

Worship at Home: Sunday Worship for 30 May 2021 Trinity Sunday

SERMON

Rev Shemil Mathew

May I speak in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Mother Teresa of Kolkata said over a decade ago said:

“The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved.”

In the last year, with the Covid 19 restrictions in place, we saw loneliness becoming not just an issue, but a crisis.

We are of course hugely indebted to our scientists in medical research for developing a vaccine so quickly. Genetic research also helped us to realise we people of different races are not different species but one human species in this longlist of times. This happened through a booming industry of DNA mapping. Many of us in Britain are interested in finding out what ancestral secrets our genes hold. There is also a surge in the use of websites that offer help in tracing our ancestry.

In a world more isolated than ever, DNA mapping and ancestry tracing connects us to the people who went before us. My own story is not that different. This is a chart (holding the chart up) proudly displaying our family tree dating back to --. For my family in India, this chart tells our story going all the way back to the legend of St Thomas the Apostle arriving in Kerala in 52 A.D.

Both the increasing popularity of ancestry checking and my own family's obsession with its heritage attest to an inherent human desire to belong and be connected.

Today is Trinity Sunday, the Sunday that we celebrate the most fundamental and holy connectedness of all: the connectedness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Trinity is a foundational doctrine of Christianity, yet we have no direct references to in the scriptures. It is a teaching that took shape as late as 300 AD, and even then was contested and debated.

To the rational modern Western mind, the Trinity remains elusive and somewhat incomprehensible. In an attempt to bring clarity to such a concept beyond comprehension, we often rely on metaphors and analogies. The language of mystery is that of analogy, yet in our limited repertoire, we compare the Trinity to a shamrock or a Jaffa cake. If there is a Sunday on which one can expect heresy preached from the pulpit, it is indeed Trinity Sunday.

I would like to bring your attention to this replica of an icon by the 15th century Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev. This icon is known as either the hospitality of Abraham or simply, Trinity. It is a painting that depicts the relational nature of the trinity beautifully: we see the three figures gazing at each other, completing a loving relationship.

Franciscan friar and spiritual teacher Fr Richard Rohr suggests that the small black mark we can see at the end of the table could have been a mirror, inviting the person who is looking at the icon to be part of this divine union.

For many of us, God is someone far away both physically and emotionally. We believe in a God who Isaiah witnesses in our Old Testament reading – He is a holy god whose glory fills the earth. A god who arouses in us the response of fear and inadequacy -

Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!

God is holy and as the people of God we are called to be holy. Holiness misunderstood is often seen as a separation resulting in isolation. A true trinitarian holiness is one of invitation where we are invited to partake in a relationship. May I just be clear that this does not mean that we Christians are those who are achieved holiness. In fact such a superiority complex of church is the greatest heresy of our time. It is this heresy that evokes a response of shock and anger in us when we hear the scandals of racial and sexual abuse involving the church and its leadership. We are not above the follies of the flesh. But we are a community constantly called to repent of our failures in an attempt to be holy through the loving beckoning of Father Son and Holy Spirit to be in a relationship with them.

This transformative love is what we see clearly articulated in the gospel reading of the day- in perhaps the most used and quoted verses from the gospel of John:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

It is this gratuitous love of God which brings us to the table with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is this gratuitous love of God that unites us and will in the end bring us together as the eschatological community of all tribes, nations, and tongues we see in revelation chapter 7 Verse 9

I started this sermon by speaking about the human disposition to be interconnected and to be in relationships. Our readings today prompt us to both the awesomeness of the glory and holiness of God as well as God's gratuitous love that welcomes us into a relationship with Him.

Let me conclude by saying that a relationship in which God welcomes us through his grace is one that connects us to those who are around us in our communities and churches. This is what we can offer to our society riddled with loneliness.

Amen!