

“THE TRINITY”

2 Corinthians 13:11-13, Matthew 28:16-20 [MW17-17]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 11 June 2017

The title kind of gives it away doesn't it? [Slide 1 on]

- 'three in one', when three equals one
something to do with the 'Trinity'
so to begin, a 'trinity' of stories

I remember when I was in my first parish as Vicar

- working out with the Bishop when he might be able to visit
and the Bishop remarked that he always seemed to have plenty of invitations
to preach on Trinity Sunday
- if I didn't know better, he said, I'd think these vicars were trying to avoid
preaching on the Trinity!

Then there is the best explanation of how the Trinity works that I've ever heard

- a colleague who was also a Star Trek fan put it like this: [Slide 2]
apparently a physicist asked Gene Roddenberry, the creator of the *Star Trek* series
how the transporter worked
- the transporter, you know, the thing that beams crew members
to the planet surface, and back
- Gene Roddenberry's answer to: how does the transporter work?
very well thank you!
- so when someone asks: how does the Trinity work?
the best reply is: very well thank you!

And finally there's the story of a group of guys out in the bush for the weekend:
One of the guys looked around at the sun streaming through the trees and said, "Okay God, I
know you're real." The others looked at him a bit surprised, then he added very firmly, "And
I'll believe anything you like, but don't ask me to believe in the Trinity! Okay?"

The basic idea is that somehow $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$; $3 = 1$

- there is one God, and only one God
but three distinct persons make up that one God
- so how does that work for you: ... very well thank you?
or does it give you a headache?
- do you give up because it's too difficult to get your head around?
or is it one of those things best left as a 'mystery'?

So, is there more than one God?

- absolutely, positively not!
God states this very clearly in the Bible, like in Isaiah 45:5 [Slide 3]
I am the Lord. There is no other God; I am the only God
- in the Old Testament the people of Israel had a tendency to worship other gods
practically every other nation around Israel back then had multiple Gods
- the people of Israel probably saw this as a kind of religious insurance policy
if Yahweh didn't deliver for them, maybe another god would
- no wonder number one on God's list of Ten Commandments is:
you must not have any other gods except me

Of all the major religions in the world, only three are monotheistic

- that is, have the belief there is only one God
these three are Judaism, Islam and Christianity
- there is one and only one God: God [Slide 4]
then there's Jesus and the Holy Spirit
- how does that work?
and the answer is ... very well thank you!

Seriously though, we have come to one of the most important truths in the Bible

- and it involves a word which doesn't even appear in the Bible
"Trinity"
- we sang a line in our opening hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy"
which goes: *God in three persons, blessed Trinity* [Slide 5]

Essentially, the Trinity describes the three distinct persons

- which make up the one true God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit
perhaps we could describe this as the "tri-personality" of God
- God has many distinct personality traits
but God is also three unique persons
each one with individual personality traits

Trinity most definitely does not mean three gods exist who together make up God

- that would be *tritheism*
God is one, Deuteronomy 6:4 makes this very clear [Slide 6]
*Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is **One***

Theologians use the concept of the Trinity in order to help describe the

- "fullness of the Godhead", including both God's unity and diversity
sometimes the words "triune" or "trinity" are used
- there is only one God
but within that unity are three eternal and co-equal persons
all sharing the same essence and substance, but each having a distinct existence

There's no question that the Trinity is one of the great mysteries of God and the Bible

- this is what occurred to Augustine, one of the great early theologians:

Augustine, while puzzling over the doctrine of the Trinity, was walking along the beach when he observed a young boy with a bucket running back and forth to pour water into a little hole. Augustine asked him what he was doing. "Trying to put the ocean into this hole," the boy replied. Then Augustine realised he had been trying to put an infinite God into his finite mind.

Although the Bible never actually mentions the word 'Trinity'

- the concept is definitely there
and we can kind of get a 'picture' of Trinity from some passages [Slide 7]
one of the most striking passages on the Trinity can be found in Matthew 3:16-17

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. Then heaven opened, and he saw God's Spirit coming down on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with him."

