *do* believe by setting the boundaries of what we *don't* - and we don't discover those boundaries unless we're daring enough to risk crossing them.

I could go further on to discuss *apothatic* theology and how we define God by asserting what God is *not*, but frankly I feel that would be a distraction from the point.

Our epistle reading this morning offers a beautifully simple yet challenging description of the Trinity – encapsulated in the prayer we know as *the Grace*. It is not just a blessing encouraging the *general qualities* of grace, love, and fellowship/communion but an exhortation to be filled and surrounded with the *specific qualities* of God:

not merely grace, the grace of *Jesus* be with you;
not merely love, but the love of *God* be with you;
not merely fellowship, but the fellowship of *the Holy Spirit* be with you.

For me, this points us towards not the theology of *how God is Trinity* as being important, but to the economy of *what God does as Trinity*. We know *who* and *what* God is by God's own actions, and this is what we should aspire to be like.

To follow the grace of God as *Christ* is to favour and reach toward those whom Christ favours, so that we might become his compassion and passion for transformation toward justice.

To follow the love of God as *Creator* is to esteem and hold close all those whom God loves, so that we might become the fierce, protective, and unconditional love of God.

To follow the fellowship of God as *Spirit of Life* is to be in partnership and collaboration with those whom the Spirit strengthens (just as we are strengthened), so that we too might become life-givers and power-sharers.

And who does Jesus favour? Who does the Creator love? Who does the Spirit empower? Consistently, continuously, categorically: the oppressed, the marginalised, and vulnerable.

The Trinity of love deposes the powers of hate and isolation, and gathers creation in bonds of mutual care. Our God is with us *always*: through confusion, conflict, and trial - even 'til the end of the age. This is our steadfast example of how to be, how to love, and how to relate to one another.

It's easy to want to avoid talking about complex theology or doctrine, because we don't want to be told that we're *heretical*. But if we never do this, we never grow – we never discover deeper understanding or develop our knowledge of who God is and what that means for us.

In the same way, we can avoid confronting our privilege in fear of discovering that we've been complicit in the oppression of those very same groups for whom our God champions. But if we never do this, if we never listen to the voices of the oppressed, the marginalised the vulnerable, then we never grow – we never discover a deeper understanding of the systemic inequalities of our society, or develop our knowledge of how we can best act in solidarity with those who suffer because of those structures.

We must examine our part in these issues because to allow oppression, marginalisation, persecution to happen in our God's name is a heresy of the highest order. We must seek to build a kingdom of peace, grace, and forgiveness that really values the voices of all its people – and works actively to listen to and amplify the voices of those who are being oppressed, marginalised, or who are vulnerable.

As a people made in the image of our God, it is our duty to stand in solidarity with our image-bearing siblings who are oppressed, marginalised, or made vulnerable by these unjust systems.

You may have realised by now that I have been particularly affected by the events reported in our news in the past week. I imagine I'm not alone in this.

It is unacceptable that we live in a world – are participants in a system that actively discriminates and oppresses people of colour.

We cannot allow this to continue.

We must listen to these voices crying out in the wilderness.

I can't tell you what it's like to be a person of colour in our society or in our community – I'm not the right voice to share those stories.

But I do have the privilege of a platform which I can share, so I've asked Kat Love to share what she thinks we need to hear.

As we prepare to listen and respond, I want to pray again our collect for today:

Trinity of love,
deposing the powers of hate and isolation;
gathering creation in bonds of mutual care;
through the waters of baptism
may our relatedness be reborn
in justice, mercy and peace;
Through Jesus Christ,
who is with us always.
Amen

Steven Shakespeare