

## Trinity: A MATHS LESSON

John 16:12-15 [MW18-18]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 27 May 2018

Trinity ...

- it's something that can really mess with your head and yet it says something vital about God and also about us and our relationship to God

Now you can get all technical and theological

- and go into all sorts of details to try and understand and explain this "Trinity" concept
- or you could do what I did and turn it over to a "real bloke" to grapple with

You might remember that I am writing a series

- on the life and issues and questions followers of Jesus might face involving an 'ordinary Kiwi bloke' who has had the experience of the Lord God bursting in on his life
- they have developed quite a relationship and this real bloke is developing his understanding too as I think you will see in what I have titled: "A Maths Lesson"

Read the story

Then ... I invite you to reflect on what the Trinity may mean for you

- and your relationship with God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit as we have a video clip of Sandra McCracken singing "Trinity Song"

## A Maths Lesson?

I'd never been much good at maths. Shapes and angles and 'x + y squared' never made much sense to me. I thought I had a reasonable grasp of the basics though. Enough to know that 'one' and 'three' were not the same. 'One' definitely did not equal 'three'!

I don't know why I was even bothering to think about it. It wasn't as if it was important to me. It was well out of my league. Give me the "Rugby Weekly", "Best Cars" or a western any day. That's as much brain stretching as I need. Heck! This was probably even out of my wife Patti's league.

It's just that on the radio on the way home – Patti must have changed the station – I heard this guy talking about knowing and understanding God. That kind of grabbed my attention as I have a little experience with that kind of thing. Then he started going on about God being "three in one". That's when my rudimentary maths knowledge kicked in and said: no way! It doesn't make sense. Why bother? The guy said it was the "Tri...", "Trina ..."?

"Trinity perhaps?" came a voice from the chair next to mine.

I looked over and sure enough it was the Lord God. Creator of absolutely everything and then some. "Yes," I answered, "that's it. The 'Holy Trinity'. Not an expression you hear everyday, thank goodness! It can mess with your mind."

"May be there's a reason for that," said the Lord encouragingly.

"I'm not so sure," was my answer. "Don't see why anyone needs to bother really. I mean, one God is enough. (Sometimes much more than enough!)" I muttered under my breath. "I mean it's hard enough getting my head around there being one God, let alone three!"

"Ah, yes," said the Lord kindly. "I know it can be confusing and stretching. However this one in three is not about there being one God or three Gods. There is only one God: me!

However I am three distinct and separate persons with one nature, so I remain essentially one."

"And this helps me how?" I said. "What you have just said makes no sense at all to a guy like me. As I said before: It's hard enough to accept one God. Then you go and put all this other stuff on top of it! Too much ..."

It seemed the Lord nodded gently. "It is difficult, I know. That's why people talk about the "Trinity" as one in three and three in one. Kind of 'shorthand'."

"Sounds a couple of sandwiches short of a picnic if you ask me!"

There was a distinct pause. I wondered if perhaps I had finally gone too far. Then the Lord continued: "It's about relationship. I, the Lord God, am all about relationship. Relationship to my creation and relationship to the beings I created in my image. And I am in relationship with myself ..."

"Sounds kinky," I blurted without thinking.

There was a worrying pause. I could almost feel the Lord's patience stretching – as much as I felt my brain stretching. Then the Lord continued: "Trinity is supposed to capture and show that God, that is me, is vibrant and dynamic."

"Maybe. But what I am left with right now is how to have a relationship with a triangle ... There I am, just beginning to get to know you as a friend. A Good Friend. A kind of larger than life best mate ... and then this ... it's plain confusing if you ask me! Why do you need it?"

"Because it is important."

"Really?"

"Really!"

"Oh yeah? How?"

"There was a time," the Lord explained ever so patiently, "when how people thought about God and explained God got them into trouble."

"No way!" I responded. "Seems to me you're more likely to get into trouble because you think there is a God and that it's important!"

"I'll try to explain it like this, said the Lord: People said okay, we go along with there being 'God' – the creator and ruler of the universe. But how does 'the Saviour' fit in? You know, Jesus? If Jesus is the son of God, then he is obviously less than God and therefore not the same as God. They also asked where the 'Holy Spirit' fitted in. Was this part of God or not?"

"And people actually got into trouble for this?"

"Oh yes!"

"Seems to me," I said, "the only trouble you'd have is a headache from trying to make sense of it ..."

"You're on to it there," the Lord went on. "It was a headache. A huge headache! People had the basic idea that God the Creator, Jesus the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, Giver of Life; were all somehow one and the same – but they needed a way to make sense of it."

"You sure got that right!" I said. "And 'Trinity' is the best they could come up with?"

"It was and is the best," the Lord assured me. "It captures the three essential ways I am, that is God is, shown: as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Three is a good number – it signifies 'wholeness', 'completeness'. A three legged stool never rocks and all that ..."

A 25 watt bulb was beginning to shine in my head – very dimly. "Let me check this out: People experienced you, God, as Father; as Son, Jesus; and as Holy Spirit. And it's all God. And this 'Trinity thing' kind of gives it – ah – structure?"

"Now you're getting somewhere," the Lord sounded pleased. "Trinity is a way of describing something that it is really not possible to describe."

The 25 watt bulb faded. "Huh?"

"Trinity is what can be called a 'mystery'," the Lord tried to switch on the light again. "Human beings can grasp some but not all of the picture. God, that is – me, is not totally explainable. It is not possible to fully comprehend God. Not possible to tie up all the loose ends. It's as close as it gets, but there is a different way of thinking and seeing. For example you could have  $1 + 1 + 1$

$= 3$ ; then with a slight change you get  $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ . Still three separate 'ones', but they total one."

"So," I took a breath – what I really needed was a whiskey (I think the Lord knew that too) – and plunged in: What you are saying is there are three ways in which you – the Lord God – reveal yourself to the world and to us. As Heavenly Parent; as Jesus the Son; and as Holy Spirit. Though these are all very different, they are not separate. They are all 'you!'"

"That's it!" said the Lord. "Just like the scene at Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan. Jesus is being baptised in the river. The dove (the Holy Spirit) is coming down; and there is the voice of the Father from heaven. Three parts but one picture."

I tried to imagine the scene, but it wasn't helping. I was loosing it and the Lord was on to it immediately. "Remember I said Trinity is about three distinct persons having one nature?"

"Y-es."

"Think of it this way. What's your job?"

"Building labourer," I answered. I couldn't see how this related to the Trinity.

The Lord continued: "You are married to Patti so that makes you a ...?"

"Husband." No idea where this was going.

Again the Lord asked: "You have two sons, Brandon and Paul, so you are ...?"

"A father, parent." Still none the wiser.

"And," asked the Lord, "how many of you are there?"

He was definitely loosing the plot. "Just one," I replied. "You're always telling me I'm unique."

"And indeed you are," said the Lord with just the faintest hint of tetchiness. "You are very unique. There is one and only one of you. Yet at the same time you are a husband, a father and a building labourer."

The dim 25 watt bulb was replaced by a spotlight illuminating a coin dropping! "Right! I think I'm getting it now! One of me and three different ways of being seen and related to. There you are - over there. One Lord. One God. Positively and

definitely only one. Yet at the same time as being one and only one, people can know you and relate to you as Father and Creator; as Son and Redeemer; and as Holy Spirit and Life Giver.”

If I didn't know better I could have sworn the Lord broke out in a grin. Nodding his head and grinning. May be after all these years my maths was improving!

And it seemed to me I heard the Lord say, very encouragingly, “I don't think it's your maths that's improving!”

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