



Sunday 21st June

## Welcome to our Father's Day Service

Today, we celebrate Fathers, but we bring our worship and our focus to God who is our Heavenly Father who loves us, protects us, provides for us and disciplines us perfectly.

We welcome our guest speaker today.....

Here are the readings he has requested.

I've heard a thousand stories of  
what they think you're like  
But I've heard the tender whispers  
of love in the dead of night  
And you tell me that you're  
pleased, And that I'm never alone

***You're a good, good father  
It's who you are, it's who you  
are, it's who you are  
And I'm loved by you  
It's who I am, it's who I am,  
it's who I am***

I've seen many searching for  
answers far and wide  
But I know we're all searching  
For answers only you provide  
'Cause you know just what we  
need, Before we say a word

*By Chris Tomlinson*

**You are perfect in all of  
Your ways  
to us**

## Isaiah 40:12-15

Who has measured the oceans in the palm of his hand?  
Who has used his hand to measure the sky? Who has  
used a bowl to measure all the dust of the earth and  
scales to weigh the mountains and hills?  
Who has known the mind of the Lord or been able to give  
him advice? Whom did he ask for help? Who taught him  
the right way? Who taught him knowledge and showed  
him the way to understanding? The nations are like one  
small drop in a bucket; they are no more than the dust on  
his measuring scales. To him the islands are no more  
than fine dust on his scales.

## Psalm 8:3-5

**“When I consider Your heavens, the work  
of Your fingers, The moon and the stars,  
which You have ordained, What is man  
that You are mindful of him, And the son  
of man that You visit him? For You have  
made him a little lower than the angels,  
And You have crowned him with glory  
and honor” (NKJV).**

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ  
and the love of God  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with you all.*

2 Corinthians 13:14

Matthew 28:16–20 (ESV)

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Welcome to our Guest Speaker

*James Gregory* Pastor from Crediton, Devon.

## **‘The Trinity’**



I hope this will feel like swimming in deep waters... in a way which is exhilarating and inspiring - not like swimming in deep waters which mostly just feels like drowning!

I hope that we will begin to see how the fact that God is Trinity reminds us of who God is and who we are too. The doctrine of the Trinity is this: God is one, and God is three. There is only one God and this one God is a community of three persons: Father, Son and Spirit. The word ‘Trinity’ is not in the Bible at all. But it’s an understanding of God which is absolutely based on what the Bible does say about God. And so, the readings we heard this morning help us to see that.

Isaiah 40 is a meditation on who God is: God is vast and powerful and perhaps seems distant but Isaiah is reminding us that God is a present help. And Isaiah introduces this concept of the Spirit of God; (v13) ‘who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord?’ So there is this clue, in several places in the Old Testament, that there is God and there is also this person, ‘the Spirit’, and they appear to be somehow distinct from each other. We also heard Psalm 8 which the New Testament writers took to be one of many prophetic texts that speak about Jesus - Paul quotes from it in his great resurrection chapter, 1 Cor 15. We heard from Psalm 8 about the Son of Man who was made lower than the angels but is now crowned with glory and honour and has dominion over all. And then we heard these two, short, readings from the New Testament. Interestingly, they are both texts for worship.

There was the grace which we tend to say to each other at the end of our services, ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit...’ And there was a description of baptism, that we are to baptise people in the name of the Father, and in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit; another act of worship.

It’s as those first Christians worshipped God that they began to see more clearly who this God they were worshipping is - that God is one, but also that this God they adored had revealed himself by his name ‘Father’. To be Father eternally you need an eternal Son - and this Son is Jesus, Jesus whom Peter worshipped as ‘my Lord, and my God!’ And then as Jesus is preparing to leave his disciples he tells them that he will send another person who will be God in them and with them, and this third person, who is also God, is the Spirit - the disciples met him dramatically as they prayed at Pentecost. Like those first believers we too are getting to know this one God who is also three in worship. God the Holy Spirit moves us to call out to God our Father in worship, ‘Abba, Father!’ - and it’s by the Spirit that we can say in worship ‘Jesus is Lord!’ Who is this God whom we worship? God is one - there is only one God. And yet this God has revealed himself to us as three persons, as the Father, as the Son, and as the Spirit. Got it??!!!

