

'Who is The Trinity?'

(John 7:27) "Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, " Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own . . ."

It has been for certain preachers to avoid Trinity Sunday, because they think that they have to explain the inexplicable. Although, I must admit that I have always enjoyed the challenge of it. Over the years I have come up with a variety of illustrations, most memorable being the Trinity as 3 in 1 Oil - yes, God cleans, lubricates and protects! One problem is that the Trinity is not mentioned explicitly in The Bible, rather it is implied in people's accounts of their different experiences of God. It wasn't until the 4th century at the Council of Nicaea that the doctrine was adopted, and at the heart of the debate that had raged for 100's years in the Church was the fundamental question, 'Who is this Jesus?'

In John 7, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, and the city is packed with people from Jewish communities across the world. In the midst of the hustle and bustle, Jesus begins to teach and preach, and what he says creates divisions in the crowd. But everyone seemed to be asking, 'Who is this?'. To answer that the writer of John's Gospel, and 300 years later the Council of Nicaea, asked even further questions (the sort you would expect on someone's CV), because they wanted to dig deeper.

(i) What were his qualifications? We not taking about a City & Guilds in carpentry, but rather by whose authority had he come. The words he said, the action she took, the lives he touched, made people conclude that he had come from God - Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer: Father of all. "I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me." (v.29)

(ii) What was his background? The Queen's College (as it was called when I trained there for the Methodist ministry from the late 1980's) once hired a drama teacher to help the Anglican students with their sermon delivery, while we nonconformists were more practised in the art. Although she could not fault my annunciation, I am sure that my pronunciation gave the dear women sleepless nights. The crowd who heard Jesus knew his background because his accent gave it away. So, they wondered whether a Galilean could be the Messiah. Many replied, "When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than his man has done?"

(iii) What was his legacy? John's Gospel, written around 80 years after Jesus, reflected his life and mission with the hindsight of a faith community, a group of Jewish Christians who wanted to distinguish their beliefs from others, and so claimed that because of Jesus they had an intimate experience of God. An experience described in many ways, and called the Holy Spirit. "Out of the believer's heart will flow rivers of living water." (v.38)

"Who is this?", asking the crowd. The answer came that it was the One who reveals that God is experienced in different ways: the God who is beyond us, beside us, and within us. Not a monolithic being, but a community of Father, Son and Spirit; one God experienced in diversity, who shows us how to live together as true community which is diverse, united and loving. From that fundamental question, " Who is this Jesus?", comes a greater understanding of God as Trinity, the Community of Love which makes us complete.

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