

# The Trinity

Genesis 1:1–2:4a

Psalms 8

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Well, today is Trinity Sunday.

When we speak of the Trinity, we speak of God being Father/Mother, Son and Holy Spirit. The song by Sammy Horner I think explains it brilliantly.

The best way to explain it is to either think of your finger with 3 joints in it, but it's still one finger. Or those of you who are mothers or fathers, you're a wife and a mother and a daughter in one, or you're a father, a husband and also a son. Blessed Father, Son, Spirit, yet one God we serve. When thinking about the Trinity, it is interesting to consider how we think of God. Who do you primarily pray to? Is it to the Father, Jesus or the Holy Spirit? Do you pray to God as Father, do you pray to Jesus, or do you pray to the Holy Spirit?

I have gone through stages in my life. When I was a Christian in my late teens, I used to always talk to God as Father. Then as I began to be touched more by Jesus' life, I thought of God more in terms of Jesus, and it was more in an earthly sense, in the sense of the sort of person he was and how he lived his life. When I prayed I began to address Jesus instead of the Father. I saw in Jesus the sort of person I wasn't but wanted to be.

At times now I also pray to the Holy Spirit, although for me that takes some getting used to. Maybe for you it's easier to pray to the Holy Spirit. The thing that I love about God is the freedom to address God so personally and intimately. The apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans that when we don't know how to pray, the Spirit prays for us in groans that words cannot express. Don't you love that? That gives me such comfort, knowing that even when the person in this life who is closest to me, my wife, can't understand me, God understands me and knows exactly, better than I do, how I am trying to express myself.

When looking at the creation account in the reading from Genesis this morning, we can see how the Trinity is alluded to. In 1:26, God says "let us make humankind in our image". I was always stuck with this verse. What did God mean by making humankind in *our* image? Was he talking to the angels? There are different schools of thought about what is actually meant by this verse. However, whatever the intention of the author, there is no doubt that it can be taken to mean a reference to the trinity. He was creating us in His image – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (and when I mention in *His* image, please understand that I am using that in the generic sense. I'm not saying that God is exclusively male). We are created in the image of the Father/Mother, in the image of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. A couple of weeks ago, Fuzz spoke about the mother heart of God, and mentioned characteristics of God that show God's mothering love for us.

So let's look at what God would have been referring to when he said let us make humankind in our image.

Firstly, as we grow in our Christian walk, we develop more of the Father/Mother heart of God. The person who founded World Vision back in the 1950s was a guy called Bob Pierce. As he saw the children who had become orphans as a result of the Korean War, he said "let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God".

What breaks God's heart?

God created us in His image, so that we are able to become people who have the same concerns in life as God does. May that be our prayer – let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.

Similarly, we are created to be like the Son. Jesus tells us over and over again in the gospels to follow Him. We are created to be Christlike. It is as we become more Christlike that we become more of who we were originally created to be. To reach our full potential in life is to become Christlike. If you look at the sort of person Jesus was, as is shown to us in the gospels, you will see his compassion, his determination to stick to what is true, his unswerving desire to do the will of his Father come what may, and many other characteristics that can become more attractive to us as we look at our own lives in comparison to his. When we give our lives over to him we'll become more like him. If you're overly aggressive you'll become more gentle. If you're overly timid and shy, you'll become more assertive.

When you read the gospels over and over, and get more of a glimpse at the character of Jesus, as well as being enormously comforted and encouraged by Him, you will see things in him that attract you, that make you want to be more like that. And there's a very good chance that those things about Jesus will attract you because they are not who you are normally, but they are definitely what you want to become.

Let me give you an example. I've always been quite a reserved person by nature. When I was in my teens I was so shy that I wouldn't initiate conversation with other people in case what I said was stupid. I would happily talk to people if they talked to me. And so when I see the side of Jesus that is assertive, that takes the bull by its horns so to speak, that does not have that fear of people, that attracts me because I'm so often not like that and I want to be more like that. It excites me, knowing that I can be more like that. I don't have to be beholden to my timidity, to my fears. So when I read in the gospels that Jesus went through the temple and turned over the tables in a righteous rage at how the temple was being used not as a place to worship God but as a money market, and when I read that Jesus constantly stands up for what is right against the Pharisees, and courageously stands against their hypocrisy, I feel excited, because I know that that's what it is to become more Christlike, that is what it is to become more molded into the image of God (because Jesus is the perfect image of God). That assertive side of Jesus convicts me and attracts me to want to be more like Him.

