

The Kiss of God

Today is Trinity Sunday, the only day in the church's annual cycle of Sunday celebrations and Bible readings when we remember a theological concept rather than an event, a person, or one of Jesus' teachings.

Arguably of course we are remembering a person because God is a person – a rather complex three-in-one person. But you only have to look at the scripture readings to realize that there is no Bible passage that explains the Trinity or even describes the Trinity. Jesus did not directly teach about the Trinity and neither did any of the Old or New Testament writers. Even Paul did not go there.

But Jesus talked about his Father; he talked about himself as the Son of Man and accepted the title of Messiah – the Anointed one, the Christ, the son of God; and he promised to send us the Spirit. So that's three Gods, isn't it? Jesus also said that he and his Father were one at least according to John's gospel which is the latest of the gospels and the most metaphysical.

And the church started as a group within Judaism which was very clear that there was only one God. So they had to resolve the issue of Father, Son and Holy Spirit co-existing in some way, three-in-one and one-in-three.

You may remember that within the first three centuries the church had established itself with centers in some of the major cities and lots of smaller house churches throughout what we call the Middle East and the Mediterranean and into North Africa and Europe in the West. There was no central organization and no creed or agreed belief system. When Emperor Constantine wanted to use Christianity as a way to unify his empire, he also had to try to unify Christianity because without printed material and without a centralized structure, different theologies –

different understandings of God and the church – grew up in different places.

One of the biggest issues was the triune God and the relationship between the persons of the Trinity. I know this seems pretty arcane, but bear with me for a minute more.

Towards the end of the 3rd century, a priest and theologian from Alexandria in Egypt, whose name was Arius, was teaching that the son of God, being begotten of the Father was therefore a creature of the Creator, did not always exist and was actually of a very different nature. In contrast, Athanasius, the patriarch of Alexandria taught that the Father and the Son were of the same nature and co-existent. This became an acrimonious debate, not dissimilar to some of the issues, like abortion or the full inclusion of LGBTQ+, which divide the church today.

The idea that the Father and the Son are co-existent and of the same nature won the day and the Nicene Creed was created to make the point clear. Yet as the church continued to develop many people still agreed with Arius and so some branches of the church, especially in the East, remained Arian. We, my friends, are the spiritual descendants of those who won the argument – the Trinity of three equal persons is written in our DNA. It is part of our spiritual identity and our heritage. And is why we are expected to say the Nicene Creed every Sunday.

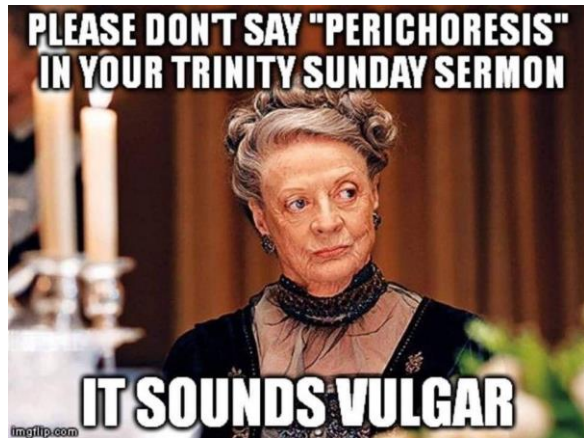
Last Sunday we celebrated Pentecost – often called the birthday of the church, and today we celebrate Trinity Sunday, a reminder that we are the church who understands God as three equal persons. For almost two thousand years we have baptized and we have blessed in the Name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I have been using the term Father for the Creator because that is how Jesus talked about God and that is the traditional language. But for many of us today it is difficult to use language which is patriarchal and for some it is also difficult to step over our negative associations with our

fathers. And so we often use Creator though that runs the risk of reducing the Father to one action, however astonishing and on-going. Surely the Father is more than just the action of creating. I have been playing with using Author instead.

It is easier to just use God or Spirit and not to worry about any of these things, but I think we sell ourselves short when we don't live into our Trinitarian heritage. There is tremendous richness in the knowledge of a God who lives in community.

There is a word for this (*perichoresis*) that I have been instructed not to use. It means to go round or to encompass and carries the sense of two sides of the same coin. The Trinity is a community in constant relationship with each other.



This is how Bernard of Clauvaux described the role of the Holy Spirit in this community:

“If, as is properly understood, the Father is he who kisses, the Son he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity. “

Wow – the Holy Spirit is the kiss of God. Let me read that again:

“If, as is properly understood, the Father is he who kisses, the Son he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity. “

Last week we celebrated the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church – to our ancestors, and to us. And now we find that gift being described as a kiss.

Isn't that a wonderful idea? You and I are filled with the kiss of God.

The Trinity is a community or communion of three persons with complete free-will who are united in love, who are constantly going round and encompassing and the energy between them is of love and respect and adoration and eros – all the things that make up the very best adult kiss you can imagine. And we are invited to be part of that!

We are invited to participate in that communion – to be filled with the Holy Spirit – “the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity.”

I think that this maybe the energy that is at the heart of all matter, and the consciousness which moves all sentient beings. Is it not possible that it is the dance of the Trinity that is expressed in the constant movement of the quarks? Is it not possible that it is the consciousness of the Trinity that animates our lives?

So Trinitarian people of God... let us live in the fullness of the kiss of the Godhead. Let us allow the passionate, deep, warm, stirring erotic Spirit to fill every part of ourselves as we rejoice in the creative benevolent provision of the Author-Creator, and as we follow the teachings and example of Christ the victim and redeemer.

My prayer is that we may truly live into our heritage, experiencing the Holy Spirit who is “the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, [and] their indivisible unity” in every aspect of our lives, and allowing God's Spirit to flow through us and around us into the hearts and lives of all those whom we love, and even the hearts of those whom we don't.

