

TRINITY SUNDAY 11.06.17 - The Divine Dance

Two weeks ago in my Scripture class, just as the bell went and the children were packing up their things, a little girl at the front of the class asked a question. "Is Jesus God?"

I said that yes, he was. "Well, how can he be God if there's already a God," she asked.

Good question, wasn't it? Children and the Trinity. They ask the questions we all wish we could, but don't, because as good Christians, we're told we're not supposed to understand this doctrine, just believe it.

When my son Micah was four, he asked a similar question: "There's God who's our heavenly Father, right? And there's Jesus who is his son?"

"Ye...e..s", I said, already guessing where this was going.

"So, if our heavenly father is God, and Jesus is God, how come there is only one God? Which one is God?" (The Holy Spirit didn't get a look-in at this stage.)

I sat him down and gave him the best kid-friendly metaphor I could come up with at the time - that one person could be different people at the same time. For example a man could be someone's father, someone's son and someone's brother, yet was only one person. He listened intently and then patted my knee and said, "Mum, I think we should talk about this when I'm bigger."

But it doesn't necessarily help to be bigger, does it? The concept of the Trinity is still pretty incomprehensible, regardless of how old we are or how long we've been a Christian.

How are we on this particular doctrine? As Christians we would all agree we believe in the Trinity. The Athanasian Creed in the back of our prayer book, as well as our Anglican 39 Articles spell out the best understanding we have of this doctrine.

But how do we relate to the Trinity in our day to day lives? Do we relate mainly to Jesus, or to the Father? or to the Holy Spirit? Or do we just call God "Lord," or "Father" interchangeably and not really think about it.

Theologian Karl Rahner said in his classic study, 'The Trinity', "Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere monotheists." (in other words, we simply believe in one God) He continues, "We must be willing to admit that,

should the Doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.”

If this is so, and the Trinity has no real impact on our lives as individuals or as a church, then logic tells us it's either not true, or we are severely lacking in our understanding of it.

But on the other hand, let's not be too hard on ourselves - we can't get away from the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity is a paradox - meaning that it is something that is “seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet can be true.”

Another 21st century theologian Richard Rohr has written a stimulating book on the Trinity called “The Divine Dance.” I'm still chewing on it. In this book, he circles around what he calls simply, ‘a mystery.’ He goes on to say that really, that's all we can do with a mystery. As we circle around it, looking at it from many different perspectives and positions, we gain more understanding. He describes the mystery of the Trinity, not as something we can't understand, but something we *endlessly* understand. His book goes on to explore the notion of the Trinity as a ‘Divine Dance’, where God is not merely a dancer, but the dance itself, and more than that, the notion that we are invited to participate in the dance.

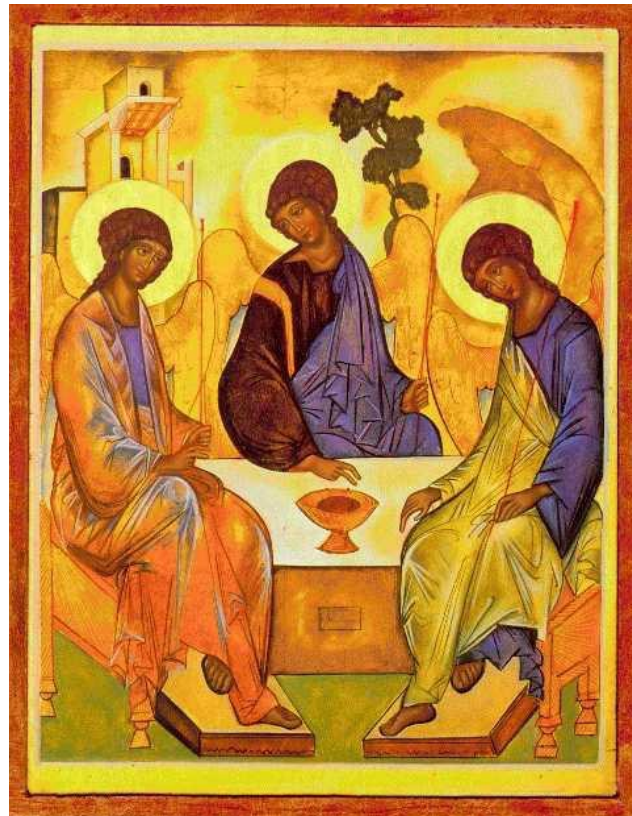
Rohr says, “Whatever is going on in God is a flow, a radical relatedness, a perfect communion between three, a circle dance of love.”

And as he unpacks this, Rohr says that being part of the Divine Dance can be transformational.

