

Sunday 31 May 2026

Liverpool Parish Church

Trinity Sunday

OT: Isaiah 40:12-17, 27-31

NT: 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Gp: Matthew 28:16-20

‘Go, baptise in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach everything that I have commanded you’, says Jesus today. For those of us who are engaged in the business of education, this might sound as if Jesus has things in the wrong order. We might rather expect him to say, go and teach, before you baptise. You might think that you need to sow the seeds first, and put people through the courses, show them what the landscape looks like for this business; after that you can invite them to be baptised and to commit themselves. However, Jesus seems to think otherwise, and to behave differently to what universities call ‘learning and teaching’. And it’s that otherwise that gives us the clue to understanding just some small part of the immeasurable mystery that we celebrate on Trinity Sunday.

“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?” says Isaiah chapter 40. This passage comes from what is normally referred to as ‘Second Isaiah’; it begins with a message of hope for the exiled Israelites in Babylon, the famous ‘comfort ye, comfort ye my people’ of Handel’s Messiah; and many scholars have pointed out that the distinctive Jewish and Christian belief in late antiquity of ‘creation out of nothing’, *creatio ex nihilo* in Latin, originated at this time of Israel’s return from Babylon. This deliverance from exile, decisive and unexpected, is like a second Exodus, whilst exodus becomes a sort of recapitulation of creation. ‘He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak’, says Isaiah. Out of a situation where there is no identity, where there are no names, only slavery and powerlessness, God makes a human community, calls it by name.

And so, we celebrate today God acting to create the world and recreate it, out of nothing, in the sense that nothing makes God do this except for God’s own free promise and gift. God does not need to create or redeem; God does not love in an arbitrary way either, whenever he decides is relevant from his self-enclosed infinity; that would make his action and love a secondary thing. God creates; God the everlasting Son goes to take a people for himself, us, in the midst of the world by his coming in human form because God *is* love in himself: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is an active self-pouring reality whose action is soaked in the material world around us. He does not only *show* love. He *IS* love. And when he gathers us, he draws us to himself and says, ‘turn around, trust, and follow; in other words, repent and believe’. And so, we hear in St Paul’s letter today from the well-known words of the grace, that to stand in the grace of God is to stand in the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Spirit.

Hence Jesus challenged his disciples in the gospels to be baptised with his baptism, that is to say to enter the mystery of his self-giving love. And before the disciples really understood anything – there were no courses given – they became involved in something they cannot understand or control. They are swept into the mystery of the Son's love for the Father in the Spirit and all that that means and costs. They have stood alongside Jesus, and they have also failed to stand alongside Jesus at his crucifixion; they were recalled to stand alongside Jesus in his resurrection; and the risen Jesus says to them: 'Go and do the same'. 'Go, baptize, draw people into the mystery of the threefold love, to stand in his place and pray with his prayer, and breathe with his spirit. And they DO! It's only out of that that the teaching comes. Out of the engagement with mission, the doctrine develops.

Christianity has often been described as an historical tradition; it's not in the first place a scriptural tradition; we are not simply the 'people of the book' as the Islamic tradition refers to us. We are the people of the Word made flesh that constantly calls, and recreates, challenging us to think afresh, as he did in the gospels; when asked, Jesus did not give straight forward answers; he makes us think, debate, and argue; and the longer we stand where Jesus stands, with the fathomless waters that Isaiah talks about washing around us, sooner or later we will begin to search for words that might begin, just a little, to do justice to this mystery and understand that we stand with the Son, crying out to the Father, borne up by the Holy Spirit. Bit by bit the Church learnt that language and began to teach that doctrine. As such, the doctrine of the Trinity is not simply a puzzle but a joy. I don't normally have a truck with clergy who like to start their sermons by apologizing for the fact that it's all very difficult.

Today we celebrate the fact that we have been plunged into a mystery beyond any depths that makes us wonder. It is a mystery of life and death; and make no mistake, it is there because God the Son has come into our midst, died, and is risen. God acts. God creates and continues to be the creative reality of our lives. Today, we take a deep breath, a spirit-filled breath and say: this is what we have to teach and say to the world. We might struggle and stumble in our understanding; but we don't look for the exact, but least silly things to say.

Anglicans tend to approach the doctrine of the Trinity with great reverence, careful scholarship and the quiet hope that the offertory hymn might explain it. After all, the place where all of this comes most clearly alive for us is here at the altar, at the Eucharist. The doctrine of God as Trinity grows out of the life of the Church as a community that celebrates the Eucharist – something the Church did from the very beginning in the first century. Here we take the words of Christ on our lips; here we pray his prayer, we invoke his spirit, and we call God Abba, Father; and the life of God the Son comes alive in us. This is where it all happens. To speak of God as Trinity is to speak out of the heart of the Eucharistic experience. That is why good priests are Trinitarian priests, the ones who live out of the heart of the eternal love in the Eucharist. If priests call people to repent trust and follow, their words can only have conviction when the priest stands in the midst of the mystery that is the Eucharist – not by arguing, not first making the case and presenting the

detailed apologetics but first saying: 'Here is the mystery in action; here is life and here is joy'. Worship performed with beauty and conviction is the beginning of our conversion. Our mission means that we are called to imitate Christ and say NOT 'listen to these arguments', but 'Come and see where Christ is alive, come and see Christ alive in the Eucharistic assembly', in the lives of those particular people who were around this Eucharistic gathering. I doubt that we are destined for sainthood, but we are still the people seeking to inhabit the place of Christ turned to the Father and be inhabited by God the Holy Spirit. We may not be making much success of it either; but the point is that we are trying; we have come to see where the Trinity is alive in the lives of people.

To God the Holy Trinity be love, thanksgiving praise and glory now and forevermore.

Fr Yazid Said