

God the Father

Today, in the church calendar, is Trinity Sunday. Typically, this would be an occasion for me to lose myself in the arcane mysteries of how one add one add one is still one; probably committing one heresy or three in the process. Not that there's anything to be afraid of in getting it wrong – mistakes are our best teachers, as long as they are pointed out to us. Trinity is both simple, in the way that it can be defined, and incredibly hard to grasp when we actually stop and contemplate it. There's a video that's been doing the rounds on YouTube expressing this difficulty really well. In that cartoon, Saint Patrick is trying to explain the Trinity to Irish farmers, who keep on catching his metaphors as known heresies.

That difficulty is one I'm familiar with – when I was doing my PhD, I was trying to have a full grasp over *everything* that was happening in the classroom, and my aim was to have a nice, easy and consistent model to explain classroom interaction. I got absolutely nowhere until I accepted I should probably be a little less ambitious and started focusing on specific aspects of classroom interaction. Then I found something worth noting, worth writing home about. And finding those things in turn fed back into my understanding of the classroom as a whole.

And then I started teaching, and I realised it was still a bit more complicated.

The same thought process should be applied when looking at the Trinity. So I won't explain how it is possible that one add one add one is still one. I won't use the passages we heard and somehow link each to one person of the Trinity, although the texts could lend themselves to that approach. No, rather than trying to lead us to a fuller understanding of, or to describe comprehensively what the Trinity is, I will be more focused in my approach tonight.

See, the passages we heard tonight are all describing our link with God the Father. So tonight, I'll focus on the Father; and I swear this has nothing to do with the fact that today is Father's Day – although the coincidence is fitting. God the Father, so: who is He? Where do we fit in relation with Him? And how should we respond to Him?

So the first question, then: who is the Father? And already, we hit a snag. He's indescribable, as we sang at the start of the service. Greater than anything our words could describe, and beyond anything our minds can encompass on their own. But it's still worth trying, for it is better to know some truth than to know in its entirety a false reflection. And so, in order to try, we revert to one of three strategies to “deal” with God the Father: we picture him as a wizened old bearded man sitting on a cloud and peeking into our lives, with the occasional smiting. Or we think of Him as a vending machine who answers our prayers. I don't think that we do either of these things too often. The final strategy, however, is one we use far too often: we revert back to God the Son. I know I do that sometimes – if I'm not careful, starting a prayer with Father and then in the middle of the same prayer addressing Jesus.

The first thing I should say about this is: it's natural to do so – and we're in good company when we do: even the Nicene Creed says very little about the Father, and focuses quickly on the Son. Like I said, we need strategies to get our minds to deal with an indescribable God. And the Son appears easier to deal with than the Father, because he is human, like us, and therefore easier to relate to; but also because there are a whopping four books wholly dedicated to the Son in the Bible, so that we might think we know more about the Son than about the Father. But where there are some books describing the Son, the whole of Creation is ringing with the Name of the Father. That's what Isaiah is telling us in the passage we have heard: we cannot fathom the Spirit of the Lord, we cannot understand God on our own because if we wanted to do so, we should take in the whole of Creation, and then some. We

should measure the waters in the hollow of our hand, or weigh the mountains on scales.

The whole point of this chapter in Isaiah, chapter 40, is to deal with this struggle to get to know God the Father, and it reaches two important points in this regard: firstly, that it is not for us to comprehend God fully, because if we did, we would set ourselves up as His equals. In the bit that we did not read, Isaiah expands: we would be able to fashion our own idols to represent Him, but these would not do Him justice, no matter how well picked the materials used. And that is the second point: there is one way to try to get a tiny glimpse of God, a way to stand in awe of Him. That is to think of Creation – of all its riches, from the cedars of Lebanon, all the nations, everything, and to take in that all of that, before him, is nothing.

God the Father is Creator; and that is not simply important historically, nor is it just a case of saying that our lives and our belongings do not actually belong to us but to Him – although this is also true! - no, it is most importantly here our way to know God and to stand in awe of Him, who created all that we know.

So how do we stand before God? We hear the nations are nothing before him; and therefore so are we. Absolutely nothing. Nothing, before the Almighty God of creation. And yet, Isaiah does not stop there. In the second part of what we read today, there is a glorious affirmation: that He whose understanding no one can fathom – gives strength to the weary. Increases the power of the weak. Allows us all, who hope in the Lord, to “soar on wings like eagles”.

A first question to arise from such an amazing promise – especially when we've just been told that we were nothing before the Creator – is why us? How do we deserve this? Remember, at the start of the Gospel passage, it reads: “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him but some doubted.” But some doubted. They hesitated –

not that they didn't think Jesus was God, that much is made clear by their worship. But they probably didn't feel like they were fitting in such glorious company.

The same goes for us – we ask “why us” - and I know that I personally am quick to shove it under the carpet, because I don't like to ponder on my own insignificance before God. But the answer to that question is simple, it's just that pondering on my own insignificance is looking in all the wrong places. It's not what I did, it's who God – God the Father – is. So far, through Isaiah, we were led to glimpse at the glory of God the Creator. But the truth is, the Father is more than just the Creator or the Ruler. He is the Father, and, through Christ, we are adopted into daughtership and sonship with Him. Being the Father, He is caring and supportive, and *because he is also the Creator*, His promise of support is solid, trustworthy, and he truly makes *us* soar like eagles.

And if there is one thing to take away from these 15 minutes, it is this: that this glorious affirmation of sonship is not dependent on us, or on our actions. It is freely given and truly liberating.

If, through the Holy Spirit and thanks to Christ, we can call God the Father *our* Father, then at those points when we do take this in, we share in Christ's authority. Like the Eleven, knowing this authority means there is no hesitation any longer in what we can do. For when Christ says “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him”, an implication is that, as co-heirs in Him, the same authority has been given us.

Which brings us to the final point: what should our response be? Before I try to answer this, let me stress again that our adoption in Christ is not dependent on this response. We are not earning our sonship and daughtership. But just as God is our Father, and loves us and cares for us and supports us in more ways than we can imagine; so are we His sons and daughters, and therefore we are called to act as sons and daughters. The crux in the Great Commission, to go and teach and baptise all the

nations, is in the Therefore. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ, and, through Him, to us as co-heirs. Therefore, we should follow His call, in the obedience of children, yes, and in the full trust that we can do so (as Christ reminds us in the very last verse). And in this command, to go and teach all the nations and baptise them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we are reminded of the nature of God the Father: creator of all the Earth, before whom the nations are nothing, yet who cares for them.

Doing God's work, in caring for His Creation, and in teaching all the nations – this is the proper response to our adoption as sons. Not just out of a sense of duty to do whatever we are asked, even the unsurmountable; but because as sons of the Most High, we *can* do so. So, as you go out later, in peace, to love and serve the Lord, in your workplace, in your own family, and with your friends, sharing the Gospel through words or through love, remember this one thing, which the bishop said to all those who were confirmed last week. God has called us by name. We are His sons and daughters, and filled with His authority and power.