

16th June 2019

Preacher: Jen Smith

Hymns: **106** **God, whose almighty word**
 372 **Come down, O Love divine**
 457 **Author of faith, eternal Word**
 83 **Praise, my soul, the king of heaven**

Readings: **Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31**
 Psalm 8
 Romans 5:1-5
 John 16:12-15

“The Trinity”

Let us pray: may the words of my lips and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

A few years ago I took a call on my landline at home in the early evening – ‘Hello, I have an urgent message for you,’ a young man said. ‘Yes,’ I answered – wondering which of my church members might be in need, or who this was – ‘what is it?’ He had me.

‘For this week only,’ the man said, ‘... you can have a fully fitted new kitchen for a massive discount! Madam this opportunity will not come again! This is an urgent message for you to consider!’ And I was working to get off the phone, and he was working to keep me on the phone. I explained that I lived in a church house, and the kitchen was not mine to replace. The young man hesitated – I realised I had taken him off his sales script. ‘A church house, you say?’ He asked. ‘So there is a Christian priest?’ ‘Yes. More or less.’ ‘May I speak to him instead?’

I explained.

‘Ah’ he said – with what sounded like real urgency now – ‘Madam this is not about the kitchen, and my supervisor has only stepped away a minute. I want to know about your God – is it true you worship three Gods, and one could be killed by men? DO you have two left now?’

I took a breath. Where he had been trying to keep me on the phone, and I to get off it, our roles were suddenly reversed. Sometimes a fresh perspective on God is a terrifically nourishing, exciting thing.

Trinity Sunday is that Sunday in the year when we're given this opportunity to take a step back. To consider God from a different perspective – to shake up our thinking about God. Not the thinking of our heads so much – our explicit theology – but also our gut level thinking – our implicit theology. Trinity Sunday can expose our bad habits in relation to what we actually think of God. Like that God has left the world to its own devices, or that God is punishing us with bad events, or even that God thinks of any part of us as less than beloved. And to build better habits, and to reclaim that most countercultural thing, mystery.

We begin with the book of Proverbs (our first lesson). As we heard, wisdom says of herself: 'The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago'. Standing back & reading these words afresh, we see that the wisdom of God isn't abstract knowledge or speculation, it's not the wisdom we may think of today when we say of someone in a university, *She's a wise aunty*, or *He's a wise teacher*. Rather, the wisdom of God is personal & knowable. 'At the crossroads she takes her stand, at the entrance she cries out'. God's wisdom is personable, given a gender, calling out, confrontational, blocking traffic. And about the way we live. Practical. Warning, calling. Involving.

To know God, says the truth of this Trinity Sunday, isn't primarily to grasp facts or to understand precise doctrine, rather it's to hear the voice of God, to know God as you'd know someone beckoning to you as a friend. Like the 'word' who the evangelist St John says 'was with God & is God', the word who 'became flesh & lived among us', Jesus, the wisdom of God who reveals the secrets of God to those who accept her. Now, if Jesus shows us the wisdom of God, then today (standing back, looking afresh) we're reminded to look to him for meaning & for him in all things.

And then there's St Paul's words in his epistle to the Romans (our second lesson). As we heard: 'hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts thru the Holy Spirit that has been given to us'. St Paul's anxious not to be misunderstood. He believes salvation is assured for Christians, but he stresses that we haven't, as it were, got it sorted out yet. the kingdom work is not yet complete. And life may also still be full of, well, he says 'sufferings' but we could think of many other things which, although *suffering* may be too strong a word, still aren't the most pleasant things of life. And these sufferings are not an aberration of God's plan, but birth pains of something new. Paul counsels trust in God, and this is a habit to reclaim.

With the spirit of God, that same wisdom of God who makes her appeal to us, we learn to trust. Not only in ourselves but in a God who's other than us yet alongside us.

Now, if Jesus is God walking alongside us, befriending not only the loved & the lovely but the unloved & the unlovely, then today (standing back, looking afresh) we're reminded that this God continues to befriend, continues to give hope & confidence. Where is there hopelessness, where is there fragility- there we will find Jesus' spirit even today.

On Wednesday this week, I was walking on a crowded pavement, and in a hurry – dodging to the left and right, making my way. And there was another young man in front of me on his phone – coming right at me. I did what we would expect and pivoted to the side – saying 'excuse me'. But he pivoted into me – and then suddenly angry, put his shoulder into my chest and pushed, saying distinctly, 'yes, excuse you!' I rocked back to the side surprised – he rolled on – had disappeared by the time I'd taken breath. Had I been rude, had I provoked him or been in the wrong? I don't know? Whatever, I would say he was having a worse day than I was – both before and after he gave me that little shove.