It’s okay if you haven’t got it! It’s okay because God doesn’t come to us and say, ‘understand me’ he says, ‘love me, with everything you are and everything you have’ and ‘follow me’.



God is not an enigma to be solved.  
Loving always matters more than  
knowing or understanding.



**Loving always matters  
more than knowing or  
understanding.**

- 1. Love is a choice and a commitment.**
- 2. Love is an action not just an emotion.**
- 3. We love because God loves us.**
- 4. Love is a habit.**

Nevertheless, here are five reasons why the doctrine of the Trinity matters to us: God is not our possession God is self-giving love God is a vortex of love God is not an individual (and neither are you) God has plurality at the very heart of his being

- 1. God is not our possession** - we belong to him. The first one is what I've just been saying; we need the puzzle of the Trinity to remind us that God is not pin-down-able. God is not our possession. God is not an idea we can hold within our heads. God will not fit into what we think we already know.

And God is not another thing we can take up in our hands and use for our own ends, God is not a force we can manipulate to back up our cause.



Imagine a powerful politician holding up a Bible and in front of a church as a way of claiming God's endorsement for his actions and prejudices. That would be an inherently foolish, and indeed blasphemous, thing to do. God is not another thing for you to use to get what you want and defend what you think is important. God is not a leg-up to help you get on in the world. God is not mocked. In his very being God is mysterious and untameable.

We don't claim this God, we allow ourselves to be claimed by him, we do not tell him who he is or what he can do, we open ourselves up to humbly receive what he tells us about himself. We always approach God with humility and allow him to show himself to us. We approach him hands open, surrendered, ready for transformation. **Are you on board with that?**

And yet, here's another paradox... (take a deep breath...!) This God whom we cannot grasp in fact does allow us to lay hold of him, to lay hands on him, to take him up in our hands, and to crucify him. This God will give you brain-melt!! Which leads me to think that God is ungraspable, but is also self-giving love...

## 2. God is self-giving love.

Though we sometimes talk about 'self-love' really love most always have an 'other' to love - there must always be an object of love. You can't truly love your reflection. Love is something that you give to someone else - to a person who is distinct from you; you love what is different from you. For love to be real and true it must be received by someone who is not us, who is an 'other'. Which suggests that if God were only one, if God were only an individual, he could not love - or at least he could only love once he had created a universe to receive his love - but that would mean that God only became love after he had created that universe, as if God needed us in order to know what love is.

