

Sunday 19th June 2011 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m. 7 p.m. (Student Eucharist)		Trinity Sunday - Year A Ember Day Fathers' Day Sunday after Youth Day (June 16th)
Deut 4:32-40	Ps 33:1-12	2 Cor 13:11-14
		Matthew 28:16-20
THE TRINITY		

FOCUS

The main focus of the sermon

- The doctrine of the Trinity

BODY – Greetings & Introduction

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2 Cor 13:13)

Today in the Christian calendar is Trinity Sunday. It is an Ember Day, when we pray for those in the ordained ministry, and those in training. It is also Fathers’ Day – happy Fathers’ Day; and the Sunday after Youth Day – the commemoration of the events of June 16th, 1976. The central theme of Trinity Sunday gives us an opportunity to reflect on God as he has revealed himself to us.

1st POINT – Trinity Sunday – touching mystery

It is a unique Feast: there is no direct reference to what God has done for us. Instead, it holds up for our praise and worship the vision of God as he is in himself: One God, three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have spent half the year, from Advent through to Pentecost, telling the story of our salvation through Christ. The rest of the year, from Pentecost to Advent, is given over to the teaching of Jesus, and its implications for our lives. Trinity Sunday is the meeting of these two halves.

On Trinity Sunday we take a step back, and ask ourselves, “What does all this – the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus;

God the Father who has sent his Son into the world; the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost - say about the nature of God?"

Imagine a large jug of water, and a small glass. There is no way that all the water will fit into the glass. The glass is our human understanding, with its limitations. There is far more to God than we can cope with. He is in every way so much bigger than we are. We can never fully understand and appreciate the nature of God.

Gregory of Nazianzus was one of the three great Cappadocian Fathers (Turkey) (329 – 389). It was his preaching that helped explain the Christian belief in the Trinity and its final acceptance by the church. He wrote:

“To speak of the Godhead is like crossing the ocean on a raft, or like flying to the stars with wings of narrow span. Even heavenly beings are unable to speak of God’s decrees or of his government of the world.”¹

We worship God because he is the source, or beginning, and the end of all things; because he is the great power behind all life and all existence; because he is the one true God, too full of mystery for us to ever understand. Part of that mystery is our worship of God as Trinity.

Our Catechism puts it like this: Q. What do we mean by speaking of God as Trinity?

A. “We mean that we believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, three Persons and yet one God.” (AAPB pg 430 # 53).

2nd POINT – How did we get there?

It is helpful to look back and see how the Christian church arrived at this.

¹ Poem 1-3: PG 37, in Commentary: Gregory Nazianzen, Thoughts from the Early Church. The Center for Liturgy Website.

Early religions – and some today - worshipped many gods and goddesses (polytheism). There was a god for each aspect of people’s lives: war, harvest, fertility, sun, rain, storm. People have always had an experience of God and worshipped God. But, from the very beginning, humans have had a sense that God is too rich and too beyond any one set of categories to be pinned down.² Sometimes they believed in one supreme God who ruled over all other gods; sometimes the gods were at war with one another, or intervened in human lives. Myths and legends which speak about how rich the human experience is, of God.

Then a massive shift took place: Judaism, soon followed by Christianity and Islam, introduced the clear idea that there is only one God. All divine power and energy was seen as coming from a single source (monotheism.)

“I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before me.” (Ex 20:2-3).

“Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? *To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him.*” (Deut 4:33-35)

Only one God... no other gods. The later history of Israel is the struggle for the spiritual heart of the people: would they worship the gods of the nations, or would they remain true to the one God?

Then the Christian experience of God: Jesus had come revealing God to them. He was not only sent by God; he was God himself, God in

² Ron Rolheiser

the flesh, though not God the Father. And the experience of Pentecost: the power of God, the Holy Spirit, that came upon them.

The early Christians believed that God alone was God. Yet Jesus too was God, as was the Holy Spirit. God was one and yet God was somehow three. How to fit this together? It took Christianity three hundred years to arrive at a formula, or picture, that recognised the Christian experience of God. The Council of Nicea in 325 AD: there is one God in three persons. In Greek: God is one substance (Nicene Creed in the SAPB.) It describes the relationship of the three Persons.

“We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth...” (the Creator);

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being [Substance] with the Father...” (the Redeemer);

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified...” (the Sanctifier).

3rd POINT – The heart of God

One of the most famous paintings of the Trinity is in the form of an icon (Rublev – 1425). Icons are painted with prayer and fasting, and are meant to be a window into the glory of God. This icon is a picture of the story in Genesis 18, when Abraham is visited by three mysterious figures.

From the earliest Christian centuries, Abraham’s hospitality has been interpreted as an encounter with God, since the group of visitors is referred to as “the Lord” in Genesis 18:9. The three figures give a glimpse of the three persons of God, and foreshadow the fuller revelation of the Trinity which comes through the New Testament.

In the figures in this icon, there is harmony, unity with diversity, mutual love, space and freedom between them.

At the heart of the Trinity is love; community; relationship; wonder; mystery.

CONCLUSION

1. What we believe about God is important (try a debate with a Jehovah's Witness, or a person of the Jewish or Islamic faith.)
The doctrine of the Trinity is central to our faith.
2. The Trinity is at the heart of our worship: Altar; font; word; sacred space – the people of God.
3. The doctrine of the Trinity affirms God as loving and knowing, giving and receiving. God could not be God without the "other" (the Son) and the eternal bond of their relationship (the Spirit).
4. When we are held in God, we are held in relationship.

Two of them
Love one another;
Their love becomes the third.
The sharing of the three makes one.

Lord,
Let us love each other in imitation of you.
Make us one in your Holy Spirit.
Make love our instinct.
Let us be Godly
With each
Other
In
You.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2 Cor 13:13)