

Address by Ash Leighton Plom, 30 May 2021

Almighty God, Creator and Saviour,
Glorious trinity,
Guide my words and all our spirits,
By your Word and Spirit,
That we may please you, and see your fruit in our lives,
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Good morning everyone, and for anyone new, or perhaps joining us online, my name's Ash, one of your curates, and as we've noted, today is Trinity Sunday. There's a bit of a joke that vicars always give Trinity Sunday to their curates to preach on, because vicars want to duck out from having to preach on it!

Now, let me say I'm sure Nigel would do a better job than me, but I actually volunteered for this slot because the Trinity excites me so much and I find it really helpful to have this opportunity to clarify our thinking on this key doctrine in relating to God.

Let me also say that there is an extent to which the doctrine of the Trinity is beyond words, and every attempt to describe or explain God's nature and action will fall short of the full reality... I mean, if you could put God in a neat little conceptual box, then that just wouldn't be God anymore, it would be too small, as it were. No matter how 'big' the box, the full reality of God would be bigger still. So, doctrine should allow room for the mysterious and even, to an extent, the incomprehensible.

But God has given us a number of means to perceive the mysterious and know at least in part the incomprehensible. These means include holy scripture, as in the Bible, and also tradition, by which I mean for example the wisdom of people who have read the Bible before us, and finally reason, i.e. our ability to think and reflect on these things. So, let's deploy some scripture, tradition, and reason to enliven our thinking about the triune nature of God today.

This will build on our session of Thrive last week for those of you who were there, but don't worry if you weren't, this will be stand-alone as well, so it's not essential that you caught Thrive last week, it's just hopefully progressing and embedding what we looked at for those of you who were there.

So, our starting point is that the Bible states very clearly that there is only one God. Deuteronomy 6(v4) for example emphasises, “the Lord our God is One”, and this is so central it’s chanted in synagogues globally every week.

This one God is called God because he is identified as uniquely worthy of worship for a number of specific reasons. For example, scripture asserts that God alone is the eternal creator of the universe. Isaiah 40(v28) says, “The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.” This states that only God is everlasting, because he alone existed before creation, and he created all of creation. This means there’s an infinite "ontological gap", a complete difference in nature, between God the creator and everything else, as creatures.

Another example of a thing that scripture says is unique about God is that he alone is our saviour. For instance Jeremiah 3(v23) says, “salvation is in the LORD our God”. So, to sum up so far, unique traits like being our creator and saviour mark God alone out as God.

Now, secondly, it's probably not a massive leap to identify the Father as God. For example, 1 Corinthians 8(v6) states, “there is only one God, the Father, who is the Creator of all things”. Jesus, of course, prays to the Father as God, and Isaiah 63(v16) says of God: "You are our father... You, O LORD, are our father; our saviour in times past."

But where it starts to get a bit tricky is that the Bible also names Jesus as creator and saviour, those unique traits attributed to God. For example, John 1(v3) says of Jesus “through him all things were made”, and Luke 2(v11), part of the nativity, says "today in the city of David there has been born for you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

Similarly, the Holy Spirit, is also named as creator and saviour. For example, Job 33(v4) says, “The Spirit of God has made me”, and in Ephesians 1(v13), it's the Holy Spirit who seals believers’ salvation. So, scripture has the Spirit, too, as being creator and saviour.

Collectively, this means we have a tension whereby God is emphatically One, and yet we have three persons (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) named as fulfilling those unique divine ontologies as creator and saviour.

It's this tension which is synthesised in trinitarian Christianity, exemplified for example in the Athanasian Creed. This summarises:

“There is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godness of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one... the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God.”

“For as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; so we are forbidden to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords.”

So, the credal doctrine of the trinity neatly integrates the various statements about Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which would otherwise be contradictory.

Some of you are thinking "What does this have to do with me?" But I hope it might mean you'll engage or reengage with worship in a new or deeper way, and perhaps expand your awareness of Father, Son or Holy Spirit. I think a lot of us default to thinking of, say, the Father as the creator and the Son as the saviour, but scriptures Trinity Sunday is a timely opportunity to remind us of the full divinity of each of the Father, and the Son, and Holy Spirit.

I also think a lot of Christians have a default go-to in prayer, probably catholics are more likely to pray to the Father, evangelicals maybe more likely to pray to Jesus, and charismatics to the Spirit. But if prayer is talking to God, then prayer to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be theologically rich and life-giving. So, who from the Trinity might you engage or reengage with in prayer and worship in a new or deeper way over the rest of this service, and the week to come?

And finally, there's a missional element here, too. Too few people properly grasp that Jesus is fully God, and that it was God himself who came from heaven to earth, teaching and healing and who took up his cross to show us how radically to love one another, to die for our sins, and to defeat death – God himself, not just “God's son”, as if only the Father is God, and he was some kind of tyrant who sends his son to suffer and die. Yes, God the Father grieved as Christ suffered and died, but God himself, in Jesus also hung on the cross and died for you and for your friends and your family, and I wonder if they all know that yet. And God himself fills us now in the Spirit, to help us to share these wonderful truths. So, I hope you'll feel closer to

God, and more empowered, too, to share the whole Trinity today, and in the week ahead, getting to know God more fully and deeply, and critically, sharing this fulness too.

Amen