

Anglican Church of Noosa
THE FULLNESS OF GOD – TRINITY
May 30, 2021
Romans 8:9-17; John 3:1-17
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Today we are looking at God as Trinity; and if there is one thing the Trinity teaches us it is that God is big.

We don't necessarily need the Trinity to know that. We only have to look at the vastness of the universe to know the Creator God is big. We only have to look at the detail in any one part of the creation to know that God is big. So it doesn't matter if we are looking through a telescope at galaxies far far away or a microscope and the complexity in every living thing; we know God is big.

One of the ways Christianity recognises that God is big is in the doctrine of the Trinity. In this doctrine there is a complex vocabulary that gives definition to a big God.

The Creeds are part of this vocabulary but only the tip of the iceberg. In the first five centuries after Christ theologians worked hard and long debating with one another how Christianity could believe in one God, yet also believe that the Father was fully God, the Son was fully God and the Holy Spirit was fully God.

To explain this they came up with the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. These are the three creeds which the Anglican Church acknowledges as a true account of the Bible's teaching about God. There are also many other writings and statements from this period which explain the Trinity as well. Reading this material you can't help but come to the conclusion that God is complex and God is big.

I would encourage you to at least read the three creeds which are foundational for our Anglican church and indeed most mainline churches. You'll find them all in our Prayer Book. The Apostles and Nicene creeds are probably most familiar but I would also direct you to the back of the Prayer Book where you will find the much more complex Athanasian Creed. If you don't have an Anglican Prayer Book then I suggest you look up Dr Google.

So we have the Trinity. God is 3. God is 1.

$1 + 1 + 1 = 1$ So forget what you learned in Grade One maths. In the theology of the Bible, God is 3 and God is 1. God is complex.

Yet Christianity is so simple isn't it? Isn't it simply following Jesus. I remember in the early days of opening my Bible and discovering Jesus as a living Lord who wanted to change my life, it was simply a case of reading what he taught and obeying it. Why should it be any more complicated than that?

Well a little way into my walk with Christ I discovered that Jesus taught about the Father. More than just teaching he spoke to God as his heavenly Father. He taught those who followed him to do the same. It's called the Lord's Prayer.

The more I followed Jesus the more I saw him doing things that you would normally only expect God should be doing. For example, he had power over the creation- to calm storms, to heal the sick, and even to raise the dead. More than this he claimed to be able to forgive people their sins and that he would be the judge at the end of time. These are qualities and prerogatives unique to God.

And then if you are really attuned to Jesus teaching you will know he promised to send the Holy Spirit when he returned to heaven. More than just a messenger however, Christians experience a new life in the Spirit as they follow Jesus. For me it was about reading Jesus call to mission and then putting it into

practise in the world. I found new power and purpose in my life like I'd never known before. The Holy Spirit was real.

Christianity is simply following Jesus. Yet Jesus is the one who leads us into the Trinitarian understanding of God. He doesn't just teach that God is Trinity, he leads us into an experience of God as Trinity. In John 14:17 Jesus says, *'the Holy Spirit will live with you and will be in you.'* He teaches about the Spirit all the way through John 14,15 and 16 and then in his famous prayer to his heavenly Father in Ch 17 he prays that all who follow him, *'may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you . May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.'* These chapters are all about knowing God intimately and entering into the life of God - Father Son and Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not given to us by University professors trying to make God as complicated as possible for ordinary folk. The Trinity is not an intellectual understanding of God meant to exclude those who don't have the mental capacity. The Trinity is not a church conspiracy that was invented after Jesus left so that the clergy would be kept in a job explaining it.

No, - we believe in the Trinity because Jesus did.

-The Church teaches the Trinity because Jesus did.

-Even more than this the church experiences the Trinity because this is the spirituality Jesus experienced.

In the Bible you will not find the word Trinity and you won't see the doctrine set out as clearly as it is in the creeds. But what you will find on every page is teaching about God and people's experience of God that can only be explained in terms of the Trinity.

How that is true in the readings before us today. In John Chapter 3 we meet a fellow named Nicodemus. Jesus says to him he must be born again, and that the only way to be born again is by the Spirit of God. V6 *'flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.'* He goes on to teach the Spirit is like the wind, v8 *'the wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear it's sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'*

Jesus is teaching here about one of the chief roles of the Holy Spirit which is to bring people to faith in Jesus. Jesus understood people to be cut off from God because of their sin and that the only way people could come back into a relationship with God, was not through more self effort, but through a completely new life being given to them by the Holy Spirit. It was as radical as being born a second time.

