

## **Trinity Sunday 2021**

### **John 3:1-17**

**This is Trinity Sunday, the day in the Church year when we traditionally think particularly about the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Someone has pointed out though that our preaching and teaching all year should be trinitarian and if it isn't there is something wrong. The Trinity is notoriously hard to preach about. Our readings for today are not especially trinitarian, so that doesn't help. In fact you would be hard pushed to find a particularly trinitarian passage in the bible as such. It is clear that in the bible we read about God the Father, God the Son, Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit, but the word Trinity is never mentioned. The closest I think we get is when Jesus tells us to baptise people in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is an incredibly hard concept for us to get our heads around. In fact God is an incredibly hard concept to get our heads around. Would we really want a God who we could fully understand, comprehend, picture? Surely such a God would be no better than us, no God at all. Of course He is vast and unknowable and beyond our comprehension – He is the creator and sustainer of all things! And yet He wants us to know Him, to be in relationship with Him. I have a few friends who are serious intellectuals, two in particular, a Professor of Epidemiology and a Doctor of astrophysics and I know and love them dearly. We can talk and share and be in relationship and enjoy each other's company, I never feel patronised by them in any way, but they have vast areas of knowledge and understanding that are completely and utterly beyond me. And what God knows and sees and can do is infinitely greater than all the greatest minds that have ever been. We cannot comprehend the vastness, the greatness, the majesty, the holiness of God. But He wants us to know Him and be in relationship with Him. Jesus said, if you have seen me, you have seen the Father and then he said I will send another on just like me, the**

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counsellor/helper/advocate, the Holy Spirit. At the level of relationship, it is as simple as it is unfathomable. We may not understand how he lives in us and we live in Him but we can live in the reality of that and know that it is true. I am in a bit going to quote a part of a sermon on the Trinity that was preached by Mike Higton, professor of Theology and Ministry at Durham a couple of years ago. And to prove the point about simplicity, He preached the whole sermon more or less, in words of one syllable.

But right now we are going to look at our main text for today John 3:1-17. It must be the most preached on passage in the whole bible and I would imagine that John 3:16 is the most quoted verse in the bible. It so effectively sums up the whole of the Gospel message in one sentence. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life." This means everything to those who know it and believe it. When I became a Christian, and I know this is true for many generations of children, young people and new believers, it was practically the first bible verse I was taught. We used to have posters and stickers with it on and for a time there were popular T-shirts which said, "3:16, Know what I mean, John", which was supposed to intrigue people and get them to ask you what it meant so that you could give them the Good News. Jesus said this towards the end of His exchange with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a teacher, a pharisee, a ruler of the Jews and it would seem for this and other references to him a believer and follower of Jesus, albeit a mostly secret one who was frightened to openly declare himself a disciple. And Jesus says this extraordinary thing to Nicodemus, that everyone who follows Jesus must be born again. Born of water and Spirit. At first Nicodemus is understandably a bit confused, er, how can someone go back into their mother's womb and be born a second time? He asks. But Jesus patiently explains the inexplicable, that

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**we have to be born, made alive, from the Spirit. In the Greek it translates as born from above. Jesus isn't talking about physical rebirth but Spiritual rebirth. Again, in one sense this seems impossible to understand but the simple explanation that Jesus gives is that God loves us so much that he sent Jesus and that all we have to do is believe in Him and we will have eternal life. It is believing in Jesus that causes us to be born again. When we believe in Him, call on His name, acknowledge what He has done for us and turn away from the darkness in the world and the darkness in us, then He will give us The Holy Spirit and we are saved. We don't have to understand it, but we can know it and rejoice. Sadly, this passage has become, over the years a source of division in the body of Christ. People have taken the phrase "born again" and used it to distinguish and judge who they believe to be in and who they deem to be out. It is a phrase that we hear Jesus use once and we never hear the Apostles use it at all. It is a bit like those who believe you can only be a Christian if you have prayed the Sinners Prayer! The criteria that Jesus and the apostles used was to believe in the name of Jesus, to call on the name of Jesus. In the very next verse here Jesus said, "whoever believes in Him is not condemned". It is not about the language we use, or our theological understanding. It is about knowing that God so loved the world (name names), that he gave His only son, that if (names again) believes in Him they will not die but will have eternal life!" If you believe that and if you have been baptised, then the Holy Spirit lives in you and you are born from above, you are born again. You are not perfect, I am not perfect, we don't understand everything, we haven't got all the answers, but we are committed to living and growing in the love of God as citizens of His Kingdom and much-loved members of His family.**

**Now, I promised you that snippet of Mike Higton's one syllable sermon on the Trinity I hope it helps:**

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**'So, there is God, the one to whom we pray, the one to whom we look, to whom we call out, the one who made the world and who loves all that has been made. And then there is God by our side, God once more the one with whom we pray; God in the life of this man who shares our life, this man who lives the life of God by our side, and who pours out his life in love for us. And then there is God in our hearts, God in our guts, God one more time, the stream in which we dip our toes, the stream in which we long to swim, the stream which filled the Son and can fill us too and bear us in love back to our source.**

**The life of the one God meets us in all these three ways, and all that we meet in these three ways, has its roots deep, deep down in God's life –all the way down in God's life – in ways that our minds are not fit to grasp in ways that break our words to bits. One life, one love, one will, works through these three to meet us when we pray, to catch hold of us, to bear us up – and to take us home.**

**And that's why our words for God need to stretch; one-bit words, it turns out, will not do on their own. 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. And that is why we call this God – the God we meet when we pray, the God we know when we pray – that is why we call this God 'three in one'; that is why we call our God Tri-ni-ty'.**