

Before I start today, I'd like to remind everyone that today's sermon is our keynote sermon and as it's trinity Sunday, my intention is to start a discussion regarding the holy trinity, which if you're interested can be carried through into our house groups. In 5 or 6 minutes I can't possibly cover everything that's ever been said about the Trinity, so recognize I'm being selective and even if I were to try to say everything that's been written – it wouldn't be complete – because words, human imagination can't ever fully comprehend God. My sermon is simply an introduction to the Holy trinity.

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My first ever real discussion about the Holy Trinity left me quite unsettled. I say first ever, because when I was younger I never really questioned my faith – I simply took for granted what I proclaimed in the creed each week.

My first real discussion about the trinity took place in an adult discussion group (not in this Parish). I was challenged by another member of the group who asserted that the term "Holy Trinity" is never explicitly mentioned in the bible, and that the doctrine - that God should be understood as one God in three persons was something formulated in AD 325 at the council of Nicea.

I found the idea that something could be formulated a long time after the death of Jesus unsettling and the building blocks of my faith shook a little – as if after a mini earthquake.

Looking back on that event, and having had a chance to explore more fully what I believe, I can smile at those early tremors. "Yes" the term "holy trinity" isn't used in our bibles, but the Holy Trinity is implicitly and explicitly there in our bibles present and active in the world and in the lives of the people we encounter. And when the council at Nicea first met in AD 325 to hammer out the Nicene creed, they DIDN'T formulate a NEW doctrine. What we believe – as set out in the Nicene creed was already held to be true by most Christians. The council came together in the cause of unity and because Arius of Alexandria was having a destabilizing effect on a number of Christian communities by claiming Christ wasn't divine. The council squashed this idea and so set some boundaries around the substance of Christ leading to further exploration regarding the nature of the relationships between Father, Son and

Holy Spirit, and they did this in ways that were harmonious with scripture and faithful to scripture.

Today I'd like to spend a little time reminding us all of the many implicit and explicit ways in which the Holy Trinity is present in our bible. My review will focus mainly on the New Testament, but the Holy Trinity is present in the Old Testament. In our OT reading this morning in fact – did you spot it?

So this morning let's look at the building blocks of our faith in the Holy Trinity!

So to building block number one! In the gospel accounts Jesus is always devoted to speaking about God who he calls "Father." He tells parables/stories about his Father's kingdom and the quest of his Father to call the people back to him. Think of the parable of the shepherd searching for his lost sheep and the woman desperately hunting for a lost coin. He also spoke of his Father's invitation to others to respond in trust, joy and obedience and on a more serious note, the cost that that may entail – "the way to the Father is the way of the cross".

The Holy Spirit, another building block, can be added to this picture. In our bibles, the Spirit is portrayed as the power that enabled and impelled Jesus' ministry. Think of Mary's pregnancy and the work of the spirit there. Think of the Holy spirit pictured as a dove descending on Jesus at his baptism and propelling him into the wilderness immediately afterwards. Think of Jesus own identification as the one anointed by the Spirit to bring good news to the poor and release to the captives at the beginning of his ministry. Last week, at Pentecost, we celebrated the giving of the Holy spirit to the disciples, recorded in Acts, enabling them to continue Jesus' mission of drawing others to Christ and into the love and life of God. In our gospel reading today, the Spirit is the one who makes God's kingdom real in the life of Jesus' followers. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of the kingdom.

Hopefully we're all beginning to join the dots. But what I've said so far is incomplete! Our 3<sup>rd</sup> building block is missing! We now have to see – within our bibles – the Father directing our attention away from himself to Jesus, or naming or defining Jesus as "the Son." Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Can you think where that might be? Think of Jesus baptism - the transfiguration! The only 2 narratives in the gospels where God the Father is given a speaking role!

“You are my son the beloved, with you I am well pleased” says God the Father at Jesus’ baptism— Mark 1.11. Luke 3.22 Matt 3.17. “This is my son, the beloved; listen to him” – says God the Father at the transfiguration— Mark 9.7, Luke 9.35 and Matthew 17.5.

Now think about the resurrection appearances! Surely, if ever there was a point in the gospel where God could have taken centre stage away from Jesus it could have been then. After all Jesus had already handed events back over to the Father on the cross, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Our gaze, at that point, could have moved to God the Father again, but “no”, through the resurrection accounts, our gaze is drawn firmly back onto Jesus the Son. In so doing Jesus – who pointed others to God the Father throughout his earthly life, becomes the one we focus on. Jesus becomes a focus of devotion, matching the pattern of worship in the earliest Christian communities.

We see this in Paul’s letters. Instead of referring to God as Father in the way Jesus encouraged, we see phrases such as “grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” And in his letter to the Romans this morning Paul talks about the Father, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit - A web of relationships between the three has clearly developed.

The Holy Spirit points us to the Son, the Son points us to the Father and the Father points us back to the Son. Take a look at the icon of the trinity on the front of your service sheets, how does Rublev convey this pattern of mutual deference between the persons of the trinity?

Returning to the gospels! Jesus is often portrayed as depending on the Father, as obedient to the Father who is the source and goal of all things. From this we can get a sense that Jesus is somehow subordinate to the Father. But importantly, within the gospels, there is a theme –that to know Jesus is to know the Father. It’s not just a case that the stories Jesus tells point us to God’s kingdom. No, Jesus also embodies God’s kingdom. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” said Jesus to Philip in John 14. 8-9. God the Father allows Jesus the Son to speak and act for him. Jesus manifests God’s true nature in the world. There’s a real sense of mutual reciprocity between them. Not of one being subordinate to the other.

Taking this one step further, John mirrors the first 3 verses of Genesis, in the prologue by telling us that the Word – Jesus – is with god the Father in the beginning.

So there we have it, our three building blocks, Father Son and Holy Spirit, showing deference to one another, active in the world, drawing others into their kingdom or community. This is how God wishes to reveal himself to us! What does this tell us about the nature and character of God? And this is how you and I personally know god because each one of us here is on a journey to be drawn ever more deeply into the life of the Holy Trinity. Our lives are lives being transformed by the Holy Spirit drawing us to the Son, enabling us to participate in the kingdom. Our lives are lives spent alongside the Son who shapes and forms us. All life is created by the Father and our lives are lives lived on the way to the Father.

And as we participate in the life of the Holy Trinity we are caught up in God's eternal plans. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Look again at Rublev's icon of the Holy Trinity, it seems incomplete to me. Where are you and I? Imagine yourself sitting at that table, draw yourself into the picture and rejoice because that's where we all belong!