

TRUTH AND TRINITY John 16:12-15

We have a wonderful passage this morning and we're going to begin by reading it again

So John 16:12-15...

12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

When my sister's father-in-law died Emma contacted my mum to see if Mum knew any books she could use with her small daughters to help them begin to understand and process the loss of a loved one...death and eternity. You've got these big concepts that little minds need to try and make sense of...there's so much we *could* say, but how much can a 4 and a 5-year-old understand?

Anyone with small children in their lives knows what it is to have to re-frame complex answers into a format that their concrete minds, with as yet limited life experience, can understand. Too much information poorly delivered can be more than they can presently bear...

Jesus has been together with His followers just about three years and during that time He's taught and modelled His message before them – He *is* His message. Now He's anticipating leaving them...first for the cross, and then when He returns to His Father... I can just imagine Him – "I still have so much to tell you!!!" Or I can imagine me! Like parents preparing for one of their children to leave home...no matter how much you've taught them, you're suddenly keenly aware of their youth, their inexperience, their naivety and there's an urgent need to give them a lifetime of learning in five minutes to be sure they're going to make it out there.

I love the picture of caring relationship here. Jesus wants His disciples to know everything – to be all caught up on the details of what's going on, everything in the open, everything shared. Isn't that what it's like in close relationship...when something extra good, or something really difficult happens we all want someone or ones to share that with. We may

not tell the whole world – or maybe now thanks to social media we might – but we will invariably have a select one, two, or few people who we want, even need, to know what’s really going on for us. Jesus loves these ones who are with Him now and He wants them to be fully in the picture. But, a bit like my sister’s young daughters, at this point Jesus’ disciples aren’t ready, they couldn’t cope with the full disclosure...it’s more than they can bear.

So, even though Jesus has much more that He *could* say, He recognises that what will in future be a blessing, right then would be burdensome to these friends; they’re not yet at a place of readiness or maturity. Jesus holds off going into details the disciples aren’t ready for but assures them they won’t be kept in the dark.

In chapter 14:26 Jesus has told them that the Spirit will teach them all things, but here Jesus specifies that the Holy Spirit will lead them into all *the* truth. THE truth that the Holy Spirit leads into, is the revealed truth of Jesus. Verse 13 says, “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into *all* the truth.” The truth has been made known by Jesus to the disciples, but their grasp of it has been limited; the task of the Holy Spirit is to lead them, and us, so that they may comprehend the depths and heights of the revelation that they’ve not perceived, not “got” yet. So they weren’t to expect or look for additional or new revelation about Jesus, but to further “plumb the depths” as it were...to go deeper and grasp ever more what this truth of who Jesus is meant for them...what it means for us, and for the world.

Bible commentators Kanagaraj and Kemp have this to say:

“...the Spirit’s education concerns the revealed truth that IS Jesus... Ultimate truth about God, the world, humankind, reality – sufficient for all we need to know, is revealed in Jesus. Even though He only lived 33 years on earth, ministered for only three and His disciples were incapable of grasping all He taught, His revelation is the fullest that God intends to bring us, the fulfillment of His ongoing work of revelation through ages past. There has not been, neither will there be any greater revelation than that which is Jesus Christ.”

So, if we’re ever tempted to imagine that Jesus is not enough or we feel dissatisfied in Him, as though somehow, at some level of our being, or in our experience Christ seems

inadequate... the answer is not to look outward, or elsewhere, but deeper ... Jesus is *it*...if we don't know Him as the fullness of truth, we just don't know Him well enough.

These days truth as a concept has taken quite a beating; I say these days, but way back the author of Ecclesiastes declares there is *nothing new under the sun*, and we see this when we observe the irony of Pilate directing the question, "What is truth?" to Jesus. Truth stood in front of him and he questioned its very existence!

Jesus told His followers that the Spirit of truth would guide them, and us, into all the truth. He would not speak on His own but only what He hears. So the Spirit is not going to give any new truth or independent testimony. His teaching is consistent with the Godhead and what He teaches is what belongs to Jesus. He always glorifies Jesus. He doesn't draw attention to Himself or to anything inconsistent with Jesus...so this is a criterion for checking anything claiming to be the work of the Spirit – is Jesus glorified in and through it?

Our short text for today, in addition to highlighting the work of the Holy Spirit, also presents a portrait of the three persons of the Trinity. Jesus speaks of Himself, of the Spirit's activities, and of the Father.

On the subject of the Trinity I resonated with these words from an article online:

"For many Christians the Trinity has become something akin to their appendix: it's there, but they're not sure what its function is, they get by in life without it doing very much, and if they had to have it removed they wouldn't be too distressed."

It appears that we're inclined to neglect the doctrine of the Trinity – relegate it to the too-hard basket - but that's a mistake because it's central to our Christian faith. The doctrine of the Trinity is concerned with who God is, the nature of this God that we worship. And of course the question of Jesus' deity, that is, Jesus' being God, is very much wrapped up in our understanding of the Trinity.

