

TRINITY SUNDAY 2022

Gen 1:24-28 2 Corth 13:11-14 John 15:26,27 16:12-15

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How often have you heard the expressions,

-follow your dreams,

-be true to yourself,

-I have to do what my heart is telling me.

These ideas have been around for quite a while but in the last decade they have been taken to a new level around the theme of identity. You can be whoever you want to be in terms of gender, race, nationality.

You can self identify however you wish and society must respect your choice. It's all about finding self-fulfilment or what is now so often called flourishing.

In a society which has rejected God and any reference point outside itself, it is the individual who determines what is good, what is considered to be of value. It is individual decision, choice and action which is prized over older values such as honour, duty and order. These are the values of a previous generation which hold little sway today. The values 21st century Australia holds up as having the highest moral good are individual self-fulfilment and personal flourishing.

The question is where do we go to find a model for understanding ourselves and our relationships with one another in society?

Well guess what? The answer is God.

Sadly this is the last place it seems the average Australian would think to look. For many people they imagine that any notion of God, is the enemy of freedom and self-fulfilment.

I guess if your image of God is the moral policeman in the sky, the harsh parent who has strict house rules, or the narrow-minded preacher who is a killjoy, then of course you will think God is the enemy of self-fulfilment.

Fortunately for us, our Christian understanding of God is Trinity. It's an understanding that comes to us from the Bible.

The Bible says God is love. Simple.

But love involves relationship. Complex.

The Bible says God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity involves three distinct persons who give practical expression to the truth that God is love.

The Trinity is found on every page of the Bible but is never seen more clearly than in John Chapters 13 to 17. This is Jesus teaching at the Last Supper, the night before he was crucified. He gives his disciples a deep insight into the Trinitarian nature of God as a community of love. All three members of the Trinity have a deep desire to draw human beings into that community, into that love. The means of doing this will be Jesus willingness to go to the cross the next day. He will do that out of obedience to the Father and in the strength of the Spirit. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are united in love on a great mission together - to save us.

I want to recommend that sometime you sit down and read John Chapters 13 through 17 very slowly and prayerfully. You will gain a very full picture of the Trinity as this community of love. I want to quote from Broughton Knox who I think gives a very good little summary of Jesus' teaching about God in John.

"Thus John's Gospel reveals that the Father loves the Son, he gives all things to the Son, he shows him all that he does. The Son in response does always that which pleases the Father. His obedience springs from his

love: "I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me." There is complete other-person-centeredness in this relationship of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father. The Son does nothing of himself, but speaks just what the Father has taught him.

The same is true of the relationship of the Spirit to the Father and the Son. The Spirit is self-effacing. He does not speak from himself, but he takes the things of the Son and shows them to believers; he glorifies Christ. Ultimate reality is good, personal, relational."

A couple of weeks ago I read an article in the Australian by Carrie Jenkins which is an extract from a book she has written recently. Her opening sentence is this.

"I choose to tell you, here and now, that I am in love with my husband as well as with my other partners. And I don't think there's anything wrong in my feeling that way."

She goes on to say, *"I chose to get married, taking on all the social benefits and privileges that come with that status. I also choose to be non-monogamist. And I choose, now, to talk openly about it.*

She indicates in the article that her husband and her other partners are all aware of the multiple relationships. I guess they all certainly would be after the book was published.

So this is the route she is taking to find self-fulfilment, self expression, in order to flourish.

Yet there are hints that this lifestyle isn't that fulfilling. She talks about having to *'take joint ownership of the choices we make as a team'*. And says, *'These aren't necessarily easy conversations to have with my conscience, or with my partners (although usually the former is worse)'*. ie. The conversation with her conscience is harder.

She also down-plays the happily ever after view of marriage and comes to the conclusion that love is essentially sad. Well I think the whole article is rather sad.

But my friends we have the antidote to this contemporary malaise.

God is love.

God is Trinity.

If you want to find fulfilment then a pretty good place to start is the Trinity.

Love is the answer. We all know that. But people are looking in all the wrong places.

The Trinity provides us with the perfect model for love. What it means to be in loving relationships, loving community. It's about living for the other, seeking the glory of the other.

And the really exciting, but maybe surprising thing, is that God's plan for showing the world this love is the Church. John Chapters 13-17 is Jesus teaching his disciples about who the Trinity is, so that they might be like that themselves. And that they might be like that together as the Church. When Jesus ascends and leaves them, he wants them to know that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide them and reveal God to them, and grow them into this new community.

Listen again to what we heard read this morning John 16:14, *"The Spirit will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."*

So all that the Father has belongs to Jesus, and he will give this to the Spirit to make it known to us. We are taken into God's confidence! Absolutely incredible. It is like we're peeking through the curtains into the very life of the living God.

Jesus goes on a little later in Chapter 17 verse 21 to say, *“May those who believe, also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*

It blows my mind and my heart reading these passages in John and trying to grasp the life of love that is in the Godhead, the glory of that love and how God wants us to participate in it. And the goals are unity and mission. Look again at v23, so that we might be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me. This is a picture of the church, reflecting the loving, missional life of God.

Too often we just think of the church like a club. It's simply a gathering of people who have a common interest.

- People who like playing cards get together to play cards.
- People who like football get together to play football.
- People who like craft get together to do craft.
- And people who like Jesus get together to talk about Jesus.

But you see this is not the church. We're not just a club with individuals who happen to have a common interest in Jesus.

We are to embody the life of God – to make it real for people here on earth.
We are to be a practical expression of the Trinity, a community of love.

One of the things I love about the church is when I see it making a place for the last and the least. By this I mean the struggling person who is easy to overlook. All of us have periods in life when we go through struggle and isn't it nice to have someone looking out for us, someone who cares. We are to be there for one another.

I love it when I see the church being there for people who are shunned in so many other places in society. I'm thinking of people who maybe quirky, or bruised by life, or don't always respond in socially accepted ways, yet they find a home in the church.

The community of the Trinity makes a place. People are loved, and that may involve gentle nurture and correction such as we all need from time to time but essentially it's about simply being loved. This is the life of the Trinity in action, being there for one another.

In the New Testament this life together as church could be summed up in terms of the 'one another' passages. Jeffrey Kranz has done a study of the one another commands in the New Testament and he has found this phrase occurs 100 times in the New Testament.

LOVE

1/3 of these 'one another' passages are about love. In fact the most common is simply *'love one another'*.

- We find this beautiful phrase in John's gospel, Paul's writings, Peter and John's epistles.
- In Ephesians Paul writes, *'Tolerate one another in love'*.
- He says in Romans, *'Be devoted to one another in love'*.

UNITY

1/3 of these 'one another' passages deal with unity. Eg

- 'Be at peace with one another'* Mark
- 'Be of the same mind with one another'*. Romans
- 'Be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving to one another'*. Ephesians