Isn't that amazing - all three persons of the Trinity present in one place, at one time?!

- distinct, yet united
- the Father's voice is heard, the Son is being baptised
- and the Holy Spirit appears in the form of a dove

Trinity, three in one, three equals one, may indeed be a mystery

- but it is natural
- consider these illustrations from nature

The egg: an egg has three parts [Slide 8]

- the shell, the white, the yolk
- each part serves a different function
- but each part is all egg, and the egg is one in essence

Then there's water, which commonly exists in three forms [Slide 9]

- ice (solid) is water, water (liquid) is water, steam (gas) is water
- but what ever the form, it's the same molecule: H²O

Each person in the Trinity is equal to God - all God, all different, all one, all equal

- there is God the Father, Parent, Creator
- many, many times throughout the Bible God is called "Father" [Slide 10]
- for example in Isaiah 64:8, *You, Lord, are our Father*
- and from Romans 1:7
- May grace and peace be yours from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*

There is Jesus the Son, Redeemer

- Jesus understood who he was and said so plainly [Slide 11]
- in a discussion with some Jews in Jerusalem about 'the Christ'
- Jesus responds by saying: *The Father and I are one* (John 10:30)
- throughout the New Testament, Jesus is described as having qualities only God can possess: eternal (John 17:5)
- omniscient (John 16:30), omnipotent (John 5:19), immutable (Hebrews 13:8)
- Creator (Colossians 1:16), power to forgive sins (Mark 2:5)
- John's Gospel records Jesus saying:
- Everything the Father has is mine. That is why I have said that the Spirit takes my message and tells it to you.* (John 16:15)

There is the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life

- because the third Person in the Trinity has been called Holy *Spirit*
- there has been a tendency to believe the Holy Spirit isn't a person
- and does not have a personality
- yet God is spirit and God has a personality
- it is no different with the Holy Spirit [Slide 12]
- in fact Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as "He" many times
- especially when he promises the Holy Spirit to his disciples in John 14

Like Jesus, the Holy Spirit has several characteristics only God can possess

- eternal (Hebrews 9:14), omnipotent (Luke 1:35)
- omnipresent (Psalm 139:7)
- Creator (Psalm 104:30)

So there you have it: God in three persons, blessed Trinity

- Father, Son, Holy Spirit
- Creator, Redeemer, Giver of Life
- three in one, three equals one

Don't worry if it still seems more than a bit mind-boggling

- I'm pretty sure that all we can do is catch but a fleeting glimpse of "Trinity" and what it reveals to us about God
- be comforted, and encouraged, by these words from a distinguished theologian:

[Slide 13]

Explain the Trinity? We can't even begin. We can only accept it -- a mystery, disclosed in Scripture. It should be no surprise that the triune Being of God baffles our finite minds. We should be surprised, rather, if we could understand the nature of our Creator. He would be a two-bit deity, not the fathomless Source of all reality.

Writers Bruce Bickell and Stan Jantz sum it up like this: [Slide 14]

God the Father had it in His heart to provide a way for people to be forgiven of sin. God the Father *authored* the plan of salvation. Jesus the Son, while fully God, submitted to the Father's plan. As the sacrifice for people's sin, Jesus Christ *accomplished* the plan of salvation. The Holy Spirit, just as much God as the other two persons, is at work in the lives of those who have chosen to follow God. The Holy Spirit *applies* the plan of salvation in the lives of believers.

Beyond all this, there's nothing wrong with a little 'mystery' [Slide 15]

- when flying in a Boeing 747, most people don't really understand how it is 400 tons of metal can take off and stay airborne but they can still enjoy the trip without knowing quite how it happens!
- similarly we can relax and enjoy the journey through life in relationship with God who is one and is three

"Trinity" is by its very nature right relationship

- so we are invited to enjoy journeying with God who is relationship
- God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who desires relationship with us
- God: Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life
- whose heart is for all creation to be in right relationship

[Slide 16]

And it all works very well thank you!