Something from Rohr's book that really resonated with me was simply his notion that **we are invited “IN” to this divine dance.**

The way we think in our culture causes us to mostly objectify things. That means, we look at things as being outside of us. We label them. We classify them. We like to think of things in concrete terms. We can even think of God like that. So often, though we know God's Spirit lives within, we pray to God who is ‘out there’ or ‘up there’, somewhere outside ourselves.

During the week, I discovered a series on SBS called “The Young Pope.” It was fascinating to see how the writers of the series depicted the young pope praying: his arms are and eyes raised to the sky. In the Vicar of Dibley, the Vicar, played by Dawn French, has a representation of the face of Jesus in a



frame on her wall. When she prays, she talks to the picture. When she's doing something she thinks Jesus won't approve of, she turns the picture around so it faces the wall. All very tongue in cheek, but it is the way some Christians relate to God. He's our heavenly Father, or our Lord Jesus, or the Holy Spirit - yes, and we believe he lives within, but so often, we relate to him as if he is 'out there'; as if he is concrete, like our other relationships, just invisible. Some may feel they can approach him when they want to, or ignore him at other times. It is common even for believers, to objectify God. It makes him more understandable somehow.

But God - the Trinity - invites us IN!

I've recently installed a doorbell on the outside of the sunroom at our place. It plays Brahms' Hungarian Dance no 5! It's so I can hear people when they arrive at the door. It's so I can invite them IN - instead of them concluding no-one is home and going away again.

Russian artist Andrei Rublev in the 15th century, created an icon which reveals this understanding of the Trinity inviting us IN.

Rublev depicts God as three persons in a close circle, eating and drinking together, enjoying each other's hospitality. It is very definitely a picture of a relationship. The figure on the left, in gold, is the Father. The figure in the

centre, predominantly in blue, is Jesus. He holds up two fingers representing his divinity and his humanity. Then on the right is the Spirit, predominantly in green - the colour of verdant life. They look at each other with peaceful respect, comfortable in each other's presence, and eat from a common bowl. Many commentators feel that the figure of the Spirit is actually gesturing to an open, fourth place at the table - that place where we as the observer stand. If this is what the artist had in mind, it reveals his understanding of this deep, spiritual truth - that God, as Trinity, invites us IN to the flow of the divine, in and between the members of the Trinity, and us, as the sons & daughters of God.

We looked at John 14 a couple of weeks ago. In that chapter, Jesus says, the Father will send the Spirit of Truth, to live IN them. In his next breath, Jesus says **he** will be in them. He also says "On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." We are invited IN to this divine relationship. We are not on earth, with God in another place called heaven. Jesus is in the Father, and the Father in him. When we know Jesus, he sends the Spirit to live in us. He lives in us and we live in him.

There is, as Richard Rohr has said, a movement, a flow of love, between the Trinity and the children of God. We are invited into this divine dance.

The Eucharist or Holy Communion is another a sign of our invitation into the presence of the Trinity. Every time we celebrate Communion, we are invited to God's table. We partake of God's hospitality. We invite the Holy Spirit to bless our celebration; we remember the broken body and spilled blood of Christ in the bread and wine, and then as we partake of this celebration, we draw the bread and wine physically within us, reminding us that God is within us. Then we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to the Father, to live and work to his praise and glory.

If we can more thoroughly embrace this understanding that we are **IN** God, and that he is **IN** us, it is deeply transformational. It reminds us that we do not live, at any time, *apart* from God. He is always within us. He is in our thoughts. He is in our inspirations. He fuels the love that we show him and show one another. We can be confident, if we whisper a prayer for guidance in any situation, that God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is right there - IN our thoughts and IN our prayers. He is IN us as we move forward in faith that he is guiding our steps. We don't need to wait for an external voice from heaven; we don't need to depend on external circumstances to guide us - though they can be helpful. God is in us. As Paul said to the crowd at Mars

Hill, 'in him, we live and move and have our being.' As we do this we find ourselves being transformed into the very likeness of God.

This concept of the members of the Trinity being in a close relationship, and us being in a close relationship with the Trinity, is at the very heart of our faith. It is what our Salvation is all about - us being restored to a perfect relationship with the Trinity. It is why we are called to love God with our whole heart, and love our neighbours as ourselves. It is why we as Christ's Church, are called to live in this relationship of love. As we do this, we are reflecting the very nature of the Trinity.

So rather than put this doctrine on the shelf and leave it there as something static which has no real impact on our lives, the invitation is to continue to grapple with it, allowing it to actually transform us. Let's live, conscious that God is IN us, and we are IN God, and join in what Richard Rohr calls "The Divine Dance."

Let's pray.