At this point, let me put your minds at ease...I don't intend to deal comprehensively with the subject of the Trinity today. It's far more than part of a message can address...far more than multiple messages could do justice to. I hope to cover just enough to impress you afresh with the wonder of this doctrine and perhaps inspire you to revisit it in your own times of Bible study.

To start with let's just briefly review a description of the doctrine of the Trinity, I liked this one by Kenneth Samples:

“Historic Christianity’s Trinitarian monotheism (*i.e. doctrine of the Trinity – God is three in one*) holds that God is one being and three persons. Or philosophically stated, God is one divine What (essence) and three Whos (three distinct, but not separate persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Thus the one God has eternally existed as a community of persons.

In Christianity, God is principally a Father who forever loves his Son and Spirit in eternity before the creation of all contingent things. The Triune God has existed forever in an eternal community of loving relationships. That love then spilled over when God created all things. Therefore God is love and is capable of loving his creatures precisely because God is a Trinity.”

“...an eternal community of loving relationships.” I love that!

In the early part of my Christian life I had simply accepted the idea that God is love – the Bible described Him as such and I accepted that as being the case. However what I hadn’t understood up until that point, or even considered, was that in order for God to truly be love, it was actually essential that He also be triune.

1 John 4:8, 16, “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love...And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” The Bible tells us that God is not only loving, He *is* love. Richard of St Victor in the 12th century argued rightly, that love must have an object, love must be directed towards something or someone. If God is love and His unchanging nature means that He has *always* been love, then he must always have had ‘another’ to love. A perfectly loving Being cannot perfectly love if he is not sharing that love with at least one other, since perfect love exists between at least two distinct entities.

Additionally, a belief in God’s self-sufficiency requires that his love not be dependent upon the existence of His creatures – us. He was love before He created the world; He didn’t create us because He needed an object of His love, because He needed something to love – His loving nature was already being fully expressed in the Godhead –Father, Son, and Spirit

in mutually loving relationship – *always*. God’s loving nature has been being expressed eternally, past and future.

As an aside, this has implications for Islam which claims God is a singular, solitary deity. The god of Islam cannot be perfectly loving since there was a time when this god was not expressing love because there was no one for him to love. Before God created he was completely alone in eternity, he had no one to love but himself. And of course if God *needs* to create other persons in order for him to have someone to love, then he is dependent upon his creation for fulfillment. British Theologian Michael Reeves says “If Allah needs his creation to be who he is in himself (“loving”), then Allah is dependent on his own creation, and one of the cardinal beliefs of Islam is that Allah is dependent on nothing.”

So only the Christian idea of God as a Triune Being lines up perfectly with this understanding of Divine love since there are three eternally distinct, yet inseparable Persons of God that love one another completely. Tim Chester, a church leader in Britain, puts it this way, “God-in-himself, God in eternity, God from all eternity is a mutually indwelling, loving community.”

So, how are you holding up out there...let’s get a bit more practical, what are the implications of God’s Trinitarian nature for us as believers? If we turn to the next chapter of John, chapter 17 we find Jesus’ prayer for Himself, His disciples, and then for all believers, we’ll pick it up there from verse 20-26:

20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.24 Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Wow, so it looks like the incredible love modelled in the Trinity is what Jesus wants to see between His followers – us. I remember a little quip that I heard as a young person: “To live above with saints we love, oh that will be glory, to live below, with those we know – that’s a different story.” But that is what we are called to – deep, committed, loving relationship with each other, and not just the others who we find easy to get on with, who think like us, who we’ve never known awkwardness or tension with. This is a call with no caveat clauses, no exceptions, no ifs or buts...we don’t get to love Jesus but not friends.

Don’t think I say this easily...I’ve been following Jesus long enough to be upset and to upset others plenty of times. But the call to love each other deeply doesn’t only kick in when we’ve messed up, it has claims on us all of the time. It’s a tall order and one that stretches our capacities in the craziness of our 21st century lives; however our commitment to meaningfully loving relationships with each other, is not only because it’s good and consistent with our relationship with God, but because that’s how the world is going to know that this is for real – that’s how they’re going to recognize God’s love...when they see it in action through us.

So, what does that look like? Well I believe it looks like committed and consistent fellowship with other believers –like what we have here this morning, a bunch of people that we don’t get to pick, that we commit to loving through the rest of the week, based on our shared love for Jesus. It means rediscovering hospitality and creatively finding ways to be more in each others’ lives even though everything about life today seems hell-bent on crushing connection and community. I’m not suggesting this is easy – it’s not at all. But I encourage you, and myself to keep wrestling with how we might replicate the love and unity that’s in the Godhead here and now with each other.

And I’ll close with a challenge from Tim Chester who I quoted earlier:

“The ultimate apologetic for the Trinity is not some clever analogy or philosophical explanation. It’s the common life of the Christian community.

The Christian community is to reflect the divine community. We’re to love one another; share with one another; rejoice and mourn with one another; share our lives.

Jesus says that when the world sees our community life it will know that he was sent by the Father to save the world. The challenge is this: When the world sees our community life, does it recognise a sign of God's salvation? We're not talking about the welcome or buzz people get on a Sunday morning. We're talking about the network of believing relationships in action – Monday to Saturday. Does your church reflect the divine community?"