

Genesis 1.1-2:4a; 2 Corinthians 13.11-13; Matthew 28.16-20

Last Sunday we celebrated Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit in wind and flame, and often thought of as the birthday of the Church. Today, we mark Trinity Sunday. Trinity Sunday is probably the most dreaded day of the year by preachers across the world, because - fun fact - it is basically impossible to try and describe or explain the Trinity without being heretical.

This theology of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as we know it took centuries to develop, and was the cause of many heated arguments and a lot of head scratching. But one of the things I love about our faith is that there is space for mystery. So I am going to take the liberty of slightly sidestepping the issue, and simply affirm that we will never really understand everything, because God is too big for our human minds to wrap around. And that's ok. A bit of mystery is beautiful and holy.

But what we will focus on is that wonderful last line of our epistle reading from the second letter to the Corinthians, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you".

Grace, love, and communion. This is how we know God among us in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Grace is favour, or kindness, especially towards those who don't necessarily deserve it, but to me it seems much deeper than that. There's an underlying sense of a permeating bestowal of goodness. If you were asked to explain how you experience grace, I wonder what you would say. For me, I feel that I experience grace in the love and actions of others, but also in things like seeing God at work in my life over the years. Grace is knowing how often we fail and how many flaws we have, but simultaneously being aware of God's love, no matter what. The enduring, permanent, persistent, stubborn relentlessness of God-with-us, holding us, walking with us, loving the depths of our ridiculous selves, is grace. The fact that we can't get rid of God, can't run away, can't make God stop loving us, can't make ourselves less precious in God's eyes, this is grace. Grace is confounding, because it is offered to every person on the planet. The ones who consider themselves a good person, those who perhaps come to church from habit or duty but it doesn't go much further, the people whose lives are dark, full of violence, those who are angry at God, who don't care for religion, those who are seeking and yearning for something to fill the void. We are all recipients of grace, this thing that draws us into God. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

The love of God is connected, of course. Grace and love go hand in hand. And this is one area where I am brave enough to talk about the Trinity! The fact that God is three in one allows for God to be love. God is always in relationship with Godself, so love was able to exist before the creation of the world, because it existed in the being of Father Son and Spirit. Relationship is necessary for there to be love, and the Trinity means that relationship, and therefore love, is an intrinsic part of who and what God is. The remarkable thing is that it is this love, this love of divine relationship, which is extended to us. Hopefully we all know what it is to be loved. We may have experienced the love of a parent, sibling, partner, or friend. We might all have had a glimpse of the safety and peace that comes from knowing without a shadow of doubt that you are loved by someone who you hold dear. Perhaps sometimes it can even seem baffling. What is it about me that makes someone love me? Do they really know my deepest self? Would they still love me if

they knew all my thoughts, all the darkneses I keep to myself? And yet, we are loved, we are lovable. The love of God is even more than this. It knows us inside out, knew us before we were born, knows all we are and ever will be, both the good and the bad, and yet holds us more fiercely and tenderly than even the closest love we know among one another. This love draws us into eternal life, and into eventual oneness with the relational God who created us. The love of God be with you.

Then, the communion of the Holy Spirit. In other translations of the bible this reads as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Either way, it speaks of a dwelling-with-us. As we thought about last week, this gift is how we experience God today. Jesus has come and gone, but the Spirit remains with us, opening an intimate means of being connected with the divine. I love that we use candles, like our paschal candle, to symbolise the light of Christ being in the world and in us, and it's the gift of the Spirit that gives us each a spark of the divine within. Gathered together, we're like a birthday cake smothered in dozens of candles, all burning together like a beacon in the dark. Communion, or fellowship, is a drawing together, and this is why it is so good and important for us to gather as a church, to know that we are the body of Christ, that we are each the bearers of the light of the Spirit. Together we are reminded of that relational aspect of Godself, that love grows when we are together. The communion of the Holy Spirit be with you.

So together, grace, love, and fellowship, are how we know the Trinity. It is how the mystery of our faith is articulated and graspable, as much as a mystery can ever be grasped. It is what Jesus tells the disciples at the end of our gospel reading, that he will be with us always, to the end of the age. This is how we know this to be true, because we experience grace, love, and communion, with God, with each other, persisting at all times. God has been with us, and will be with us. Even in the times of doubt and darkness, when we face uncertainty or the valley of the shadow. God remains. God created us, walked with us, lives in us, every step of the way from creation until the end of the age. This continuing, abiding presence of Jesus is a profound promise, fulfilled through the gift of the Spirit.

Together, may we know the truth of this mystery, as we proclaim it to the world through our inward sparks of God shining out, manifested in love growing here as we walk through life together.

Amen.