

The Glorious Trinity

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[0 : 00] Father, we thank you that as we gather, you are here with us by your spirit. Your word is open. Lord, please teach us. Form us more into your likeness for your glory. Amen.

Today's Trinity Sunday. I don't know whether you knew that, but it is. Trinity was clearly in both of those readings right at the end of them. We'll come to those shortly. But I wonder what you think when you hear that word Trinity.

Maybe it's something that rather embarrasses you about the Christian faith. It's there in our creed. It's there in our blessings. We've baptised, all of us, into the name of the Father and the Son of the Holy Spirit.

That's the name, not names, by the way. But we still struggle to get our heads round the idea, don't we? How do we explain it? What Bible passages should we go to if someone says, tell me about the Trinity?

You say, I don't know. Where do I go? And it's not helped, is it, when someone says, you know, the Trinity doesn't exist in the Bible. The word isn't there. You're scratching your heads a little bit more.

[1 : 06] Well, don't be put off that, by the way. The word Trinity is simply a contraction of two words. Tri, meaning three, and unity, meaning as one. It's a tri-unity. A unity of three.

That's what we, the word we, someone has coined to describe the divine unity of the three persons that make up the one God. Because there is only one God. People may follow other religions, worship something else as God, but these gods are not gods.

The Bible is absolutely clear about that. Isaiah 45, verse 5. God says, I am the Lord, and there is no other. Apart from me, there is no other gods. That's pretty clear, isn't it?

But not only is there just not one God, God is himself one. Unified, complete, self-sufficient, needing nothing outside himself. For these famous words from Deuteronomy chapter 6.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. One, because there's just one God, but one God in unity. Paul picks up that idea as he's preaching the gospel in Athens.

[2 : 12] Part of his talk, he says this, The God who made the world does not live in temples made by human hands. He is not served by human hands as if he needed anything. God is one. He is complete.

He needs nothing outside him that he needs. And yet, as we read through the scriptures, we find that the God is not just a single being, but a complex being. A tri-unity of three persons.

All equally divine. All equally eternal. All equally deserving of our praise and our worship. Let me give you a two-minute whistle-stop tour through some of the scriptures that help us see that.

Genesis chapter 1, great place to start. We find God the Father at work creating the earth. Through Jesus, the divine word, whilst the life-bringing spirit hovers over the waters.

The spirit or the trinity is there in creation. It's God the Trinity who says, let us make human beings in our own image. It's true that while there are hints at God's threeness across the Old Testament, the majority of time, of course, God is known as the Lord.

[3 : 19] And it often seems as if God the Father takes center state. But of course, he's not the only member of the Godhead. And he's not the only member of the Godhead active in the Old Testament.

So time and time again, you'll find the Holy Spirit spoken of as the one who brings direction and power to kings and leaders. Who brings inspiration and truth to artisans and prophets.

Who convicts the people of their sin. Who brings new life to the spiritually dead. The second person of the Trinity. The son is in the Old Testament as well. That's usually looking ahead to the coming of the Savior.

To a prophet who will be like Moses. To a king who will be like but better than David. But sometimes we get a glimpse of the pre-incarnate Christ. In the pages of the Old Testament too.

As Christ takes on human form. And temporarily comes to earth. So he walks with Abraham. He wrestles with Jacob. He appears in the burning bush.

[4 : 18] Sometimes he's known as the Angel of the Lord. Capital A. But the way this Angel of the Lord is spoken of. The way he is worshipped. Makes it clear that this is no ordinary angel. Not that I think any angels are ordinary.

But you get what I mean. This is not an angel. This is someone far greater. Someone truly divine. But of course it's not until Jesus arrives. That we see the full unity of the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

So Jesus speaks about that unity doesn't he? John 10, John 17. Wonderful passages to study. And the way Jesus speaks about the Holy Spirit with us. And in us.

As the means by which Jesus himself will be with us. As the means by which we will know and experience the love of the Father. That can only point to the fact that Jesus and the Spirit are divine beings.

One is united with the Father. Distinct but united. Different but sharing the same nature. If you want a snapshot of the Trinity, probably Luke 3 is the best place to go.

[5 : 19] Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan. As Jesus, the eternal Son of God, rises from the waters. Well you know what happens, don't you? The heavens are opened. The Spirit of God descends like a dove.