Jesus is not about who deserves what – God is not about punishment – this is what we learn from St Paul in this passage from Romans. Jesus is about engagement with situations that are not yet perfect – and a refusal to let the story begin or end with us.

St Paul speaks of God who whatever else, does not take his bat and go home because someone calls him a name. But rather doubles down and trusts in humanity. Entrusts the work of the kingdom to humanity. If God entrusts this precious, fragile work to us, maybe it is worth trusting God?

And finally the reading from the Gospel according to St John, that same John who spoke of Jesus as the word of God. The word spoken – just on the lips? As we heard in today's Gospel, Jesus says, 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth'. The words from St John remind us not to allow our images of God to become static. There are surprises yet to come.

Now, if Jesus is, God as a human, the eternal truth in the here and now of a crowded pavement and folk with anger and nowhere to take it, if Jesus is a person who, as the risen Christ of God, says to us, *there's more truth ahead* 'when the Spirit of truth comes'. Then today (standing back, looking afresh) we're reminded to keep moving. Never to believe we've arrived.

Never to think it's too late, too late to join church, too late to become further involved, too late to heal that wound or repair that friendship or move on in that relationship. Never too late to know God. Good habits in our thinking about God free us from anger. Free us to operate with compassion, and humour, and to forgive. To see the bigger picture, to have our horizons broadened. No longer to be bound by ways of human life that trade anger for anger, evil for evil?

Our scriptures speak afresh of our God, one in three. Proverbs, Romans, the Gospel. Breaking bad habits in our theology, getting better ones. Good theology saves lives. Right thinking about God does not just warm our hearts and help us know our salvation in Christ, but worked out on a global scale, it brings justice. Counsels humility and confidence enough to make peace.

But I didn't think of any of that quickly enough the few years back on the phone about the new kitchen. With that other young man, trying to get off the phone. 'I have a little time before my supervisor comes, he said.' Alright so I explained - we do not have three Gods, and one died, but we have one God – One marvellous, loving, moving God - the Creator and sustainer of all that is, and yet knowable, as the Creator– our daddy, our mummy - the most perfect and loving parent we could ever imagine – never an impersonal 'it', more than a he, and so lovingly spoken of as Father. This is the God of Israel, who journeyed with God's people through the harshness and bitterness of exodus and exile, who called Abraham to follow him, who gave the Law through Moses, and who spoke through the prophets.

I paused – the young man said 'Madam I will have to go soon – I do not wish to be rude'. 'Wait, I said - This Creator God of Israel is embodied, has become embodied, in Jesus of Nazareth. He is God's self-expression, God's Word, made flesh. He is the SON of God, God the SON. He shares in our humanity, he welcomes us into his community (the Church), he proclaims and lives, and calls us to proclaim and live the kingdom of God.

'Madam, my supervisor is coming I do not wish to be rude but I must really go now' said the young man. Wait, wait – I said - This God, known and experienced as our Creator and sustainer, the source of Being, is as close as the air we breathe, as intimate as the most passionate of loves, an advocate and guide. This is God the HOLY SPIRIT. And because Jesus is the embodiment of God, and because he is risen, and because our humanity has been taken into the divine self in this Jesus, this HOLY SPIRIT is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the ever-present Jesus.

'Ah, madam I must go if you do not want a kitchen, I wish you a very good evening I still do not understand about the 3 Gods but I must go now.'
This conversation did actually happen, only I was not as fulsome in my answers as I have been just now.

Thomas Jefferson, one of the architects of the early American republic, asked a decent question – Why on earth do we need to speak of God in this convoluted and puzzling way? Why indeed?
TO broaden our understanding, to know God who's personable, who's a God of relationship. Wisdom. Who may be mysterious, and can & does bring freedom & liberty of spirit & of mind. Who entrusts us with each other, and whom we can trust. Even when we are angry or pushed around.
Who is Father (the creator & sustainer God of all), the Son (known as our companion, God walking by my, by our, side) & the Holy Ghost (the God of persuasion, whose power's never coercion but always love). Womb who bore us, word who walked among us, breath that eases in us now. This God we may know; knows us & this God we worship.

IN the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.