

SERMON – 5th June 2020 – Rev Anne Taylor

I have always thought that a sense of humour is a gift that should be encouraged and certainly in St Peter's laughter it is. During this time of lockdown it didn't take long for jokes to appear and there are some in this month's magazine. And of course Vicar's are given amusing books – a small selection from my bookshelf are Milton Jones 10 second sermons (I have already past that!), Rules for Reverends, '101 Things to Do During a Dull Sermon'!

Of course the last book could be rewritten for these lockdown times because the choice of things to do during a boring sermon can now include fast forward, mute and make a cup of tea! All I can say is don't try any of those when we get back together here for services.

Such a book could be useful on Trinity Sunday because it is one of those church doctrines that can be difficult to understand and is not helped by theologians (or indeed preachers!) who have made it their life's work to make it increasingly more complicated.

Thinking about the doctrine of the Trinity I thought of the following story –

One day two men were walking along the beach discussing this and that and generally putting the world to rights. (You can picture the scene).

In a wide ranging conversation they got onto the mystery of God. However, they weren't making very much progress. Sorting out the world seemed a much easier task!

Suddenly they came upon a young boy playing in the sand. He had dug a hole in the sand and kept running down to the sea, dipping his plastic bucket in the water, and running back up the beach to empty the water into the hole.

The two men watched him for a while as he ran back and forth filling and emptying his bucket. They found the scene amusing and it brought back memories of their own childhood. They asked the boy what he was doing and in a very serious voice he told them that he was 'emptying the sea into the hole he had dug in the sand'.

The two men smiled and walked on.

After a while one of them stopped and said to the other, 'You know we were amused by what the boy was trying to do. Yet what we have been trying to do in our discussion about God is just the same. It is just as impossible for us to understand the mystery of God as it is for that child to put the water of the sea into that hole. Our minds are like thimbles (like a hole in the sand), whereas the reality of God is as great as the ocean'.

As the story says – it is impossible for us to fully understand God. God is a mystery. But if we use our natural curiosity then mysteries are there to be solved. Because each time we understand one more small part of the mystery that is God that is one step closer in our relationship with God. And we can only benefit from that.

For centuries people have struggled – have made it their life's work - to explain and understand God. This is ultimately where the doctrine of the Trinity came from, to help us understand something more of God.

Often to understand something we separate the pieces and put them into different categories – we do it with people deciding they are a certain type and box them. And we also do it with belief – thinking of God as either Father or Son or Holy Spirit and not thinking of the interplay between the three. You usually find emphasis placed on one part of the Trinity.

There are those who find it easier to relate to God as Father – a cosmic yet personal being of Love.

There are those who focus on Jesus because in human form Jesus offers us a more personable connection –he understands what it is like to be human and vulnerable.

Last week, the Feast of Pentecost, we celebrated the sending of the Holy Spirit. Some focus their faith on the Holy Spirit as the giver of new life.

But the New Testament is quite clear that all three have a unity and have a role to play. We may at different times in our lives of faith relate better to one than the other - but we need all three.

But where does this all leave us in trying to understand the mystery of God.

It leaves us realising that by God's desire to be known and loved by us he made the first move – he first loved us and sent his Son so that we might know him better and the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide us.

The doctrine of the Trinity may have stretched brilliant minds over the centuries but I believe that God was doing his utmost to draw us into a closer relationship with him. And that invitation is open to all regardless of colour, race, sexuality, gender, education, age.

There is a beautiful Russian icon of the Trinity painted by a monk named Rublev.

It depicts the three Persons of the Trinity sitting at a table. A dish of food lies on the table. But at the front of the table there is a vacant place.

The vacant place is meant to convey openness, hospitality and welcome to all – to each of us. It signifies God's invitation to us to share in the life of the Trinity.

God doesn't exclude us. He doesn't keep us at arm's length.

He doesn't laugh when we struggle trying to empty the sea into a hole in the sand.

He invites us to come in and sit at the table. To share life with us.

The invitation for us means that we then accept to join with all the others God has called. There is no room within God's love for rejection, injustice, racism, prejudice. He treats all his children the same with an all-encompassing love. What we have seen happen in America and the unjust killing of George Floyd goes totally against God's open invitation to every person to be loved for who they are and not to be judged. We can look on with horror but we must ask ourselves when have we planted seeds of injustice – by our comments, jokes and attitude to others?

Trinity Sunday should not just be an attempt to understand some ancient Church doctrine, but rather an opportunity to celebrate a living relationship – our relationship with God. We don't grow in isolation but only in company with others – and with God.

While fully understanding that God may remain a mystery to us what is very clear is that because God first befriended us we are no longer strangers and outsiders.

We are God's children. God welcomes us to be in relationship with him and with all the others he has invited, and as our icon shows has a place for each of us together around his table.