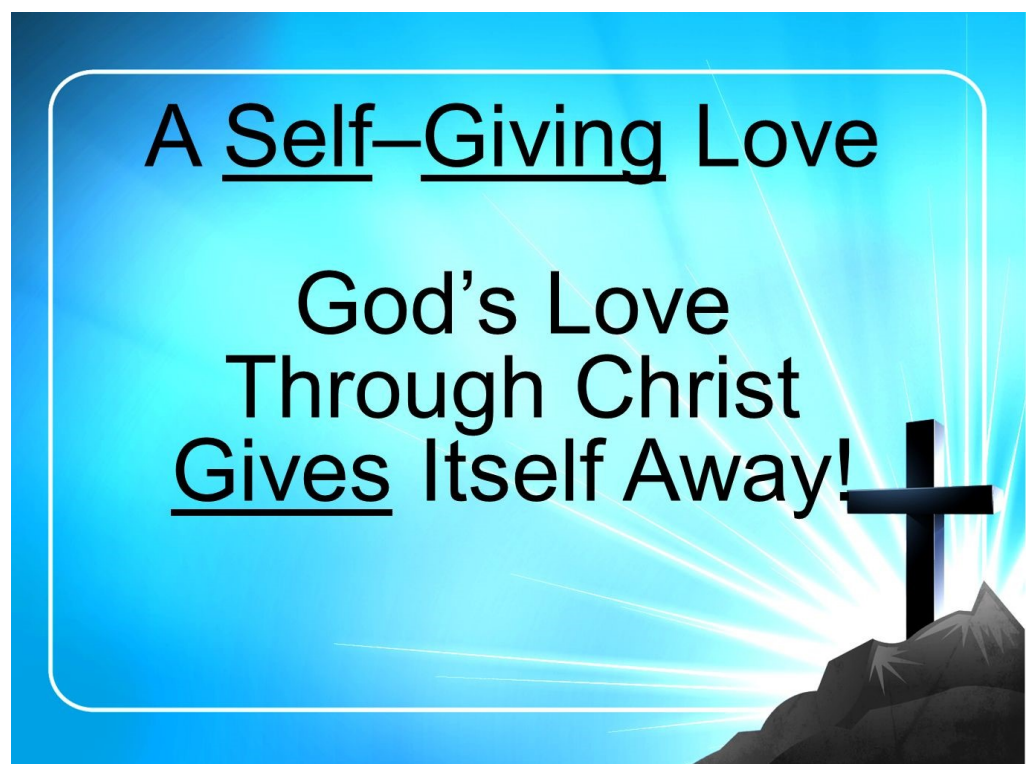
But the Bible tells us that God is eternally love, God is love in his essence - not love just because he created something to receive his love. And God really can love because God is not only one, God is also Trinity: Eternally the Father and the Spirit love the Son. Eternally the Spirit and the Son adore the Father. Eternally the Son and the Father love the Spirit. And the Spirit and the Son gratefully receive the love of the Father. The Father and the Son gratefully receive Spirit's adoration, the Spirit and the Father receive the affirmation of the Son... and so on and so on... eternally!

The Church Fathers - the theologians writing from the 2nd Century onwards called this the perichoresis, which is a word about movement. We could translate it 'the divine dance'. It's the joyful dance of self-giving, other-preferring love continually offered and received between Father, Son and Spirit - like a great celestial circle dance. Are you still with me??!

God is not just one, God is also three. And one reason God is three is so that love can be practiced and received within God. The self-giving love that is the essence of God is revealed most clearly to us in the death of Christ. When Jesus embraces the cross in obedience to the Father, sustained by the Spirit, for the sake of all creation, we get to see the true self-giving heart of love that is the essence of who our Triune God is.

Julian of Norwich understood this. She said, "when I saw the cross I saw the Trinity!" For her the cross was the perfect window on the self-giving, other-preferring love that is the beating heart of Father, Son and Spirit eternally.

At the cross we see the fullness of love in our Triune God.



### 3. God is a vortex of love.

Thirdly, then, this divine dance of love spills out of God and into creation. "We experience a vortex of love that pulls us as well into its power". That God is one and also three reminds us that God is not a clique - God is radically hospitable. The Father, Son, and Spirit welcome others into their eternal dance of love, God's love is not just for Godself, it's also for you. God welcomes us into his heart of unconditional love.



Specifically this happens through Jesus. Jesus is a bit like the prodigal son who leaves the loving home of his Father and spends himself on a bunch of questionable friendships. And then and this bit is different from that parable - Jesus unites himself completely with those new, disreputable friends and returns to his Father with them tagging along behind him. Or, if you prefer, Jesus pledges himself forever to an imperfect bride and brings that bride back into his Father's house.

We've just celebrated Easter and the Ascension. When the body of Jesus is lying in that tomb everything has changed. Jesus has so utterly and finally united himself with creation that if the Father wants him back he's going to have to welcome all creation into his house with Jesus. That's the big question that arises after Good Friday - will the Father take Jesus back when he realises he has to welcome all of us dissolute ones with him?! Can Jesus return to the right hand of the Father if the Father knows that lots of us have said 'yes' to him and will be tagging along behind him? Will the Father still want Jesus to come home if he's bringing his dodgy fiancée with him?!

