

Sermon for the Trinity Sunday 2020.

Isaiah 57:15-16. Revelation 4. Psalm 150. John 3:1-15.

The Collect: Almighty and everlasting God, who has given us thy servants grace by the confession of a true faith to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us in all adversities; who lives and reigns, one God, world without end. Amen.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.

Did you hear the joke about Einstein, who, having delivered an highly technical lecture received a standing ovation? On the way out of the lecture theatre, the chairperson asked him why he looked so glum. 'Well,' Einstein replied, 'It's my wife, I don't think she understands me.'

Well, on Trinity Sunday, I guess God will be thinking the same about us!

If this is such a fundamental doctrine of the Christian Faith, why can't we just have a simple explanation; one that every believer grasps? So many preachers and theologians have attempted to explain this doctrine that our reading list would be long and concentrated. On Trinity Sunday the Book of Common Prayer replaces the Apostle's Creed with the Quicunque Vult (the Athanasian Creed, see the Green Book page 419). I urge you to read it. If you haven't got a Green Book at home, try this link:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/creed-s-athanasius>

As you will see, it is a lot longer than the Creed we use at the Mass, and the Apostle's Creed we recite at Morning and Evening Prayer. Simply speaking, it 'unpacks' these two with more explanation. It is a response to many heretical views and claims.

There are some very sobering statements in this Creed, for example the last verse: 'This is the Catholic Faith: which except a man believe faithfully and steadfastly, he cannot be saved.' It also reads in verse twenty: 'So we are forbidden by the Catholic religion: to speak of three Gods or three Lords.' Notice how the words 'Catholic Faith' are mentioned several times. This emphasises the fact that true faith subsists in doctrines held together in common by members of Christ's Church at all times, and in all places, until this day. Verse two reads: 'Which Faith except a man do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish eternally.'

A Mormon could not affirm this Creed, neither could a Moslem, nor a Jehovah's witness, nor an Hindu, and the list could go on. They have their set of beliefs and explication of divinity and humanity. But, to have a 'saving faith' universal orthodox Christian teaching makes profound and exclusive assertions and requires us to believe them faithfully.

Are you uncomfortable about making an 'exclusive' claim? Would you find it un-British to state that another person has misleading or false ideas about God? Maybe it would be better to 'soften' the rhetoric, and make the gospel less confrontational; then we wouldn't alienate a person we want to be nice to? When Jesus talked to the educated Rabbi Nicodemus (John chapter 3) He should have said something like: 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.... well, Nicodemus, when I say 'truly', I really mean in my humble opinion (IMHO)... and when I say 'cannot enter' I mean there might be occasions when there's an Open Day in Heaven... and when I say 'You must be born anew... of the Spirit...' I really mean 'just be prepared to be a bit more flexible about how you picture God.'

That paints a picture of the human Jesus of Nazareth, an up-country self-taught Rabbi who is brilliant in so many respects, but not exactly God, full of Spiritual grace and truth. There is a great danger inherent in an approach that says: 'don't worry about what you have been taught, or about what you assume you know, and what you loosely believe, though you haven't clearly thought it through.' The catholic church has done the donkey work for us. The word 'apologetic' applies to the church in the technical sense of a formal explanation of opinion and conduct. The church has worked hard to agree on what is to be held to be true. How unfortunate it is that modern parlance uses the word 'apologetic' to mean 'an attitude of regret at have caused offence.'

Why does the Trinity matter, and why should we be unapologetic (in the modern sense) when we share our faith with others? Simply, because what we believe about God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bring us closer to Him, and to eternal life. If we want others to come closer to Him, and to share the fullness of life now and forever, we should bear witness to what we have been taught. That is apologetic in the older sense of the word. Never be ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God that brings salvation to the Jew first, then to the Gentile (Romans 1:16).

To God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost be glory now and forever. Amen.