

Address by Nigel Guthrie for 12th June 2022 (at St Michael's Church)

Would you mind holding your hand up if you own a computer, tablet or smart phone, please?

Now could I ask you to keep your hand up if you find it useful (when it works)?

Please leave your hand up if you would say you have come to rely on it?

And could I now ask you to leave your hand up if you understand how it works and could give a reasonable description of the electronics and the operating system which makes it work?.....OK – I thought that might be the case!

It is tempting to say that because we don't fully understand God we can't really trust him or rely on him. But the modern world should perhaps make us rethink. Its not just computers that we use, and even rely on, without fully understanding them. What about the car that brought you here? Even if we understand the internal combustion engine, or the electric motor, the chances of us knowing how the modern control systems in a car work are slim, unless we work in that field.

We often trust our life to a car. And if we use internet banking we entrust our money to security systems that we don't fully understand. What leads us to put our trust in these things? I suppose it is because we have found them reliable enough in the past. We need the services which they provide and we are prepared to take a leap of faith and use them.

On Trinity Sunday we are reminded us that God is a mystery we can only partly understand. But I don't believe that our partial understanding should be a barrier to us trusting and indeed relying on God and on the grace which God supplies.

Today's collect uses the words 'glory, eternal and divine' to describe God. Other faiths also use such words because they point to God who is above and beyond our understanding and experience; a God whose power is so great, and so far outside our experience that we cannot fully grasp it; a power so great that the wonders of the world and of the whole universe are a mere reflection of it. The people of the Old Testament believed that a person could not look on the face of God and live; but that all changed with the birth of Jesus. People could look on the face of Jesus and not only live but also see that God's nature could be expressed in a human life. People could see that God cared for the hungry, the sick and lonely and outcast. In fact they could see that God cared for everybody, and that he cared so much that he didn't just help them but was prepared to lay down his life for them.

We can understand that sort of love. It is the sort of love and sacrifice which other people have made, like those who have given up their lives to fight for what they believed to be right; like those who have given up their food to feed to feed others; like those who give up their time to care for others; like those who have cared for us and loved us.

The highest levels of love and sacrifice, shown by the bravest and most selfless of people are always inspiring. But for such love to be shown by God is truly awe inspiring because God was not obliged by circumstances to do this for the preservation of his human family. God did this out of pure love for us. And in giving up his life Jesus revealed the true nature of God, as pure love.

When the Church uses the clunky but ancient language of three persons in one God we acknowledge that what we seek to express about God is not easily conveyed in human words. But this language is trying to point to the truth that the different persons of God's being, the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit are bound by a love so strong that nothing can in heaven or earth can break it. So, Jesus can say in John chapter 16 'All that the Father has is mine.' But what Jesus also makes clear in St John's Gospel is that what he shares with the Father he also shares with those who belong to him. We read in John chapter 17 'All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.' And in today's gospel from John 16 we read that the Spirit of truth will guide us into all truth because he will not speak on his own. In other words the Spirit can only teach the truth and love of the Father and the Son. The three are joined in the perfect unity of love so that there is only one will and purpose. Not even the closest human relationship comes close to this.

When we put our trust in Jesus we share in the Father's love for the Son and the Spirit. In short we enter the divine circle of love. In the First letter of John we read these remarkable words: 'God is love, and those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them'. But later in chapter four he also makes clear what it means in practical terms to live in God's love: "Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."

This is where the doctrine of the Trinity really bites. Can we love those wonderful, infuriating and sometimes downright difficult people that God has made our

brothers and sisters? If not then we probably can't say with conviction that we love God.

Trinity Sunday is a celebration of the glorious but unfathomable nature of God. But it also sets us off on a great challenge which is to love, as best we can, those around us in our families, our communities and our churches. As we seek to do that may we find joy, forgiveness and grace and strengthen our trust in the great and mysterious one who made us and loves us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.