And the Father's answer is gloriously given in the resurrection and the ascension. It's a great big smacking, 'YES!' - 'Yes, I will take back my Son, and all of his new friends... his questionable choice of a bride!', 'They are all welcome, I have enough love for them all, let's feast together, for my children who were dead are now alive, the ones I had lost have been found, let's celebrate!' God's triune love does not remain within God, it spills out onto all of us, as Jesus draws us into the depths of loving communion with Father, Son, and Spirit.



***'YES!' - 'Yes, I will take back my Son, and all of his new friends... his questionable choice of a bride!', 'They are all welcome, I have enough love for them all!'***



#### 4. God is not an individual (and neither are you)

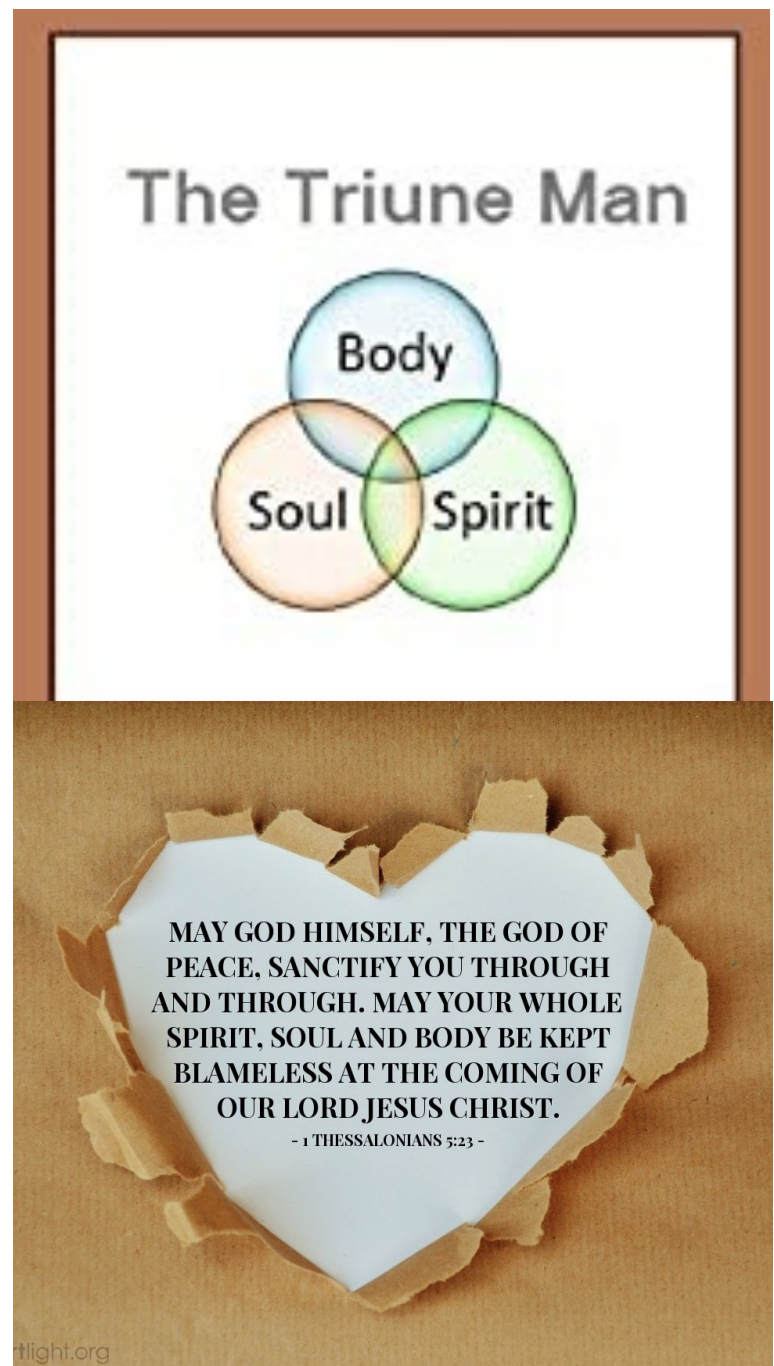
Here is some more great news about the fact that God is not an individual - that God is instead a community, God is relationship, God is intimacy., God is three persons (AND God is one!)