Whilst the voice of the Father declares, This is my Son whom I love. With Him I am well pleased. Right throughout the book of Acts, through Paul's letters, into the last chapters of Revelation even. The tri-unity of God is declared and celebrated. As lost sinners are brought into the family of God the Father. By believing in God the Son. Through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The word Trinity may not appear in the Bible. But it is the watermark that is there on every page. Underneath every law, every event, every promise. We might struggle to get our heads around God like that.

How God can be one God with three persons. But that's okay. We're not meant to fully understand God. Our job isn't to understand Him, but to trust Him and to worship Him.

[6 : 22] To love Him and obey Him. Trinity explains what God, through His self-revelation of Himself, Through the pages of the Bible has made known to us.

And it is a beautiful and wonderful doctrine. Hold on to it. But it's not just something to be mulled over and wondered about. Actually, the Trinity makes a real difference to us, as Christians. And that brings us to our two short Bible readings this morning. Both of them with a clear Trinitarian point towards the end of each one. I wonder if you noticed that.

And both of them actually revealing something wonderful about the nature of God, Our three in one almighty God. His loving unity and His gracious mission.

Those are the two things I want to pick up. The loving unity of the Trinity and the gracious mission of the Trinity. And both show us how we need to reflect God to the watching world.

[7 : 21] Let's go to 2 Corinthians chapter 13. We're not going to deal with those early verses. But we're going to concentrate on the end. But I wonder if you have a friend or family member who you love deeply, but who disappoints you.

Maybe they don't return your love and affection in the way you would like. Maybe they keep going off the rails and getting themselves into trouble. Do you have anyone like that in your life?

Paul did. It was the church in Corinth. The whole church. Both of Paul's letters to the church in Corinth are full of him pouring out his heart to them.

Explaining his love for them. Seeking to deal with the problems of division and pride that he knew were crippling the relationships between one another and between them and God.

Read the letters. You can't help but hear his pain and his anguish as he writes to them. And as he comes to the last few verses of that letter, he gives them a series of quick fire commands.

[8 : 24] And reminds them of all that he had written. He tells them to rejoice. To strive for full restoration. To encourage one another. To be of one mind. To live in peace.

And the God of love and peace will be with you. I wonder if you can pick out the thread there. The Christians were, the Corinthian Christians were one in Christ.

But they certainly weren't one with one another. But they should have been. They should have been rejoicing over their salvation and all that God had done for them. They should have been letting that rejoicing break down their divisions and factions and brought restoration, unity and peace and love. That was their aim. And Paul says, this is what you've got to do, folks. You're united to Christ. Be united to one another. And yet they were going to have to work at it.

Because it isn't easy. Restoring broken relationships takes hard work. It requires striving and sacrifice. Humility, gentleness, forgiveness. It was going to take time to put those things right.

[9 : 28] But that was their calling. It was vital because only by doing so would they be able to reflect God's character to the world. And I'm sure that's why Paul ends his letter with what 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. Paul is pointing them to the fact that as we look at God in his loving unity, as we get drawn into a relationship with this triune God, we get to see what a true perfect family should be like.

From that we get to see what God's family on earth should be like. Friends, our God is a God of perfect unity. We're all three persons of the Trinity delighting one another because they're united in love and purpose.

They might have different roles, but they're not in competition. The Son may be sent to do the will of the Father, but there is no envy, no anxiety, no desire to take the higher seat and usurp the other. Each one of the three members of the Trinity rejoices in the joy and the praise of the others. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit may be distinct in personhood. And sometimes they role, they play in salvation's history, but they are united in love and truth and purpose.

[10 : 51] We've already seen they each have a role in creation. They have a role to play, each of them as well, in rescuing Israel from slavery and leading them to the promised lands. And of course, they're all playing this role in our own salvation.

Jesus came to do the will of the Father, speaking the words his Father gave him, performing miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit, before going to the cross and dying in our place.

But Jesus is no unwilling victim. He's not put upon by a wicked, vindictive Father who really doesn't care. The Gospels never give us that picture. Instead, we see a Jesus who delights in his Father, who rejoices in the comfort and work of the Spirit in and through him.

We see Jesus who willingly left the glory of heaven, steps down to earth, takes on human flesh, becoming like us, becoming our servant, that he might lift us up.

Jesus is the ultimate example of true humility and service. One who did all he could to reconcile us to God, to bring us true peace, and to encompass us in the never-ending, never-giving-up, always-and-forever love of the Trinity.