For you, becoming more Christlike might mean something the opposite. For you it might mean becoming more gentle and compassionate because you're assertiveness goes too far and becomes aggression.

Read the gospels, listen to tapes, of them and let Jesus transform you into the person that you are not now, but into the person you can be. And as we be Jesus to those around us, people will see it, we will give off that fragrance of life that the apostle Paul talks about in one of his letters. Now when I talk about being Jesus, being Christ, let's not misunderstand what I'm saying. Of course we can never be Christ in the sense of being God with all God's powers. What I am talking about is in the sense of being Christlike, being imitators of Christ. Let me illustrate with a story:

Years ago a group of salesmen were on the last leg of their journey, headed home by train. They were running late. If they didn't catch the last train they would miss their deadline, and their wives, patiently waiting for them. As they ran through the train station two of the men accidentally bumped a table holding a basket full of apples, tipping over the basket and sending the apples flying.

Without stopping all the men reached the train and jumped on, just in time. All except one of them. He stopped, and looked back at the apples rolling on the ground. Then he looked at his colleagues inside the train and walked back to the table, which he saw was manned by a small boy. Only then did he realize the boy was blind. The salesman gathered up all the apples and noticed that several were bruised. He pulled a \$20 note out of his wallet and said, "I'm sorry mate. Here, take 20 bucks for the damage. I hope it didn't spoil your day."

As he started to walk away the bewildered boy looked up in the direction of where the man's face would be and said, "Sir, are you Jesus?"

That's what it is to be Jesus.

And finally as we look at this passage in Genesis which has God saying let us make humankind in our image, we see

that we are created in the image of God's Spirit. God breathed His Spirit into us – the Spirit of life – the breath of life. Made with the body of your mother and father, but with the breath of God. Jesus said he would give his disciples a helper, that he would not leave them on their own.

Last week I was asked to give a message out at our east church and it was an introduction to the Book of Acts. One of the things we discussed was that, as Jesus was going up into the clouds at the time of his ascension, the disciples in their confusion would have been wondering what was happening. They'd just been through the confusion of seeing their Lord die, then they'd been totally amazed at seeing him resurrected from the dead and appearing to them.

And even though he had told them that he had to suffer and die, and that he would go and leave them the Spirit to be with them, they were still confused. So there he was, suddenly heading up into the clouds.

You can just picture them. Jesus has given them the awesome task of spreading his message, "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and The Holy Spirit", and then he says, well I'm off now. You can just picture them as he is heading up into the sky saying, "wait, hang on, don't leave us!".

But he *didn't* leave them. They were not alone. Just days later the Spirit came at Pentecost. God was still with them, and with them in such an awesome way. And after the Spirit came, look how they were changed, from a bunch of confused, bewildered men to a courageous, committed, passionate bunch who turned the Roman Empire upside down.

You may have heard the quote by the anthropologist Margaret Mead which says "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Isn't that such an understatement when you look at what this little group of 12 disciples did after the Spirit came upon them at Pentecost.

Think of their experience of God. They had seen the fullness of God indwelt in the person of Jesus, and now they were experiencing God through the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, and acting incredibly powerfully through them. Now they could know what Jesus meant when He told them to go out and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost the Spirit spoke to each in their own tongue, showing that the Spirit was there for everyone.

So when we read that we are made in the image of God, when God said, let us make humankind in our image, we are made with the father/mother heart of God, we are made to be Christlike, and we are indwelt with the Spirit of God. As one of the psalms says, we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Recently I've been reading through Paul's letter to the Romans. Just reading through this book, I am struck by how the apostle Paul refers to God. He refers to God; he refers to Jesus, and he refers to the Holy Spirit – all so closely intertwined. Paul obviously saw them as one.

We have seen today that God is a trinity. As the Christian psychologist Lawrence Crabb explains, God is a trinity in the sense of being "3 persons, 1 God. There is a clear message here, and the message is that there is relationship within the very nature of God. God is a personal being who exists eternally in a relationship among persons: He is His own community."

God is his own community. This means that we are not meant to live life on our own. We are created to live in community, to live in the image of God who is his own community. So when things go well in our life, our brothers and sisters rejoice with us. And when everything goes wrong, our brothers and sisters weep with us. This is what it is to live in the image of God. In sharing our lives like this we grow. In fact, if we don't share our lives like that, opening up to each other, **we will never grow.**

As we think about the nature of God on this Trinity Sunday, let's think back to the creation account again that we had read to us before from Genesis. Think for a minute about that time before anything was created. If everything that has been created had a beginning, that means there was a time when there were no galaxies, no angels, no earth, no fish, no birds, no people, no anything – only God. Let your imagination wonder what it must have been like for God to exist with no one and nothing else. What words come to mind when you think of this? Give me just some single words.