We are made in the image of God who is three persons in relationship with each other. We are made in the image of God who has his being in communion. Hmm, what does that mean for us who reflect the image of that God?! It means that you, too, have your being in community, in relationship. You are not an individual, you are a person, constituted by relationships. You are the child of David and Sheila, the neighbour of Bob, the colleague of Michelle, the parent of Dominic, and so on, you are somehow the result of those relationships - and your relationship as a child of God of course. You are made for relationship, for communion, for intimacy; for knowing and being known, for loving and being loved - without those things you would become sub-human, but when you're practicing all those things you are showing your true image, the image of God.

So, when we decide to go it alone, when we isolate ourselves from each other, we are turning from God's plan for us. We are refusing our true being, our true image when we go after independence and autonomy instead companionship and community.

We are denying the Trinity when we fight for our rights instead of carrying out the responsibilities we have to others. We are dehumanising ourselves when we believe the myth that we should be independent and not need anyone else or need to lean on anyone else or learn from anyone else.

The doctrine of the Trinity calls us to repent of individualism by telling us that God is relationship; and that it's in relationship - with God, ourselves, each other, and the world - that we experience and embody God's nature. And the doctrine of the Trinity secures our personhood. What do I mean by that? Some people think that when we die we will disappear into God, we will flee our bodies and we will merge into God, there will not really be any of 'us' left, we will get swallowed up in who God is. But the fact that God is eternally three persons shows that distinct personhood is preserved in God. It means that when you die and you are welcomed by Jesus and the Spirit into the Father's house you will still be you in some recognisable way that you will be aware of. It means that the character and personality you are building now will be preserved in the heart and life of God forever.



## 5. God has plurality at the very heart of his being.

Finally, then, then Trinity is the model of unity in diversity that we desperately need in our world today. The Trinity gives us this vision of living in perfect peace and love with others who are distinct and different from us - just as Father, Son and Spirit are different from each other yet live in perfect peace. It shows us that it is possible to have lasting relationship with those who are not the same as us. God is diverse.

God is not just Father, he is also Spirit, he is not just Spirit, he is also Son. God is faithful and good and he has different ways of being faithful and good. He can be faithful as a Father and he can also be faithful as a Son. So when we say that God is good but that God is also diverse it means that goodness isn't sameness. It means that perfection is not one-size-fits-all. It means that goodness needs contrast and tension, not uniformity. It means that if God uses contrast and tension in embody goodness, we too will need to embrace contrast and tension to be good. Which means you need to have some people who are not like you around you. You are going to need to embrace diversity and difference. And it means that there is no longer any need to fear difference... because there is difference in the heart of God!

Given the way the tyranny of racism has come to light again these last 10 days in the US - and in lots of other ways in the last few years - isn't there great challenge and hope in the truth that God has innate diversity? And so, we pray that God would help us to embrace diversity and tension and difference and find his beating heart of love in, behind, and between those things. We can rejoice in difference because we find it at the very heart of God.

So... taking those five ways that the Doctrine of the Trinity is good for us again, but this time bottom to top: we need not fear difference - because there is difference in the heart of God; and we find true life and being in community, in dependency, in relationship - because God is a relationship; and we are continually being drawn into the ever-loving community of God; and this God who draws us close is self-giving love; and we come to this God with humility, with hands open, because he is not our possession. Amen.

