

TRINITY SUNDAY

Today we are celebrating the Trinity. It is a mystery - no one can really explain it.

But this doesn't mean we shouldn't at least have a think about it.

The Doctrine is set out in the creeds of the church. At a Baptism I use the first century question and answer creed.

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, who made the world? All I believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who redeemed mankind? All I believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God? All I believe and trust in him.

Well - there we are - that is the simple version. But, as with all creeds - statements of what we believe - there is more to it. Not too long ago in the life of the church - In the successive Books of Common Prayer of the reformed Church of England from 1549 to 1662, on 19 Sundays in the year something called the Athanasian creed had to be recited. Every third Sunday we had to hear this:

Whoever wants to be saved should above all cling to the catholic faith.

Whoever does not guard it whole and inviolable will doubtless perish eternally.

And what is 'it'?

Now this is the catholic faith: We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being.

And then it goes on for a long time trying to define God. Which of course you cannot do.

When it comes to preaching the Trinity, most church leaders try to be on holiday!

Martin Luther said: "To try to deny the Trinity endangers your salvation, to try to comprehend the Trinity endangers your sanity."

John Wesley said: "Bring me a worm that can understand a human being, and then I will show you a human being that can understand the Trinity!"

In other words, these two great leaders of faith found that Trinity is totally mysterious and inexpressible.

But yet it is essential. It is a defining - no **the** defining bit of Christianity.

A man visited a vacant house with a friend who wanted to buy it. The friend was particularly struck by the beauty of one of the rooms which he wanted to turn into his study; but he objected to a cupboard in the corner.

“I will have to remove it”, he said to the architect. “No, you won’t,” was the reply.

“But I can do what I like if I buy the house,” said the man. “You cannot do what you like with that cupboard,” answered the architect.

“Why not?” he asked, “Is it protected by a clause in the deed?”

“No,” said the architect, “it is not on the deed: it is on the plan. You cannot take away the cupboard without taking down the house; it is part of the main structure.”

So if we take away the Trinity we destroy the whole structure of Christianity. That doctrine is built in. It is central. It is a part of the structure. It simply IS the God we worship.

So what is the Trinity: Well the early church Councils met to try to thrash out in some form of order what the Church believed. They produced the Nicene Creed which we say every Sunday. Essentially the creed says that the Father, Son, and Spirit are the same in substance, and are all equal in power and glory. Spirit - Jesus - Father: All God - all equal.

There are probably some folk here who imagine that the idea of the Trinity was thought up by ivory-tower theologians who were making things more complicated than they needed to be and were messing up the simple faith of regular believers. But this is not so. The creeds came out of a real struggle to work out who Jesus was and what the Holy Spirit was. And this wrestling with great truths went on from the first Pentecost until 381 AD.

This complex and profound faith was then handed over for the theologians to try and make more intelligible. They have been trying ever since.

So how are to try to wrap our heads round it? Well my feeling is: don’t try. God is mystery and marvel. He exists in light, he is spirit and he is so far outside our capability of understanding him that all we can do is to fall down and worship the being who created and sustains that who universe.

Rather than trying to understand God, we need to be open to experience him. He loves each one of us. We know this through Jesus and we understand how great this love is through calvary.

So let's do the early church creed. Would you please stand:

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, who made the world?

All I believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who redeemed mankind?

All I believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God?

All I believe and trust in him.

This is the catholic faith. This is the faith of the church. We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We cannot be saved without believing this firmly and faithfully.