Trinity Sunday (Stowe) Romans 5: 1-5

John 16: 12-15

Any consideration of the Trinity must start with the first line of the Nicene creed

**We believe in one God. -**  the original Greek from the councils of Nicea and Constantinople is We believe not I believe, though even in the orthodox church it is now I believe or its Greek equivalent. Common worship has restored the original we, amid much controversy and not a little dissent. BCP is still I believe.

The oneness of God is essential. Without that we get into all sorts of difficulties many of which the early church pursued and rejected in the first three centuries.

We also need to take on-board the understanding that any formula that seeks to define God is essentially blasphemous. Or at the very least grossly presumptuous. We are the creatures not the creator and a very small part of his creation. The observable universe is currently calculated to be **93 billion light years** across and 13.5 billion years old. Almost 3x as old as the earth. We need to remember that when we are trying to explain or define God. We should stick with Anselm’s definition *a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived.* That fits well with our growing understanding of how enormous the creation actually is and expands with our expanding knowledge.

Both the Old and New Testaments understand that God is experienced in multiple expressions. In the Old testament we have the concept of God as Father and as Spirit as Wisdom and Creator, and we should note that in Hebrew wisdom, and spirit ar feminine nouns: the Old testament is not as patriarchal as men might like to believe. And despite its perception of God’s multiple manifestations it is resolutely monotheistic. Hold onto that when some accuse traditional Christianity of believing in three Gods – we don’t. But we do believe in a God whose greatness is such that we experience him ( and I use the male pronoun for convenience only) in different ways. This ought not to be a surprise, even in human terms each of us has several persona, husband or wife, keen amateur hobbyist, walker, dingy sailor etc, teacher, minister, builder, or whatever our working role is or was. These are not mutually exclusive – or they should not be unless we lead a double life – in fact they are what make us rounded and, we hope, more or less integrated personalities. We would regard someone with only one aspect to their personality as boring, obsessive or imbalanced

At first sight the epistle and gospel readings are not particularly Trinitarian. That is because the idea of the Trinity as developed in later doctrine had not been formulated. So there is no conception of consubstantiality and equal divinity here. Indeed from our point of view they could equally well have been Pentecost readings emphasising as they do the work of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel does have the three persons of the trinity identified, the epistle is less explicit but shows will of God (as Father) working in and through Jesus the Son and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In the Epistle it is the saving work of God in our justification. A topic for a whole sermon series in itself.

*Read in connection with Trinity Sunday, these references to God, Christ, and the Spirit take on a particular significance. In common with other New Testament writers, Paul does not talk about the Trinity as such. The later christological controversies that prompted*

*sustained reflection on the Trinity lay far ahead. Instead, Paul and other New Testament writers search for language with which to express the experience and convictions of early Christians. As a result, their comments do not always yield themselves to a systematic*

*framework.*

*In this passage as elsewhere, the members of what would later be called the Trinity provide the basis for Christian existence. Christians live in peace with God because of Jesus Christ. Christians know the love of God because the Holy Spirit has poured out that love to*

*them. Christians boast in God’s glory, which they know through Christ and the Spirit. If Christians today find talk about the Trinity abstract and remote, for Paul it is as close as life itself.*

In the Gospel, which is the 5th of the teaching sections about the Paraclete in the Lord’s final discourse it is the teaching work of the spirit that is empahsied revealing truths not yet apparent. That is both because the Lord’s ministry lasted only 3 years and because we live na world that is ever changing with new things coming along all the time. When we talk of the unchanging Gospel the only unchanging aspect of it is the committed Love of God, who does not himself change for his whole creation and especially humanity. Its application has to change with the changing world. We need to listen to the Holy Spirit and seek the gift of discernment so that we can hear what the spirit is saying to the Church, and there is no reason to expect that it will be exactly the same for Christians under persecution in China, N Korea, India or Nigeria as it will be for those tackling secularisation and cynicism in western societies, or animism in parts of Africa or Papua New Guinea.

The Spirit expresses to us the will of the whole Godhead. Father and Son fully included*.*

As one commentator puts it

*If what the church needs is not new information but fresh discernment, better focused eyes with which to read the signs of the times and the relevance of its message, then the Spirit is a timely gift.*

*The Spirit is the indispensable reality for the community as it seeks to interpret its tradition and its context. The Spirit enables the church to be a community of both memory and hope. The Spirit “brings forth fresh light from the Word” and enlivens it for its readers. If the Spirit is not operative in its vision, to enable the understanding of its sacred text and to expose the true situation of the world, then the church is left to its own distorted sight. How can the church be sure? How can it discern what is right and what is wrong? How can it determine which of the many voices speaking is the voice of the Spirit? Does it go with every new fad?*

*The Johannine community itself had problems with contesting claims that finally resulted in schism. The warning is appropriate:*

*“****Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).*** *Not every new burst of energy, not every spurt of growth, not every surge in attendance is necessarily to be*

*identified with the Spirit’s activity, and not every speaker mouthing biblical phrases represents the voice of God.*

How does this fit with Trinity Sunday?

*For Trinity Sunday, this fifth Paraclete saying speaks primarily to the relationship between Son and Spirit. The final verse mentions also the Father (16:15), and in the broader perspective of John’s Gospel refers to the mutuality shared in the godhead.*

A focus only on the work of the Spirit is unbalanced. For Jesus in his teaching, and Paul, and therefore also for us, we want to experience and know in ourselves the fullest possible experience of God. It will only be a minute part of who He is. But Trinity Sunday reminds us of that breadth and depth of the Divine that is incomprehensible and knowable only in part in this life.