

Trinity Sunday, 2014.

Isa. 40: 12-17, 27-end, Ps 8; 2 Cor. 13:11-end, Matt 28:16-20

This day, Trinity Sunday, and these four readings, are so packed with expectations and advice we could talk till midnight. Don't worry; my first sermon ever, in Heidelberg in 1992, went on for 25 minutes, but I learnt fast! Moreover, we have had a trio of baptisms today demonstrating a trinity of relationships between three children of God and God, three children of God and their families and supporters, three children of God and this and all other congregations of God.

And Trinity is not difficult – unless we insist on seeing Creator, Redeemer and Comforter as three separate Gods yet weirdly One, or see the Spirit, the Comforter, as an afterthought, despite being foreshadowed by Christ God whose own coming was foreshadowed by Parent God in Isaiah. A wise Christian understanding of God sees us as made in, and imitating through living in, the image of a nurturing, loving, comforting interrelating One. Understanding the God of the Bible and other texts as a relating, interacting, interweaving God, rather than a static possession of churches, challenges us to live our lives as images of an interacting and therefore changing *yet* eternally solid God. A static image of three God-figures at a safe controlled distance may be easier, rather like keeping ourselves at controlled distance from the risks of nurturing, loving and comforting other people and the earth. But neither approach, to God or community, brings life.

We share in God's sovereignty, says the Psalm, and must nurture the world we are given responsibly, not grabbing excess only to throw it in the bin, and we must be respectful of land and people, not buying prawns which are cheap because they are caught by slave-labour, or abusing people with whom we disagree. Sharing in sovereignty, yes, made in God's image, yes, both women and men alike. Both are equal to each other, yet *neither* come close to God in knowledge, wisdom or virtue, in merciful grace, uncounted love or constancy. Let me set out two strands related to the Trinity and therefore to the lives of the people of God, picking up on that last line of Paul in Corinthians, and Matthew's demand for mission.

Modern writing on the Trinity tries to find a place for women in the images, some making the Holy Spirit 'Sophia Wisdom Woman,' others pointing out images of God as a hen gathering up her chicks: but at best we tend to be given two men and a bird. But there's a passage in the Odes of Solomon from around 125 AD, perhaps written by a member of the Jewish-Christian Qumran community, which merges male and female attributes in the Trinity:

The Son is the cup,
And the Father is he who was milked.
And the Holy Spirit is she who milked Him,
Because his breasts were full.

Confused identities? Only if we demand God fit our mode, with God the Father having size 12 shoes and a beard!

But if we accept God as indefinable and unknowable other than through the brief life of God on earth, and the fruits of God in us, what would that mean for our practice of faith in life regarding gender and mission?

The total rejection of ordination to Roman Catholic women despite strong movements in many countries among ordinary members for that; the denial of ordination to women in three Anglican Provinces, the Southern Cone of Latin America, the Indian Ocean, and South-East Asia; the rudeness and rejection meted out to too many ordained women throughout the Anglican Communion, including the United Kingdom, by clergy colleagues, lay women and men in congregations; clerical and episcopal inaction over known abuse of wives by lay and ordained men in congregations across the world including the UK. What do these facts say about woman and men as images of the One unified God?

And Matthew's 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?' Some people missionise disrespectfully, and that embarrasses us: well I remember being in Seoul, Korea with former students, who attended my ordination here in 2010. Walking past a mob of Christians yelling their daily abuse outside a Buddhist temple, we sought to separate ourselves from those 'missionaries.' But in reacting to how Matthew 28 *can* be used, too many reject any proclamation, even whispered. Failure to speak for our faith, to explain our faith to others, to show God working in our lives by example, risks us failing to be images of God, whatever our gender, rank or ethnicity.

In these many weeks of Trinity, largely devoid of ecclesial drama, let us focus on learning about and living as images of God, for just as these children baptised today, each person here needs to grow in learning and in the love of God.