

## **Sunday 31 May – Trinity Sunday**

### **Sermon by Wendy Borgartz**

*An audio recording of the sermon from St Luke's will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](http://Sermons(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk)*

When I realised that one of the Sundays I was due to preach was Trinity Sunday my mind immediately went back to the lectures I heard when I was doing my training about the Trinity. My heart dropped as I remembered how my brain hurt at the end of each lecture and my worry about how on earth I was going to find a way to explain what I had struggled with, and failed to understand in many places, to others. And now here we are this morning. As part of my preparations for today, I did go back and reread my notes and the lecture slides, but you will be pleased to hear that I am using very little of that material.

So, let's start with the easy stuff. Trinity has, as its root, tri so three, as in triangle, with three sides, triplets, three babies etc. It comes from the Latin Trinitas and triune, if you come across that word, has the same meaning. But you won't find the word Trinity anywhere in the Bible.

Our Gospel reading this morning is the first time in the Bible that the phrase 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' is used, when Jesus is telling his disciples that their job is to go out and baptise people. The only other time in the Bible that an obvious Trinitarian expression appears is in the final verse in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, which was in our second reading this morning, where Paul writes the words we now call the Grace, 'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.'

Yet, the Trinity is one of the central beliefs of the Christian church. It appears in all the versions of the creed; it appears in much of our liturgy. It is there through the Bible, however, in both the Old and New Testaments, just not so clearly articulated.

For example, at the creation when God created everything, Jesus was there as the Word speaking creation into being and the Spirit was there blowing over the waters.

Then there is the story of the Lord appearing to Abraham at the Oak of Mamre in Genesis chapter 18 to tell him that he and Sarah will have a child in their old age. Three men visit Abraham, and these are believed to be the Trinity. There is a famous icon painted by Andrei Rublev in the 15<sup>th</sup> century depicting this scene, with the three angels sitting round a table. They are interpreted as representing, from left to right, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

If you look, you can find many other instances through scripture, as God reveals himself to us. References to wind, also to doves, are generally God the Holy Spirit, clouds and fire are generally God the Father, Jesus is obvious as God loving us so much that love became incarnate and lived among people. Jesus refers to his Father throughout the Gospels and tells his followers that the advocate or helper will come to them – God the Holy Spirit, acting in Christians today.

The same person who coined the word Trinity, a man called Tertullian who lived at the end of the second century and start of the third century, also came up with the idea of a 'Persona', which literally means a mask worn in Roman theatre when a single person played many roles and put on a mask for each persona, but behind the mask was the same person. Whilst there are three personas in the Trinity, they are all of one substance or essence, they are all God.

People have come up with different ways to try to explain this in ways we can understand, none of them are perfect because we are trying to explain something that forms part of the mystery of our faith. It is a mystery, not a numerical puzzle. But let's look at some examples, they may help wrap our brains around this concept of three-in-one.

An example I use with children, because it is something they have come across, is the substance H<sub>2</sub>O, or water. We can have it in liquid form as water, as a solid as ice, and as a gas as steam, but it is all the same chemical composition, H<sub>2</sub>O.

Another one I have heard is that of an apple, with skin, flesh and a core.

Or a three-leafed clover.

Or, and this is one for the musical among you, that of a chord. If a full chord is played it sounds harmonious. But the same chord with a note missing is incomplete and not as pleasing on the ear.

The problem with all these analogies is that they are all trying to explain something that is outside the understanding of human beings, and they all break down at some point. They can explain a small corner of the whole picture, but not the whole picture of God. It is part of the mystery of God.

As St. Augustine of Hippo put it in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century: 'si enim comprehendis, non est Deus' which roughly translates as 'if you can get your mind around it, it's not God.'

So, let's not get hung up on wording or understanding how the Trinity works. It does show us that God is mysterious, and Christianity is called faith for a reason, so let us trust in God. It also shows us that at the very core of God is relationship and love among the three Personas. The God revealed in Jesus is the missionary God, sending his healing love into the world in Jesus, and now, under Jesus' authority, sending Jesus' followers out with that same healing love, of which baptism is the sign and seal. Although it can be hard to get our heads around the fact that one God exists as the three personas of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, what we can understand is that God speaks as One person to us. We can be reassured that there is no division between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The challenge for us, therefore, is to ensure there is no division among us as we follow Jesus' instruction to go out and baptise all peoples in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.