

Dear friends,

Almost predictably, as we transition from May into June so the temperature has dropped by about 10 deg C and the heavens have opened. Having said that, lovely although those hot sunny days in May were, the fields and gardens were starting to look quite parched. The rain of the past few days serves to remind us how God wonderfully provides for all our needs, for the sun to warm and cheer us as well as the rain that brings us the water we need for life.

We are starting to see a slow return to some sort of normality with some of the lockdown restrictions being lifted and some schoolchildren returning to class.

Our news bulletins each day remind us that although the rate of rise in the death toll is slowing, it continues to increase inexorably and to put the grim threshold of 40 000 deaths that we exceeded this week into context it represents four times the entire population of Whitchurch or just over half the population of Shrewsbury.

This week brings us to Trinity Sunday which marks something of a turning point in the church's calendar. All the main festivals take place in the period between Advent Sunday and Trinity Sunday. Looking back we have Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Ascension Day and Pentecost in this period and we next week we enter that period of just over 20 'Sundays after Trinity' that will bring us back round to Advent Sunday which marks the start of the new church year.

The significance of Trinity Sunday is often overlooked, and many find the doctrine of the Trinity, that God reveals himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit difficult to understand. We find comparatively few direct references to the Trinity in the New Testament although the idea of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is very clear. Perhaps the most obvious reference is found in Jesus' command to the disciples to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit that we find at the very end of Matthew's gospel, words which form part of the gospel reading for today (Matthew 28:16-20). We find the Trinity referred to directly in what is probably one of the most used passages of Scripture – the closing words of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians – "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" whilst throughout the gospels, Jesus speaks clearly of his relationship to his Father in heaven (indeed He taught the disciples when they asked him how they should pray to pray "Our Father, who art in heaven...") as well as the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. It was, however, only in the third century AD that theologians like Tertullian began to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity.

The first thing that we must be clear about as we consider the Trinity is that we worship ONE God. A devout Jew will still recite the words of the Shema Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 4-9 twice every day, words which begin with the great affirmation of the uniqueness of God "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" followed by the command to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength", words which were re-echoed by Jesus when asked what the most important commandment was. Although we speak of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they are but different aspects of the same God. We worship the one true and living God rather than a multitude of gods as the men of Athens did in ancient times for example (see Acts chapter 17) or those seeking some sort of New Age spirituality do today.

One of the issues that we have today that contributes to some of the confusion we have about the three persons of the Trinity stems from the fact that our modern word 'person' is derived from the

Latin word persona which describes the mask worn by an actor in a play to denote the character they were playing at the time rather than an individual. When Tertullian and others started writing about the Trinity in the third century, he would have used the word 'persona' to describe the three persons of the Trinity in its original sense, as the mask worn by an actor in a play, rather than in the sense that we understand it today i.e. an individual person. Through the three persons or personas of the Trinity, God reveals different facets of his character in ways that we, as mere mortals, can begin to understand. There is an ever present danger that we try to reduce God to a size that we can comprehend (there was a famous book written by J B Phillips entitled "Your God is too small" which addresses this theme). If we struggle to understand God in all his divine majesty we are in good company for it was no lesser a theologian than Augustine of Hippo who observed that "If you can understand him, it can't be God".

God the Father created us in his own image. In Jesus, God made man, God with us, Immanuel, we encounter the living God in human terms and we understand the sacrifice he made for us as he died on Calvary's cross to set us free. The Holy Spirit is how we understand the fact that God is with us wherever life takes us.

We can think of the Trinity as being akin to the three forms of water – ice, water and steam. Each has very different properties but chemically they are all H₂O, two atoms of hydrogen combined with an atom of oxygen. Furthermore, in an insight we gain from the study of thermodynamics, we discover that water, ice and steam can co-exist in equilibrium with each other at what is known as the Triple Point (which for water corresponds to a temperature of 0.01 deg C and an almost complete vacuum). Water can simultaneously be water, ice and steam, demonstrating the very different characteristics of water, ice and steam whilst still being one. This can be a bit daunting to understand but then so is trying to understand the one who is the creator of heaven and earth from the electron orbiting the nucleus of an atom to the farthest planet orbiting the farthest star at the edge of the Universe.

Rather than be daunted by the Trinity, we should be thankful that almighty God reveals himself to us in ways that we can begin to understand in purely human terms.

The collect for Trinity Sunday

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the divine majesty to worship the Unity: keep us steadfast in this faith, that we may evermore be defended from all adversities; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Please can I encourage you to continue to pray for the church here in our parishes and across the world and for Veronica and the family that she would soon be able to resume her ministry amongst us. Please pray for all who have been impacted by the corona virus, those who have been directly impacted (especially those who have lost loved ones both directly due to the virus or who have lost loved ones but have not been able to mark their passing), those who are in financial difficulty as a result of the virus and those whose relationships are at breaking point. Please continue to pray for all those in the essential services who are continuing to work extremely hard to care for those in need and keep essential services operational. Please too take time to pray for yourselves, that you would continue to grow in love for Jesus through these challenging times

In Jesus name, Amen

Jeremy Hunns