Lawrence Crabb goes onto say that the word he thinks of is 'fun'. Imagine the sheer delight of enjoying perfect relationships with 2 others with no fear of things turning sour, a community of 3 cut from the same fabric yet unmistakably distinct. Imagine 3 who, without a hint of competitiveness, are absolutely thrilled with the uniqueness of the other 2, who will stop at nothing to give each other the opportunity to display their special glory. Imagine a community without even the shadow of evil, with nothing but perfect goodness, where every member can be fully himself, fully herself, without fear of promoting rivalry or releasing something bad. What the Bible reveals about

relationships within the trinity since creation supports these kinds of imaginings. The Father intends to bring all things under Christ and to give Him a name above every other name (this is in the apostle Paul's letters). The Son, Jesus, has no greater delight than pleasing the Father (look at the gospels). The Spirit loves to minister to fatherless children and to present Christ as the perfect lover to the unloved and the unlovable. The trite phrase, "one for all and all for one" becomes rich when applied to the Trinity. And the cynical phrase, "two's company, three's a crowd" doesn't fit.

Crabb goes on and encourages us to push our imagination a bit further. Ask yourself what it would be like for you to be a part of that community – and the word 'fun' might come to mind. Visualize God's joy in *being* that community, and you catch a glimpse of what it must have been like to be only God. Add a group too large to number who enter that community without messing it up, without even the possibility of messing it up, and you find yourself thinking what heaven is like. Now close your eyes and imagine - after God created the earth and all the animals, the birds and the fish, the eternal community would have called a meeting and said...

Let's create creatures with the capacity to fully enjoy us. We're absolutely happy with ourselves of course, because who we are and how we relate is incomparably wonderful. But so far, we've created no one who can share deeply in the unique joys of an intimate relationship with us where we hold nothing back. Let's create personal beings like us to whom we can reveal the very depths of our glorious nature.

Son, at just the right time I'll send you to become one of them and to accept the guilt for their sin. Then (and here the Father's voice broke) I'll break our connection and let you experience the death of separation from me that all sin deserves. When they see the extremes to which we will go to bring them into our community, the yearning we'll build into their hearts to be loved like that will draw them back to loving us fully and trusting us with their very souls.

Father, what you ask is painful beyond description to even contemplate. I cannot imagine what the actual experience will be like of not seeing your face. And yet I am delighted with your plan. It will give me the chance to let people see how wonderful you are. The joy of seeing you glorified makes it all worth it. There is no other way.

No.

Then I will go gladly.

Spirit, you will come upon my various people who will advance my purposes until my son dies as a man and is resurrected. Then you will take up residence in every one you have drawn to me, and you will incline their hearts toward loving me so that obedience will become a joy instead of a duty.

It will be my incomparable thrill to advance your purposes and to create within all those who accept your gracious offer of forgiveness an appetite to know you. And I will nurture that appetite until it becomes stronger than all others. I will not rest until they live in my strength and overcome all desires to find life apart from you.

When there was only God, the Eternal Community was having fun. God's purpose in creating people was to invite us to the party. As C.S. Lewis said, the serious business of heaven is joy. God, the eternal community, created us for community. We can't live without the Eternal Community and we can't live without community here. No one is an island. We can't survive on our own.

Let me finish off by playing a song from a CD. Some of the lyrics of this song speak to us about how we are created for community. We can't do it by ourselves. Our own self-sufficiency and pride will not get us there in the end; so let's quit trying. We need each other, and more importantly, we need God – Father/Mother, Son and Holy Spirit – the Eternal Community. Listen to the words of the song; close your eyes if you want to. I will also put some of the lyrics up on the overhead for those of you who would prefer to follow it that way.

SONG – 'SOMETIMES YOU CAN'T MAKE IT ON YOUR OWN' – U2.

Sometimes you can't make it on your own. If it was me who wrote that song I would change the title to 'You can never make it on your own'. The simple fact of life is that we need each other. We are created in the image of God.

Another musician, a guy called Keith Green, spoke of his desire for God as being 'like a moth to a flame, whenever I hear your name' When we soften our hearts and realise that, both individually and collectively, we need God, we will stop putting up the fight, stop the independence, the self-sufficiency and come on our knees to the God who wants us to become more like the wonderful person that he is.

*by Nils von Kalm*  
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