

TRINITY SUNDAY - The Grace

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Date: 30 May 1999

Preacher: Keith Rayner

- [0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on Trinity Sunday, the 30th of May, 1999.
- The preacher is Archbishop Rayner. Let us bow our heads in prayer. Blessed and glorious Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we offer to you our praise and adoration.
- Make us deeply conscious of your presence with us and make us alert to your word through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- May I say first of all what a great pleasure it is for Audrey and me to be here on this Trinity Sunday your festival of your church. 130 years, I believe, the old church is in age and 145 years of worship in this parish and it's lovely to be sharing with you in it today.
- And great to hear of the growth of the life of the parish and to see the work that God is doing here in your midst. I'd like to take as a text words from the New Testament second reading this morning.
- [1 : 3 3] Words that we know very, very well and use very often. We often call it the grace. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
- This is Trinity Sunday and rightly we think today of the being of God as Holy Trinity Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Because the word Trinity is a concocted word. Try unity. Three in one. Three persons in one God.
- So as soon as we say that we have to say that human words are inadequate to express the being and the mystery of God. We mustn't think of three persons as meaning three quite separate individuals apart from one another.
- More of that a little later. But on the face of it I suppose we might say it's a very unlikely way to think of God.
- [2 : 4 8] If you were starting from scratch and you were asking the question if there is a God what would he be like? I very much doubt if you would come up with a belief in three persons in one God.
- So why do we believe it? Well, simply because it is the way that God has revealed himself to us.
- And God's people experience that revelation and they had to find words to try to express it in human language.
- You see, if you think of the Old Testament and we had an interesting passage from that this morning. There was the sense of God as creator all powerful someone to be approached with awe and reverence.
- and that was very strong in the belief of the Hebrew people. And the disciples of Jesus of course had been grounded in that understanding of God as powerful creator.
- [4 : 0 4] The Lord the Lord we heard in this morning's reading from Exodus a God merciful and gracious. So they were rooted in that faith.
- And then Jesus' disciples came to know Jesus and they knew him as a man in their midst.

They thought of him at first as a fine man great teacher a healer a prophet. But as they got to know him and as they experienced his death and resurrection they knew that none of those things that I've said about him was sufficient to explain what they had experienced.

So that by the time of the resurrection appearances you have Thomas the one who found it hard to believe falling before Jesus and saying my Lord and my God.

they knew from the way he had lived and shown himself among them that he could not just be thought of as man but as God in their midst.

[5 : 23] And he had spoken of one who would be sent one of whom he spoke in personal terms but who would come within them and be within their lives a source of divine power whom he called Holy Spirit.

And they had that tremendous experience on the day we call Pentecost. We celebrated it last Sunday when they were conscious of the Spirit coming into them with great warmth and power.

power. And they knew the Holy Spirit as a personal force in their lives. Now it's perfectly true that this doctrine of the Holy Trinity is nowhere in the Bible set out systematically.

It took the church some centuries to find words to try to express adequately this experience they had had of God's revelation of himself.

And that's why people like Jehovah's Witnesses can come and say to you this is not true this doctrine of the Trinity. But think now of that text that I gave you.

[6 : 49] Paul writing these words in one of the earlier books of the New Testament the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

How could that little prayer be expressed other than in the context of the belief of God Father Son Holy Spirit all equally God and yet one.

And so I want for a few minutes to try and tease out something of the meaning of that great Trinitarian prayer which we rightly use often in our worship.

Let's start with the middle phrase the love of God and I start there because that is absolutely foundational to all Christian belief.

You see everything else we believe about God about the world about human life and its purpose all of it is grounded on this great central truth that God is love.

[8 : 15] Isn't it marvelous when you think about it that perhaps the most profound sentence in the whole of the Bible is a sentence of three words of one syllable the longest of which has four letters.

