

SERMON – 12 JUNE 2022 – TRINITY SUNDAY – ROMANS 5, JOHN 16

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Email from Ciara, the teacher with responsibility for Religious Studies at Walter Evans School – could I do a school assembly explaining the Trinity. “No problems”, I said, “I’ve got one where we have a big circular world, representing God the Father – the creator. Make a cross for God the Son, then give the cross a couple of extra sticky out bits, and you have a letter E. The dove of the Holy Spirit can do on a nice V – so you have O, E and V – what letter is missing, an L – you have God as love – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For many years I had these large cardboard letters tucked away behind the filing cabinet, coming out every now and again for another assembly or a children’s talk. The only time the talk really failed was when I did it at the Methodist church in the Cambridgeshire village of Over – you say to the kids, O, V, and E, what other letter do we need? And they all said R – it took me a moment to realise why it wasn’t L for Love, but R to make Over.

Sadly the cardboard letters must have gone off to be recycled when we moved to Derby, so I spent a happy hour drawing letters on the computer, and producing a powerpoint – if you want to see it, watch the Zoom service! I get into school, and we’re in a different room to usual, and the school laptop doesn’t want to talk to the whiteboard – bring back my sheets of cardboard. The world was easier then! We got it to work eventually, and it is still a good talk.

My beloved wife rather spoilt my feeling of success when she pointed out that the cardboard letters were probably older than Ciara, the teacher at Walter Evans – and she implied it was about time I came up with a new idea. I offered to trade her in for a younger model and asked if she’d like to do the school assembly.



Then I got an email from a member of the congregation in Bury St Edmunds saying she had been digitizing some video tapes and she had found one of a service I had done for ITV in 1999, would I like a copy of it. I answered “yes”, watched it, and part of me rather wished I hadn’t – 1999 is a long time ago, the beard was a different colour in those days. On the other hand, it was a jolly good service – if I say so myself. In those days, Anglia TV based in Norwich did the Sunday morning broadcasts for ITV, and I did a few for them. Then it got moved to Manchester, and that was the end of my media career. Such is life.



The Trinity is an amazing concept – and one unique to Christianity. We are a monotheistic religion, we worship one God – we have that in common with our Muslim and our Jewish friends. Indeed the Psalm printed on our noticesheet, have a look at it, Psalm 8 in the middle column, is a passage of scripture they will use too – “O Lord our governor, how glorious is your name in all the world”. I had a friend once who was a prison chaplain, and he commented how unhelpful that image was in his context – in the days when we had prison governors. The majesty image is more helpful, especially in a country like ours where that is a positive image. From the tiniest baby, and young Gwen has grown up in the last few months, right through to standing against your enemies – God is there. Look out at the universe, and you can imagine the psalmist looking up in the darkness of a desert sky – and be aware of God.



The image I often put with this is the Apollo 8 one, the blue earth against the backdrop of the heavens – to me an iconic image, but not an image the psalmist (or anyone up until 1968) could really picture.

And psalmist goes from God, to the majesty of man – we should think humanity, it is more than the male. The psalmist uses the phrase “son of man”

which, for Christians, takes us to Jesus. Not just a good man, not just a prophet, but Christ, Messiah, anointed one, Son of Man, Son of God – all those phrases and words to use to try and describe what is indescribable. He is God, in just the same way as God the Father, but he is also human. A child, a boy, an adult, a man – meek and mild, strong and principled. Companion, friend, Saviour – what sort of relationship do we have with him.



After all, in a few minutes you'll kneel at the altar rail and I will use the words "this is my body" – how do we unpack that? Our understanding of that, of the whole concept of Christ as the suffering servant, of the understanding of Jesus as our personal Saviour, our Lord, our master – our understanding will be very different to that of the person taking communion this morning in the ruins of a church in Ukraine, or in a drought ravaged village in Africa, or in a detention centre in England with the threat of deportation hanging over you.



