Trinity Sunday (Year B)

'Friendship with God'

I wonder how many of you have ever had a penfriend. It was popular when I was a teenager and was an ideal way to meet someone from a completely different country and culture. It was in the days before the internet and correspondence was conducted in pen and ink and of course snail mail, so getting to know your distant friend would often be a slow process. Letters would be exchanged, often written in one of the languages they were learning at school such as German or French. In many cases they never met their pen friend face-to-face and the relationship eventually fizzled out. Others, however, persisted, exchange visits took place and they became life-long friends.

Today is Trinity Sunday and the Holy Trinity is about relationship. For many (including some Christians) the concept of the Trinity remains a mystery If you struggle, you are in good company. Even some of the greatest saints such as St Gregory the Theologian described the doctrine of the Trinity as 'paradoxical' and 'beyond words and understanding'. Whilst Evagrius of Pontus wrote: "God cannot be grasped by the mind. If he could be grasped, he would not be God". For that reason, in the few minutes available, I don't intend to offer an in depth theological exposition. What I would like to do, is ask you to think for a moment about how you 'see' God.

Down the ages, God has been portrayed in many creative ways. For centuries Christian artists avoided creating any pictorial images of God and would only paint God's hand emerging from a cloud. However, by the time of the Renaissance, paintings depicting God's whole figure

emerged, often as a man with a long white flowing beard. Some of these images would have had their roots not only in biblical stories but also in the vivid imagination of the artists themselves.

For me, the the Holy Trinity – God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are essentially facets of the same One loving God that each in their own way call us into relationship. Divine conduits through through which we as mere mortals are enabled to 'see' and unite with God from whom we have become estranged.

In this morning's Old Testament reading we have Isaiah's personal vision of God (the Father). "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple." (6:1). In the presence of such glory and holiness Isaiah felt an overwheming sense of his own unworthiness. He cried: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts". (6:5). Yet despite his unworthiness, God sanctified him, forgave his sin, cleansed his guilt and sent him forth to be his mouthpiece.

The gospel writers went to great lengths to emphasise Jesus was the Son of God sent to draw us into relationship with God the Father In today's reading from John's Gospel, we have the account of Jesus' encounter with the Pharisee Nicodemus who having glimpsed some the miraculous works that Jesus had performed realised here was God at work. So he covertly came to see Jesus to equire more. Jesus was forthright with Nicodemus and said that if he wanted to 'see' the kingdom of God, he needed to be born again of water and Spirit (3:5). Now Nicodemus was a learned man and he yet even he could not understand this perplexing theological concept. For as Jesus explained, the Spirit is mysterious, beyond mortal understanding and blows like the wind. Yet the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary for

salvation and the divine portal through which we can enter into relationship with God. As we read in Romans 8, the Holy Spirit is the spirit of adoption by which we know that we are children of God. When we call God father, it is our spirit responding to God's voice. (8:15-16).

Like any relationship, it needs to be nurtured. Spending time reading and meditating on scripture and prayer are all ways in which we get to know the 'face' of God. As spend more time in God's presence, we like Isaiah realise the 'otherness' of God and by comparrison, our own unworthiness. But the more we spend in God's presence, the more we like Isaiah, Paul and Nicodemus can be progressively transformed into God's likeness.

This Trinity Sunday, let us not ignore the invitation through Christ the Son to enter into his Father's kingdom and through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit be born again into a living relationship with the Triune God.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Rev Andrew Jacobson

30th May 2021