

Many of you know that I enjoy playing golf. Some golfers spend a lot of time thinking about their shot before they hit the ball. They think about how far the green is, which way the wind is blowing, which club they should use, how high their tee is, which leg is carrying the most weight and so on. Me, I skip most of that, put the ball down and hit it in the general direction of the hole. After all it's a game. And sure I'd like to get a hole in one and I'm delighted when my score improves, but mainly I'm just happy to be outside in a beautiful place with an excuse to do nothing useful.

I suggest that we might think about the Trinity in much the same way. We can spend a lot of time thinking about it and analyzing it, but what's much more important and fun is how we play with God.

Today's readings show us different aspects of the three persons of the Trinity; Jesus the Christ, Son of God, Jesus' Father the Creator God and the Holy Spirit. There is no single passage in the Bible which explains the Trinity, it is an understanding of God developed by the early church. For the first couple of hundred years theologians didn't distinguish with any precision between the three persons of the Godhead but by the fourth century the nature of God was a very big deal.

You are familiar with the Nicene Creed which came out of those debates and arguments, but most of us are not so aware of the Creed of Saint Athanasius. You can find it on page 864 of the Prayer Book. Athanasius was a strong Trinitarian but he probably had nothing to do with this creed which dates from the 5th or 6th centuries and in some places uses the exact same words as St Augustine's book on the Trinity. What is so interesting is that this creed doesn't even mention Jesus' crucifixion; five lines from the bottom it says that he "suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead." Jesus could have died from cancer it seems – it's whole focus is on the relationship

between the members of the Godhead, and yet the whole focus of the Gospels is on Jesus' life and teaching on this earth.

Jesus certainly talked about the God who was his Abba – his father, and in today's Gospel makes it clear that the Spirit is somehow separate from either of them. But he just takes it for granted – it's just part of the reality of the reign of God.

The nature of God *does* matter to us today because what you believe about God is reflected in how you live your life. If you believe that God is watching you so see how often you sin or to correct your failings, then you will live fearfully and in constant dread. If on the other hand you believe that God really does love the whole of Creation including you unconditionally, then it gives you the courage to live a life of compassion, forgiveness and hope. How you think about God affects how you play with God.

I think there are two things about the Trinity which are particularly important. First that God is complex and secondly that God is in constant loving community.

First, God is complex. We shouldn't be surprised that God is complex, because God's creation is complex. I was just reading yesterday about quarks and how there are up quarks and down quarks, bottom quarks, top quarks and charm quarks, not to mention strange quarks. If you have ever tried to differentiate between all the brown birds at the beach, the curlews and whimbrels and godwits and sandpipers then you know that God delights in diversity. Diversity in quarks, diversity in birds, diversity in people. But the great thing about God's complexity is that you and I may experience him or her quite differently and both be right. Just like light can be a particle or a wave so God can be Creator, Word

or Spirit –it all depends on how we look at the Godhead. So we don't need to get hung up on our own ideas of God.

The Sufis talk of the face of God that we know. Each one of us has a different relationship with the divine, and each one of us as that relationship comes to deepen and strengthen gets to know God in just a slightly different way. So I don't need to persuade you that God is just like I see her and you don't need to persuade me that God is something different. And God can be God to people with very different spiritual paths just as easily as she can be God for you and me.

In Jesus we have the manifestation of God in a way that we can see and understand. In Jesus we see what God is like as a human, and as such we know that God is loving, forgiving, compassionate, courageous and willing to suffer in order to transform and redeem the whole of Creation. Jesus shows us the nature of God, and the Holy Spirit empowers us increasingly to live as the Christ-like humans we were made to be, secure in the knowledge of God's love.

The second aspect of the Trinity which I think is especially important is that God is in community. Each person in the Godhead is in constant loving, flowing joyful submission to one another. This gives us a model for living which is very different from the one that we see in our society where each person is in competition for scarce resources, each person needs to make sure that they are ok and that they have as much power and as many toys as they can get their hands on. It makes for a cut-throat world based in dominance and violence.

But if we are made in God's image and we have been reconciled to God in Christ, we too get to dance in a gentle, loving community with one another. We get to learn and practice different ways of being – ways which are in sync with the rhythm of the Trinity. And we are invited to

be caught up in the dance which is the work of the love of God as he redeems Creation.

God is alongside us in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit; God accompanies us through our lives and constantly challenges us to be more than we think we can be because we are co-creators with God of this reality. During our conversation this week on the “Heart of Christianity” we were talking about Jesus falling asleep when the storm came up on the Sea of Galilee and threatened to swamp the boat. One of our group said that she wouldn’t have woken Jesus she would just have been bailing the water out. I suspect that the Triune God would be right there, bailing with her. Just as in the moments of joy, God is there rejoicing along with us.

God is here among us; as Paul said “In him we live and move and have our being.” And God is always, every moment, calling us into deep intimate relationship with the Godhead. And God is always, in every moment, right there beside us.

Let us Pray.

God for us, we call you Father and Mother
God alongside us, we call you Jesus the Christ
God within us, we call you Holy Spirit.
You are the eternal mystery that enables, enfolds and enlivens all things,
Even us and even me.
Every name falls short of your goodness and greatness.
We can only see who you are in what is.
We ask for such perfect seeing –
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.

Amen.

(Richard Rohr)