The teaching Jesus gave about the Kingdom of God was a vision of a world radically different from the kingdoms of the world. The person of Jesus was radically different from any person who had previously lived on earth. To embrace Jesus and his Kingdom teaching was to be born again. And this was a gift given only by the work of the Holy Spirit.

After setting out this work of the Holy Spirit Jesus gives us this most famous verse in the Bible John 3:16 *'For God so love the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'*

Jesus is now talking about the Father sending the Son; the Father giving the Son.

-The Father gives the Son in the incarnation - Jesus entering our world as a human being; entering into the messy sinfulness of our human existence.

-And the Father gives his Son in the atonement of the cross. The Son absorbing the full force of evil and pouring out his blood for the sins of the world.

So here in John Chapter 3, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit each with their particular roles fulfilling the great work of redemption.

-The Father sends the Son.

-The Son gives himself up on the cross.

-The Spirit causes a new birth that applies the work of the Father and the Son to our hearts.

So all glory to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

If we then turn to Romans 8 we find the apostle Paul setting out a spirituality of the Trinity. By spirituality I mean the Christian experience of knowing God.

It is set out in terms of life in the flesh compared with life in the Spirit. Flesh doesn't especially mean sexual sin, it simply means living for self.

Paul doesn't use the term born again but uses the language of resurrection. Look at v11, *'If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.'* This is what overcomes the life of the flesh - a new resurrection life given to us by the Spirit. Being a Christian is not just at a human level reading Jesus' teaching and trying to put it into practise; it's about a whole new life lived in the power of the resurrection by God's Holy Spirit.

In the last part of the passage v14 onwards, we see the work of the Spirit in relation to the Father. The Holy Spirit reassures us of our adoption as sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. We can call God Father. We can also call him *'Abba'* which is the Aramaic word for Father expressing affection. It is maybe like saying Daddy but without the childish connotations.

Romans 8 is a great place to see that the Trinity is not just a doctrine to be believed but an experience of God to be enjoyed. The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in us and raises us up to a new life. We are done with the flesh, with living for self and we now belong to a new family. We now enjoy being sons and daughters of God and can talk to God as our loving heavenly Father.

The reason we believe in the Trinity is because of the Bible.

-Jesus teaches God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

-The apostle Paul teaches God is Father Son and Holy Spirit. And so do most of the other authors as well.

So it really is quite simple isn't it?

God is 1; God is 3 - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Well it is both simple and complex.

As simple as falling in love.

As complex as working out a marriage over a lifetime.

As simple as using a mouse to work a computer.

As complex as understanding what is going on behind the screen.

As simple as being born again.

As complex as the incarnation and the atonement.

As simple as the new life in Christ.

As complex as the power of the resurrection.

As simple as life in the Spirit.

As complex as putting to death the flesh.

As simple as being a child of God.
As complex as obeying the Father.

Life in the Trinity is both simple and complex.

The Trinity is not an intellectual riddle meant to exclude those who can't work it out. Jesus used the doctrine to include people. He wanted to draw people into the very loving life of God and find salvation.

The apostle Paul, intellectual giant that he was, didn't use the Trinity to show off his understanding of the complexity of God. He used it to exhort people to leave behind the life of the flesh and enjoy life in the Spirit. He wanted people to know they were sons and daughters of a loving Father and find salvation.

The Bible doesn't use the doctrine to try and explain God but simply to give us a relationship whereby we can live in the love of God.

Saint Augustine said, *'I believe in order to understand, rather than I understand in order to believe.'*
The way the world operates is that intellectual understanding is necessary before people will believe. And that principle is OK. But there comes a point where the intellect can go no further. It doesn't mean we lose our rationality, it just means we build upon it and go further. The intellect is a great thing but it can only grasp a small amount of all that there is to know and especially when talking about the knowledge of God.

It is as we believe, that God increases our understanding. He wants to take us deeper into the loving life of God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Trinity is both simple and complex. Let us follow Jesus and allow him to take us into both the simplicity and the complexity of the infinite God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.