

Trinity Sunday 2013

Proverbs 8:22-31; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

One of the things that has really struck me in my reading of scripture over the last year (especially the New Testament), is how everywhere it is redolent with trinitarian language. This is striking for two reasons:

Firstly, the scripture was written largely by strictly *monotheistic* Jews, who wrote well before any of the great debates regarding the person of Christ and God as Trinity emerged in the church.

Moreover, both the gospels and letters as we have received them today, are very *early* documents. While there is some “theologising” in them, they have primarily an evangelistic and pastoral focus. What theologising they do is *embedded*, or is *implicit* in these concerns. The writing takes the form more of narrative or situational teaching than abstract theology as it later became under the influence of Hellenism.

And, the point is, this was there from the very first. For the early believers¹ as they recalled Jesus’ teachings, his death, resurrection and ascension, and the subsequent coming of the Spirit poured out upon all, to speak of the one true God (as Jews could *only* speak), meant speaking of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit.

From the very beginning they wanted to worship Jesus – something that, until then, Jews did only in regard Yahweh, the Lord of Israel and the nations.² Anything more would be regarded as idolatrous blasphemy – until now.

This is astonishing. Can we imagine staunch unitarians such as Muslims, for instance, speaking of God in such a way today? Well this is what those early believers did and it’s so extraordinary – and, ultimately, so costly for them – that it points to the authenticity and veracity of both their witness to Jesus’ teaching and their experience with him.

¹ and the apostles who taught them – Acts 2:42.

² Lk.24:52.

They couldn't help but speak of Jesus in the same breath as they talked of God and the Father and the Spirit, since this was the only way to remain truthful to what they had seen and heard",³ and to make sense of their on-going relationship with Jesus and their life together as his followers.

Our reading from Romans 5 is a classic in this sense: have a read...

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Therefore, since we are justified by *faith*, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this *grace* in which we stand; and we boast in our *hope* of sharing the glory of God.

And not only that, but we also boast in our *sufferings*, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's *love* has been poured into our hearts through the *Holy Spirit* that has been given to us.

Here we find Paul concerned with the *pastoral* issue of suffering which he links to the *shalom* of God obtained through the *grace* found in Christ, and the love of God evidenced in the pouring into our hearts of the Holy Spirit.

Note how each of these *activities* could equally be said of one or the other of the three persons involved. Grace, reconciliation, love and hope are all found in God, not just in Christ. Similarly as Christ suffered so too did God. As the Holy Spirit indwells God's people, so does Christ who makes the Father known. What is true for one person is true for the one God, even as God exists in three ways of being.

This brings me to the second thing that has really impacted me and is especially evident in our Gospel reading today.

That is, to speak of God in trinity is to speak not just of a profoundly *relational* God, but a God who involves *us* as *active participants* in this life.

³ 1Jn.1:1-4.

At the core of this is God's *revelation* of himself in Jesus. In verse 12 of our Gospel reading,⁴ Jesus says he has lots more to "say" to us and he goes on to say that this will be done by the Holy Spirit who will speak with his authority. In doing so the Spirit will bring glory to Jesus and, by extension, the Father. Let's read this again...

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[Jesus said], "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

So we are to be privy to "all truth" – even things that are yet to come – through the ministry of the Holy Spirit acting in unison with Jesus and the Father.

It was Gregory of Nazianzus who first spoke of this as *perichoresis*. The word is derived from the Greek *peri-*, meaning "around", and *chorein*, "to contain" or "be in". By this he was speaking of the interpenetration of the members of the godhead, their deep *communion* or *fellowship* one with another.

Another meaning *perichoresis* comes from a related word "to dance".⁵ The image is of a kind of holy dance going on as each person moves in and around the other, revealing the other as they do so.

Whatever the image, the meaning is to do with intimacy and relationality, joy and love, with each deferring to and celebrating the other in such deep communion such that they exist as one even while they are themselves.

⁴ Jn.16:12.

⁵ χορεύω – *khoreuō*

Clearly there is a parallel or analogy here to the bible's understanding of sexual union. In Genesis 2:24 we read, "Therefore shall a man leave his Father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."⁶ So there is separate identity yet deep oneness.

Going a step beyond this profound relationality within *God*, in our Gospel reading this deep communion is said to be at work to reveal God to *us* – those who are united in Christ through the indwelling of his Spirit.⁷ The communication that is going on within the life of God, *spills over*, as it were, into our common life as God's people as the Spirit of truth guides us into all truth.⁸

There are many practical implications of this for our life together as God's Spirit filled people. The self-giving of ourselves each to the other will be of the utmost importance for how we conduct ourselves as the body of Christ – those who embody Christ in his world.

When the triune God is manifested in our midst, then, it will be for us just as it was for those early believers as they joined in deep sharing of all they were and had.⁹ We will be known as a "holy fellowship" – holy in that we are seen as truly set apart or different from the prevailing society around us, but holy also in that people will sense God's presence in our midst through the joy and hope and life brought by the Holy Spirit himself who makes Jesus present for us.

This will also be true of what we *profess* as God's people. The reading from Proverbs personifies the Wisdom of God present at creation. When God's wisdom goes forth, then, it holds together the very creation itself.¹⁰

Historically, the church has understood the presence of Wisdom at creation as referring to Jesus himself who, as Paul declares in his letter to the Corinthians, is the very *Wisdom of God*. Paul writes:

⁶ Gen.2:24 and Eph.5:31 c.f. 1Cor.6:16.

⁷ 1Cor.12:13.

⁸ Jn.16:13.

⁹ Acts 2:42-47.

¹⁰ This is echoed, of course, in the opening verses of John's Gospel.

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through [its] wisdom, God decided, through the “foolishness” of our proclamation, to save those who believe.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the *power* of God and the *wisdom* of God.

For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.¹¹

This wisdom of God is not a relative thing. Just as creation doesn’t unwind into chaos, so too God’s truth stands.

This means that when the wisdom of God is allowed to be at the centre of our life together, rather than the confusion and uncertainty which permeates much of our church today, God’s church will be full of the clarity which the revelation of God’s truth brings.

Rather than discarding, for instance, the revelation to the church over the 2000 years regarding sexuality, marriage and family life as something we “got wrong”, we will treasure this as a taonga to be defended from the self-serving lies of our surrounding society and culture. Men and women will live together as God intended, our families will be blessed and others will find a blessing in them as was promised.¹²

...

May the *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the *love* of God,
and the *communion* of the Holy Spirit
be with us all.¹³

Amen.

¹¹ 1 Cor.1:21-25.

¹² Genesis 12:1-2.

¹³ 2 Cor.13:13.