[12 : 05] Because that's what God is like. A perfect unity of three who share eternal joy and love and unity together. Friends, that is the God who made us.

That is the God we were made to know. The God in whose perfect three-fold presence we will spend eternity. Do you see the implication for us from that?

For us here as God's church in Newton Abbot, is there, in Paul's words to the church in Corinth, our calling is to be a Christian community that mirrors, as far as possible, the kind of love and unity that is there within the Trinity.

A unity and love that bears with one another and forgives one another. Because, let's be honest, none of us are perfect. We all have our weaknesses. But we are to strive for a unity of love which has open arms and open homes.

A love that cares and shares and helps and encourages. A deep and close fellowship that is based on our unity with Jesus, where we weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice, and live out our faith with one another in all those times in between.

[13 : 20] So we might have different roles, but we're not to get jealous. We might have different responsibilities, but we're not to seek to usurp or to tear down. Our five churches are different in style and music, and that's okay.

In fact, that's a joy, I think. Our style and music may vary, but we have the same Saviour. We believe the same gospel. We're adopted by the same Father.

We're strengthened by the same Spirit. We cannot let our differences on things that do not matter divide us. We can't let envy or pride creep in to push us apart.

For if they do, they will hinder our attempt to present God to the world, to those who need to meet him. You see, in churches that are ripped apart by divisions, it's very hard to focus on God and experience his love.

Church is meant to be a place where we experience God's love in greater measure, where actually we have a foretaste of heaven and know something of the joys ahead. There's little of that in the church community that's divided and jealous, where they're broken into factions.

[14:34] Maybe when churches in the same parish spar against one another. But where there is true unity, deep love, solid agreement on the things that really matter, when heart and will and doctrine are aligned, when we want and pray the best for one another, where God's loving unity shapes our relationships, well, that's a different matter.

That is a taste, a foretaste of glory. And if we're a community like that, we are able much more to display God's love to the world. Brothers and sisters, our God is a fellowship, a perfect fellowship of three, united in love and grace and peace.

That's something to rejoice in, isn't it? And it's something with God's help to seek to build among us. You up for that? It won't be easy, but it will be beautiful.

Let's strive for that unity. That's the first thing. Let's move then to the end of Matthew's gospel. This point won't be quite as long as the first one. Verses 16 to 20.

Because here we hear another Trinitarian declaration, don't we? This time in the mouth of Jesus, as he sends his disciples out to make more disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son of the Holy Spirit, teaching him to obey everything he had commanded.

[15:54] So we see the loving unity of the relationships within the Trinity, alluded to in 2 Corinthians 13. Here we see the gracious mission of the Trinity spelt out for us.

What is it? To see more people drawn into the love and fellowship of the threefold God who made them. Our God is a God of evangelism. Now maybe like the word Trinity, that word sends a bit of an uncomfortable shiver up your spine.

Oh, don't want to be involved in that. Maybe it conjures up people wearing placards, proclaiming the end of the world is nigh. Bible-thumping preachers on soapboxes, shouting about hell and judgment, upsetting everyone they see.

But an evangelist is simply a message of good news. An evangelist is someone who tells that good news. So unless you are a doom-mongering eeyore 24-7, you are an evangelist.

You're an evangelist every time you tell a friend that they're giving free drinks away at Costa. Or the sea and painter at the moment is perfect for swimming. You really need to give it a go. Or would you rejoice with me?

[17:05] I've got a new grandchild. I've got a new child. I've got a new job. I've made a puppet. I've improved my golf swing. We're used to telling one another good news, aren't we?

It's just that Jesus came as and with the capital E evangel. The best news ever. He came proclaiming the good news that the doors of God's kingdom were open.

And that all who come to him, whoever they are, wherever they're from, all who come through repentance and faith would be welcomed into God's kingdom. So think about the invitations Jesus gives.

Let the little children come to me. Do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Or the passage we looked at last week. Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

[18:09] Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. Jesus was great at invitations. He invited the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the dead to rise.

Lazarus, come out! He invited tax collectors and sinners to sit and eat with him. He invited those who had lived lives of sin to turn and live.

He invited those with doubt to trust him, those with fears to find courage, those who had no hope for the future, to hope anew, to find purpose in their lives, to be equipped with the Spirit, to live lives that bring God's glory.

And that's not Jesus, only Jesus' mission. That is the Trinity's mission. For God the Son came at the will of his Father in the power of the Spirit to bring people home to God.

