

## **SERMON- Trinity Sunday**

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**Linked Congregations of Bellarine – Sunday 31 May 2015 - Portarlington**

### Bible Readings:

Isaiah 6:1-8                      Calls Isaiah to Be a Prophet (OT, p 672)

Romans 8:12-17                Life in the Spirit (NT, p 197)

John 3: 1-13                    Jesus and Nicodemus (NT, p 121)

Theme: Trinity – three persons, one God whom we can trust

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I wonder what you think of when you think about God. What kind of God do you imagine? Is it some angry old white-bearded man sitting alone on a big marble throne, staring at a computer monitor and getting ready to push the “delete button” whenever one of us does something he doesn’t like? Is it some kind of heavenly executive, with two vice-presidents called Jesus and Holy Spirit.

Is it a judge who hates us so that Jesus has to intervene for us.

Is it Jesus, going around Judea long ago telling stories, healing people and casting out demons and somehow still alive now, even though we can’t see him. Or maybe Jesus who died on a cross and that was the end of him, really.

Is it some kind of vague good spirit or ‘force’ as in *Star Wars*?

How would you feel towards a God like any of those?

It’s hard for us mere mortals to get our heads around who God really is. This doctrine of ‘Trinity’ that we’re supposed to be thinking about today, doesn’t help much. ‘Trinity’ isn’t mentioned as such in the Bible and some people prefer to shelve the whole thing because of that. It’s this doctrine that, I think, is the biggest barrier to Muslim people who think we worship three gods and they insist there is one God and only one God. I wonder sometimes if some of us do at some times think of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as three separate deities rather than one God.

I think trying to think about trinity is a bit like this bloke, holding all his balls in his mouth. He’s stuck with them there. If he wants to play with them, he’s going to drop at least two of them. It’s hard to play with three-in-one.

Many people over centuries have tried to find images or metaphors to help us hold onto ‘Trinity’. Remember the story of St. Patrick picking a three-leaved shamrock and explaining that each leaf is separate, but all three make one leaf. Some have used diagrams, like a triangle or interlocking circles.

There’s a famous icon by an icon-writer named Rublev. I understand it depicts the three angelic visitors who came to Abraham’s tent and were given good middle-eastern hospitality. It’s been noticed that the features of each of the three figures looks the same. Their clothing is a little

different showing that they are three distinct persons. They're all looking at each other so that there's a kind of unity among them. So we wonder if Rublev was thinking of the Trinity when he wrote this icon. I'm not sure which figure represents the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I have read about it, but I forget! Icons invite us to look and contemplate and meditate. They are not meant to give us definitive explanations.

Today's readings each tell us something about the persons of the Trinity.

First we heard Isaiah's vision of God in the temple. I found a picture which was the closest I could find to what I imagine Isaiah saw in his vision. Perhaps I shouldn't have looked for one. We all have our own idea of what Isaiah saw. In his vision God is being worshiped loudly and busily by heavenly creatures. This is an awe-inspiring, majestic God. No wonder Isaiah is terrified. He knows he isn't worthy to be in God's presence, which just happens to be a necessary condition for repentance. Now, if God was just a wrathful and powerful judge, Isaiah would be right to be afraid. He knows that God should zap him and that would be the end of him. But God doesn't. This God is a forgiving and cleansing God. This God is also a missionary God, who sends people out in mission. God asks, 'Who will I send?' and Isaiah, in sheer and utter gratitude and worship, volunteers. At this point, Isaiah doesn't know what he's volunteering for!

That awesome, majestic God still asks, 'Who will go?' and he still doesn't usually let us know what the job is until after we've volunteered.

Then we have Jesus, the Son. Nicodemus says that Jesus is recognised as a teacher and miracle worker sent by God. Jesus shows the kind of wisdom and does miracles that only God can do. The gospels show us Jesus who brought forgiveness and renewal in people's lives. Jesus also invites his disciples to follow him in mission. John tells us in words Jesus speaks that the Son comes from heaven and will return to heaven. The Son is divine. John tells us at the beginning of the gospel that the Son came to live as a human being. The Son is God amongst humanity. Matthew's gospel tells us that Jesus will be called Emmanuel, which means God with us. Paul's letter reminds us that Christ, the Son of God, inherits the blessings of God's kingdom, or God's rule. The Son, like the Father, is to be worshipped as God.

The New Testament passages also tell us about the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, we learn that to belong in God's kingdom we all need to be born again, or born anew by water and the Spirit. We are changed. We are made into new people through our baptism, given the Spirit to dwell in us and with us, and we are placed within God's family of beloved children. Paul says that it is the Holy Spirit who makes us God's children. The Holy Spirit, says Paul, joins himself to our spirits. God-in-us. Emmanuel again! How this happens, we can't explain. Who can explain the Holy Spirit? Like the wind, she blows where she wants to, says Jesus. Some people prefer to speak of the Holy Spirit in feminine terms because the Spirit, like a mother, gives us birth as God's children.

As God's beloved children and members of the family of God's people, we, like Christ, inherit the blessings of God's kingdom or God's rule. As God's children, we join the family business and as children in any family business, have the privilege of playing a part in building up that business. The Holy Spirit provides us with gifts to enable us to do that. This is an act of creation, just as rebirth or spiritual renewal is an act of creation. The Holy Spirit is as much creator God as the God we read about in Genesis and the Psalms. Why? Because this is the same God.

So, when we think about these Bible passages, we find that all three persons, like the figures in Rublev's icon, are so much alike that the only explanation the church could come up with is that they are the one God. All are divine. All do acts of creation. All bring forgiveness and renewal. All in their own way are God with us. All invite us to join God on the mission of bringing God's kingdom, or rule, on earth.

God is a God of relationships. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are a household, a relationship of love. God offers us the awesome privilege of joining in that relationship. We are invited accept our place as beloved children of almighty God, the Father whether we deserve it or not. As beloved children, we are invited to take our place as joint heirs with Christ in God's kingdom and follow Christ into the family business. We are gifted and led by the Holy Spirit for our role in that family business.

God invites us as Isaiah was invited. 'Who will I send?' asks God. Are we willing to trust this God in three persons, even if we can't understand how that can be. Are we willing to trust that when Jesus tells us to call God 'Our Father', we can be obedient to the will of our Father God because we know God is a loving God who only wants what is best for us and for all of Creation. Are we willing to answer as Isaiah did and say, 'Here I am. Send me?'