Our Trinitarian faith also encapsulates the Holy Spirit – a power, a love, something difficult to describe, difficult to understand. Again, some people, some churches, have a far more powerful, more vivid understanding of the Spirit than we do – driving past a church in Nottingham recently where the Pastor offers the gift of the Holy Spirit to cure your diseases and make you whole. I scoff, I'm a sceptic – but Jesus did exactly that. We are all different – I found the peace doves in the Cathedral quite special, others I know did not. For me the music of the Jubilee service in St Paul's was spirit-filled, but watching

the television broadcast it was obvious that for some of those fortunate enough to have a seat in the Cathedral it was simply background music to be talked through – it really seemed as if the great and the good who go to that sort of service now have no real idea what it meant to be quiet and pray, they looked completely out of their comfort zones.



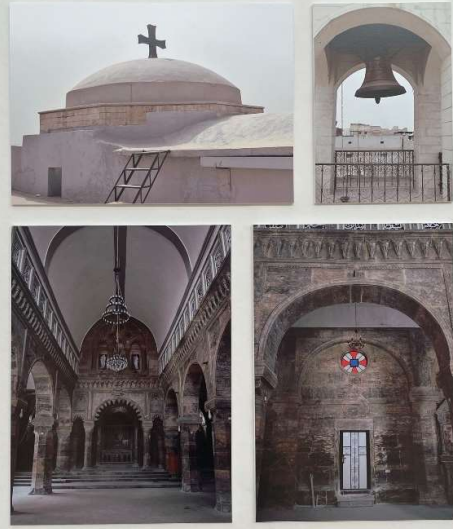
The reading from the Book of Proverbs, which coincidentally we had for the wonderful Evensong last week celebrating Her Majesty's Jubilee, that talks about wisdom – as I said last week, please note that wisdom is female. Easy enough to celebrate wisdom as we gave thanks for the faith of our monarch, far harder to celebrate wisdom when you watch American law makers go on about their God-given right to carry weapons, or watch British politicians struggle on from day to day, seemingly incapable of being wise.



Paul writes to the Romans about “peace with God through Christ”, and we – I – need to be much better at finding that peace. We went across to Nottingham on Friday morning to see an exhibition at the Lakeside Art Centre about the archaeology of Iraq. A travelling exhibition from the British Museum, and some amazing objects from the thousands of years of history in that part of the world. An exhibition tinged with sadness, as Iraq for me is the Gulf Wars, the violence and the hatred and the destruction – and the exhibition pulled no punches, so much was destroyed, so many priceless artefacts no longer exist – and I know that objects destroyed pale into insignificance against lives lost, but it was not a positive story.

Mar Toma Church

This church was built in the 7th century, on what is believed the site of the house where Apostle Thomas, one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus, lived during his stay in Mosul. It was damaged during the ISIS war, and it has been collaboratively recovered by Mosul authorities & ALIPH.



Until we got into the second room, and there were stories of rebuilding. Of the church built where the Apostle Thomas had lived and worked in the town of Mosul, now repaired and reopened. Of mosques rebuilt, of communities coming back to markets devastated by war and violence, of lives rebuilt.



The British Museum has a project working with the Iraqi Ministry of Culture – and young archaeologists, many of them young ladies, come to London for several months to learn techniques of recording, photographing, excavation – they learn to use amazing computer packages that can help map and record and rebuild – and then they take their skills back to their devastated, war torn country, and help their communities rebuild, help them find their heritage, recover their heritage, and use their heritage skills to bring people together.

I have to believe that out of evil, out of a darkness so complete that I cannot comprehend it, the light shines. I have to believe in a God whose love is so encompassing that nothing can separate us from the love of God. I have to praise and celebrate all that is good, and know that the evil has been defeated by

the cross, and will continue to be defeated day in and day out for all eternity. As usual the post-communion prayer gets it right

Almighty and eternal God,
you have revealed yourself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
and live and reign in the perfect unity of love:
hold us firm in this faith,
that we may know you in all your ways
and evermore rejoice in your eternal glory,
who are three Persons yet one God,
now and for ever. Amen.

Peter Barham, 11 June 2022