

## **Wherever love is, there might the Church be**

Two weeks ago we celebrated Trinity Sunday – we focused on that common-place in our life and in our worship, that we call God Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The early Apostles and Fathers of the Church spilt much ink (and not a little blood) over how best to describe God. Having established that God can be understood as the heavenly Father, found in the humanity of Christ and experienced through the Spirit, they sought to understand whether these three things were better understood in terms of hierarchy, or by understanding them as relationship:

- Hierarchy: Father creates a dependent Son and the Holy Spirit is a subsidiary (and somewhat mysterious) way that the Father (and perhaps the Son) can communicate with us lesser mortals
- Relationship: That the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal within a single Godhead – there is no priority, no precedence – each has its part to play and each can fulfil its role only in relation to the other two.

The balance of opinion was that the love that is God was best seen in relationships of equals, rather than as a hierarchy where one bit of God was subordinate to another.

This has something to say to us as members of the Church...

It is all too easy to see the Church as an institutional hierarchy – a group of people united in doctrine and identified by shared language and ritual. It is about you and me gathered here, about the ministry that I offer to those who come and ask, and about the needs we answer to those outside who we find to be in need.

But being Church – nothing less than being the body of Christ present in the here and now – is not about this is we are to be serious about our faith in the Trinity. For being serious about a God who is found in relationships between equals means that being Church is about revealing God in our relationships – and relationships as equals.

This recasts what we might call Church – no longer is the prime identity of the Church forged by fulfilling a duty to worship God, or understanding ourselves as the elect who are saved by God's love. Still less is it defined by being a priest who administers the sacraments. It is not about just doing good works to benefit others. But it is about being in relationships and seeking God wherever he may speak.

If we redraw the boundaries of Church in this way then we see that we play our part here (and important that part is), but others play their part at other times in this place, and many. many times in so many other places. With an equal claim to be the body of Christ are all those people who come into this place and are touched by the presence of God they find.

If we draw the boundaries the easy way – the way where there are clear boundaries and easy structures – then we probably find that this congregation has been the witness to Christ's presence among a hundred or so people during the past month or so. So easy, so neat and tidy, so easy to understand, and so easy to work out how we belong...

But if we draw the boundaries in a way that reflects our belief in the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the God who is found in relationships – we might find that the number of people who we have seen meet Christ numbers at least ten times that number (and that may be conservative!)

- We have seen people touched by Christ as they have come to give thanks for a new life and pray for God's grace on their new-born child
- We have seen the mourner come and offer their memories before God and commit a loved one to God's eternal care
- We have seen the loving couple reveal an echo of God's love as they have given themselves to each other in marriage
- We have seen the needy person fed
- We have seen the child enter this place with innocent joy
- We have seen the dying person find comfort in the prayers of the Church
- We have seen the visitor stand back in wonder
- We have seen the lonely find companionship
- We have seen the anxious student seek calm when the time for revision is past
- We have seen the desperate mother-to-be seek protection for her unborn child
- And none of us may know of what we have not seen

And all of this (and probably some more) is equal before God – all of this is the life of the body of Christ – all of this is the life of the Church.

So if we are serious in our belief that God is revealed to us in the relationships of the Holy Trinity, then we need to live this out in our lives as members of the body of Christ. When we gather together, and when we walk alone, we must seek not only to find God, but to reveal God's presence among us.

And so in a few minutes time we gather around this table – with things seen and unseen – to remember the gift that God gives to us in Christ: the gift of a love given that it may become a gift. And let us pray that wherever that gift is seen – there the Church may be.