

At the end of this service, Rev Jon will bless you: *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*. Highly appropriate because we are the family of Holy Trinity Church and today is designated Trinity Sunday; the day which celebrates the mystery of faith and the unity and love manifest in the Holy Trinity.

Indeed, the Holy Trinity stands as the central doctrine of Christianity, the belief that God exists as three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each person being fully and equally divine, yet there is only one God. The words we speak shortly in the creed affirm this.

Yet for most Christians, it is probably the most difficult doctrine to understand and explain, partly, I suspect, because the word Trinity is not mentioned anywhere in the bible. And it was not until after great and prolonged debates by church leaders in the third and fourth centuries that the doctrine was adopted.

Unfortunately, those debates about the Trinity's meaning and implications have continued throughout the centuries right up to today as theologians struggle to explain more clearly how to recognise and understand the Trinity.

As a young lad, the Trinity was once explained to me in terms of an egg with 3 components – shell, yoke and albumen. On another, as different physical states of H<sub>2</sub>O – water, steam and ice. But as my faith matured neither of these seemed right as none of the states of H<sub>2</sub>O can co-exist and whilst the whole egg might be an analogy for God, the three parts are certainly not co-equal. I mean, who eats the shell?

Another early analogy was the shamrock, supposedly first proffered by St. Patrick – shamrocks having three leaves yet remaining one plant. That was until I read that there are also four leafed shamrocks, so goodbye to that analogy.

The only early explanation which stood the test of time was the simple arithmetic analogy  $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ : one father, x one son x one spirit = one God. Although, admittedly, it doesn't work if you use a plus or minus sign.

This equation is reflected in our reading. In verse 13 Jesus makes it clear to the disciples that the Father speaks to him, who speaks to the Spirit, who will: *guide you into all the truth* (John 16:13). And why not? After all Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life so it's only natural for the spirit of that truth to reveal more of him as time goes by. And the Spirit certainly reveals more of the truth to the disciples as time passes.

In just the same way, as time has passed, I have come to understand a more complex explanation of the Trinity thanks partly to the writing of Sam Wells, the rector of St. James, Piccadilly. He has written: *We subscribe to God being three persons in one substance. But God isn't a thing....God is a relationship of three persons, so wonderfully shaped towards one another, so wonderfully with one another, that they are one, but simultaneously so exquisitely diverse and distinct within that unity that they are three.*'

And the key word there is relationship. It is in the relationship of the Trinity where we are able to grasp that amazing truth of the gospel: that God himself in his love has really come into our world as Jesus Christ and that God himself in his love has really come into our own experience as the Holy Spirit. That is the experience Rev Jon was talking about last week and what the seer writes in John 1. Note the number of occasions John writes about the experiences of living and loving in just these few verses:

*'No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit....God lives in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they live in God. So, we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them' (1 John 4)*

Father, Son and Spirit live in love and act of one accord albeit in different ways. They live in love, flow from love, are perfected in love and the most wonderful thing is that we have an open invitation to join them and return that love. And for me, that invitation is best experienced when we enter into communion.

I've shown this before, so apologies if I'm repeating myself, but I think it is worthwhile doing so. This is Andrei Rublev's icon of the Trinity, painted in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. You will see that there are three persons present, but in my mind the circle of love is not complete. There is an empty place at the table where we are invited to sit.

Each and every time, I receive bread and wine I am accepting the Trinity's invitation to join them in celebration of their relationship. To renew, recharge, restate the love not only in their relationship, but also my relationship with them. I have previously likened Jesus to the big brother I never had who always puts his arm around my shoulder urging me to join him at the table. The table, where faith, hope and love always abide. And the greatest of these, as it says in 1 Corinthians, is love.

Amen

**Terry Ward-Hall, 15 June 2025**

