

Isaiah 40:12-17; 27-31

12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?

13 *Who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counsellor?*

14 Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge, or showed him the path of understanding?

15 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

16 Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

17 Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.

27 Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God'?

28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

31 *but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

Matthew 28:16-20

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

17 When they saw him, they worshipped him; but *some doubted*.

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Trinity

Isaiah 40:12-17; Matthew 28:16-20

I'll start with a prayer by the theologian Ian Paul: '*may God the Father direct me, God the Son equip me, and God the Holy Spirit empower me, and breath life and grace into my every word*'.

It's Trinity Sunday. There isn't a mention of the Trinity in the Bible. It's just there if you look. The Nicene creed, which we say at every communion service, is the most thorough statement of what the Trinity is, in fact of what our faith is. If we don't agree with the creed, we're heretics by definition. Or just not christians. In the past I've often repeated the cliché that the Trinity is the most difficult thing to preach on. I now think actually that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are so central to everything we do as church that there's not really anything different about Trinity Sunday. We preach on the trinity every week! Anyway, somewhat predictably I'm afraid, you're going to get a 3 point sermon.

1. God The Father

You often hear negative and dismissive views on church or christianity based on vague, or sometimes even well-informed understandings of the Bible, and particularly the Old Testament, along the lines of 'how can anyone believe in a remote and often violent God like that?' It's something that anyone who reads the bible in any depth has to wrestle with.

For many people this image persists, of an intolerant and judgmental figure who simply wipes out people who upset Him and forbids any enjoyment, particularly when it comes to sex. *But* the Old Testament is also full of beautiful and uplifting descriptions of God, and sex actually!

The passage we heard from Isaiah perfectly illustrates the problem: *those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.* Also this wonderful expression of the sheer unimaginable majesty of God: *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?* Anyone? Thought not. But then we have this:

...all the nations are...regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. How do we reconcile these two extremes? It's not surprising that even Christians give up on this. Several things occur to me. For one, the span of time covered by the Old Testament is roughly the same as that from Jesus to now. Think how our understanding of things has changed over 2000 years. Go back nearly as long before Jesus and you have a civilisation which was struggling with the very *idea* of there being only one God. The 'gods' small 'g' of 2000 BC were very similar to the Old Testament Yahweh who supposedly laid waste to whole towns. This was an acceptable understanding then of how 'gods' operated.

So military victories and defeats alike (and genocides) were attributed to God's favour or displeasure. Not seen as wrong in the culture of the day, but in the light of later revelation, confusing at least! A present day Christian like you or I has two advantages.

Firstly because we are in the time after Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit has been given to us, we have a better understanding of who God is and what He is like. The Holy Spirit did communicate in the Old Testament but it was only to specific individuals for specific purposes, for instance Abraham or Moses or Elijah. i.e. Read about Abraham's '3 visitors' in Genesis 18.

We also have Jesus. Jews were forbidden to even mention the name of Yahweh. The only reason we actually speak God's name is because Jesus did, and he called Him Abba, Father.

He also said don't call anyone on earth Father. (Mt 23.9)

Because there is only one Father and he is in heaven

2. God the Son

Jesus is the full and final revelation of God. So no one who comes after him can be. If we need to know what God is like, we look at Jesus. And so Jesus, who was at one and the same time a human being like us, and also, according to Hebrews 1:3, *the exact representation of God's being*, reveals to the world what God is like. The trouble is, first impressions are so important, and so many of us were brought up in a time when 'God' was used as a method of keeping us in line or making us behave.

Verses from Proverbs such as *spare the rod and spoil the child* (13:24) provide ample excuse for parents who are inclined to use physical punishment. It's a dubious translation anyway. Jesus, if you look closely at his behaviour and teaching, is categorically not like that. His words for child abusers (or abusers of any sort for that matter) are by some way his harshest teaching. Anyone who turns a blind eye to such things, should be exposed as having turned away from God, particularly if they're church leaders.

Jesus had compassion for those on the edges of society, and for those with psychological and spiritual problems, and for those with sickness of any sort. He shows us the very heart of God, and it's a God who is intimately concerned with every aspect of our lives, and with making us better and more integrated as human beings. And actually enabling us to live fruitful lives, and lives of much more depth and joy and kindness. This process is seen happening to the disciples as we go through the gospel accounts. They're transformed – from fishermen, taxmen, prostitutes, all types, into people prepared to travel the world and die for their faith.

The final moments of Jesus' life on earth are proof that God *himself* went to the extreme of sacrificing *himself* for the world he created. The phrase 'God with us' is overused and under appreciated. God became and remains today, one of us. Isn't that the biggest miracle of all?

3. God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the final piece of the puzzle, who for me had very little significance for a large part of my christian life. I think the term Holy Ghost explains why his image has been of something insubstantial. The bible sees God as a person. Paul in his letter to the Galatians says this:

(Message version) *Answer this question: Does the God who lavishly provides you with his own presence, his Holy Spirit, working things in your lives you could never do for yourselves, does he do these things because of your strenuous moral striving or because you trust him to do them in you?*

We do not even begin to know God without the Holy Spirit, and so at Pentecost, when Jesus had returned to the Father, it was the Spirit who kickstarted the church, but who also today is the engine who keeps our faith alive. It's The Holy Spirit, not anything that we do, who enables us to see the truth of who Jesus is. And much **more** than that, if we're open to the possibilities of what he might do. As Annette mentioned last week, although Jesus asked the Spirit to fill the disciples before his ascension, it happened again at Pentecost, and many times in the book of Acts.

It's not a one off thing, it's a continuing daily process. I'll finish with a look at the Matthew passage, Jesus final appearance on earth. The disciples' first reaction is to worship Him, and so they've clearly accepted that He is who he said He was.

But notice that still some of them doubted.

Maybe they still didn't recognise him, or understand fully what all this meant. Maybe they thought he was a ghost, despite everything.

But Jesus' words leave no doubt who He is:

1. *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

ALL authority.

2. *Go and make disciples.* This is our task as a church.

Not converts, not church goers. Disciples. Followers of Jesus.

Lives surrendered.

And baptise them in the name of Father, Son and Spirit.

Here's the Trinity, although the word is not used.

And teach them what I've taught you. Clarity.

3. And then thirdly he echoes Moses before his death, sending Joshua and the Israelites into the promised land:

Moses: The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.' Deut 31:8 Good news.

Jesus: Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

I'll finish with this, by Mike Higton, professor of Theology and Ministry at the University of Durham

'We call the source, the one **to whom** we pray, **God the Father**.

And we call the one by our side, the one **with** whom we pray,

God once more, Jesus. And we call the one in our hearts, the

one **in whom** we pray, **God one more time, the Spirit**.' Amen