

In the chapel as part of the photographic exhibition are two triptychs; three pictures which stand as one story. One is the story of a bowl, one of a window. The story from the window is the same window from 3 perspectives – the window is in the stone stairwell of an old city church and the first photo is on the stone window ledge, the window and then a glimpse of the square outside; the second is closer, mainly the window with more of the outside – the third is the view of the square with the window framing it. All of the photos are the same window, the same square, the same ledge, and yet all seen with different perspectives, different depths, different insights. They engage us with the same story in different ways.

Today we mark Trinity Sunday – the day in the church calendar when we acknowledge the three fold nature – or three dimensions of God. Now at one level we do this every time we pray – but on this Sunday in the church year we are invited to consider this, to mark that it has been an important development in Christian theology and Christology. It is so easy for the mention of the Trinity to be about doctrine – but that is to lose the point of the trinity – for the trinity – as I mentioned last year is about relationship! It about our interrelationships with God and with one another. The notion of the term trinity emerged in the early church as a way of trying to grapple with a monotheistic belief in one God in light of the early church actual, lived experience of God’s activity powerfully in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and after an encounter with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity provided an answer...of sorts. An answer often couched in the language of fourth-century metaphysics. Sometimes because of this, somewhere along the way the Trinity became less about describing an experience of the living God and more about accepting doctrines of God’s church¹.

I was contemplating this yesterday, when I was sitting in the chapel. I hosted a retreat yesterday for Curates, and we sat in the chapel for a large part of the day – as I looked at the window photo’s I was struck that when we look at one window we see so many different things – when we look at one relationship we too experience and see many different things. In some many ways the notion of the trinity is about trying to help us explain and explore the complex relationship with God in its many different expressions.

This is what the early church were trying to achieve when they wrote about the Trinity – they were trying to describe their different experiences of God – no longer a God who was only creator of the universe – but now a God they had met in Jesus, as well as a God they had felt and experienced in the Holy Spirit. For those of us who only have a Christian faith experience – we have always had a notion that God is expressed and experienced in different ways – but this was not the case for the early Church. Having said that, I suspect that sometimes we need to be reminded too –

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/05/trinity-c-shh-dont-mention-the-trinity/>

just like we need to be reminded that we can see the same window different ways too.

So much is happened in the last week it can be difficult to consider what to focus our prayer on, what to reflect on, what to take to God. We live in strange and sometimes confusing times, and so our interrelationship with God needs to help us see and encounter not only our faith, but the world in new and insightful ways – and in many ways this takes confidence. With a constant changing landscape around us, socially and politically our relationship with God needs to remain constant, even in the way we relate to God changes.

In some ways this is what Jesus is trying to prepare the disciples for in Matthew today. Today we hear Jesus last advice to his followers before he leaves them. He invites them to enter fully into this relationship, to engage with the spirit that they might come to know God more, and that others too might come to know God through Jesus Christ. This requires confidence in what we believe and to have courage to explore the questions which we find most difficult. Jesus knew the disciples would face many changes in the days ahead.

Matthew 28.16-20 provides the narrative of the last recorded encounter of Jesus by the disciples and the final words of Jesus close the Gospel. Directed to return to Galilee where Jesus would meet up with them, the disciples followed yet again, not knowing what they would encounter. Galilee was where it all began and Galilee, it seems, would mark the new beginning. (The full circle so to speak). It is difficult to imagine what their journey was like, but it had to have been a memorable one. It was the ultimate road trip, filled with long conversations that focused upon making sense of the mind-bending events that had transpired, wondering aloud what would happen next. This moment with Jesus would be an important time for them. They had lost everything in the catastrophic events that preceded this, and they were on their way to discover what, if anything would be next.

Jesus' parting words are commonly referred to as the Great Commission. But the reference of the text is much broader. The text frames the basis for the communal identity and life together for the movement that will become the church.

The commission is for all who are part of the people of God and incorporates the task of making disciples with teaching and baptizing as the movement expands around the world. The church is at its core to be living out the teachings of Jesus as a witness within their world. And perhaps most profoundly of all, Jesus promises that his presence will be with his people until the final culmination of the ages – a presence of the kingdom of God.

In this we hear and encounter the dance of the Trinity again, that relationship of the spirit inspiring us to tell of our encounter with Jesus that helps us to understand more fully the nature of God the creator; that is ever present till the end of time.

All relationships take energy and conversation. We have to work on our relationship with God and with each other, this is what being a Christian community means. It is also about the dance of story – how we tell of our encounter with God. How do we describe it? Are we able to see the square beyond the window ledge or do we only see the window? Are we able to notice the work of the Holy Spirit within us, or those around us? Are we able to acknowledge God in our midst? The reminder of the trinity is to remind us that God is complex and encompassing, but it is a life we have each been called to follow.

A couple of years ago I was taken by a description of what a Trinitarian community might look like – I think it is worth sharing again. David Lose said that being a Trinitarian community is a community striving to be a place that knows it doesn't have all the answers, and so consequently makes space for conversation and values those who are bring different voices and experiences into its midst. Conversation, valuing difference, being inclusive – these things aren't easy, but genuine community, while challenging, is also creative, productive, and enriching – a solid relationship in which we find wisdom about God and ourselves².

And if we wonder if this is a new age way to see God, if we are worried that liberalism has blinded our theological insight – then we only need to look at our passage from Isaiah – a poem written in response to the exodus which highlights that the biblical witness is from age to age, God hears the cries of God's people and empowers them -- in exhaustion, in oppression, and in other moments of greatest need – God is always part of our wisdom, part of our story – part of the relationship³. It is from Isaiah we hear this lovely poetry *He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.* (Isaiah 40.30)

In the end what trinity marks is our hope for the Kingdom of God, the endless relationship and interrelationship with God and each other – not just at some future point – but now and every day.

Yesterday as part of the retreat, Graham Noyce read us a RS Thomas poem, it spoke to me of much which this notion of relationship, and hope encounter in God; and through God's presence. I wondered if it might say something to us all today.

² www.davidlose.net/2016/05/trinity-c-shh-dont-mention-the-trinity

³ Workingpreacher.org

The Kingdom by R. S. Thomas

It's a long way off but inside it

There are quite different things going on:

Festivals at which the poor man

Is king and the consumptive is

Healed; mirrors in which the blind look

At themselves and love looks at them

Back; and industry is for mending

The bent bones and the minds fractured

By life. It's a long way off, but to get

There takes no time and admission

Is free, if you purge yourself

Of desire, and present yourself with

Your need only and the simple offering

Of your faith, green as a leaf.