God is love and that tells us about the nature the character of God it tells us about the ultimate reality that lies behind this great universe because when you think about it it is because of his love that we are here love is the basis of creation love wants to reach out and share and because God is love he wanted to reach out and create people who could share his life could share his love and offer their love back to him and we were made for that we were made to share the life of God in love eternally and if we do not come to that then all else will be in vain we may achieve great things we may become famous in the world we may become very wealthy but if we do not come to that fulfillment of what we were made for all else will mean nothing and so in all life vicissitudes uncertainties frustrations agonies and there are many of those love is the final reality and that gives strength to our life it's the basis of our

Christian hope it provides the basis for all morality it is absolutely foundational the love of God and of course it was this love of God that sent Jesus Christ into the world to be one of us and share our life God so loved the world that he gave his only son to the end that all that may believe in him that's why he came as God's gift of himself God's gracious gift and he brought God's gift to us the gift of life of life abundant of life eternal he came he lived he taught he healed he died he rose so that we might have life the Christ life eternal life and all this not through something that we had earned or deserved but as

God's free gift to us through Christ's offering of himself upon the cross and so that first phrase of that wonderful prayer the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ again is so fundamental it speaks to us of God's favour God's free gift of life in Christ that life that comes to us from Jesus that is mediated to us through word and sacrament that we receive with faith remember us in Paul's words by grace you are saved through faith and again they take us to the heart of our Christian life and hope the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the

Holy Spirit you see this is so basic too isn't it there are some people who believe in a God if you ask them what sort of God they believe in he is or it is you might almost say some impersonal force or God is someone who was there long ago to account for the creation of things yes we we don't understand how things exist so there must have been someone to create but he is remote distant not a real part of life as we know it today and that's true of a lot of people isn't it if you ask them they will say yes I believe in God but he is not relevant to my life he is remote now that's where our belief in the Holy Spirit becomes so important for God is no remote creator

[13 : 42] Jesus is not someone who lived two thousand years ago and is simply a figure of the past God is present with us today making a difference in our life today dwelling in us dwelling in the Christian community active in the world bringing to our remembrance the words and the deeds that God has done in Jesus in history and last week at Pentecost we celebrated his pouring out with powerful effect but it was not just at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit was active he is here with us today and has inspired and empowered Christians in every generation for God is not remote he is a present and active and powerful

God in our midst and that's why Jesus could say those strange words it is expedient for you that I go away it's to your advantage because wherever you are wherever in the world at whatever period of history I am with you through the presence and indwelling of my Holy Spirit so belief in God as Holy Trinity is not some abstract speculative philosophical concept which we may take or drop at will it is absolutely at the heart of our faith as we believe in a God who is creator and transcendent as a God who is alongside us showing in

Jesus in ways we can understand in concrete ways what God is like and what we can be like and working within our lives to empower us from within as we face as we face the circumstances of daily life but never forget the heart of this Trinitarian faith is not that there are three gods but one God how it is must always be a mystery it is it is one of the things about God that he said my thoughts are higher than your thoughts and my ways than your ways when we come face to face with God we confront something beyond the grasp of our intellectual understanding and we fall down in adoration before him who is the great final reality behind this universe of ours and this

God in his threefoldness yet has an indissoluble unity three bound together in a loving and indestructible unity communion is the word we use the communion of the Holy Spirit the fellowship the Greek word is one that is called koinonia and if you are involved at all in Christian discussion today among Christians of different traditions you'll find that word koinonia constantly crops up that just as within the unity of the Godhead there is this perfect communion of Father Son and Holy Spirit so that is what we people we Christians are being called into and that is why unity a sense of being in deep communion with one another is also so central to Christian faith for we are called into a communion with God and one another which will transcend the barriers of time and space this then is the faith of the church this is the faith that makes sense of life not only for us but for every person whom God has created and this is why we are bound to share that faith with others around us and so our third reading this morning from the

Gospel of Matthew the closing words of Jesus to his disciples are words that bid us go out go and baptize all nations in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit that is the great commission this is the faith that makes sense of life that we all are called to come together to that life for which we were created this is the faith by which we are to live and which we are to share with others in the name of God Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen Amen