

Sermon for Trinity 3

As most of you, who have heard me preach before will testify, I sometimes like to begin my sermons with a confession. And this morning's confession goes like this. As I stand before you now, I am still not entirely sure as to what I am saying. The reason for this, aside from my obvious faults, is that today is Trinity Sunday. The day in the Church calendar, where, as we move from Pentecost into what we call Ordinary Time, the season in the Church which will lead us to Advent, we pause to reflect on God's Triune life. The core aspects of the God we believe in as Christians. One God, but who is three distinct persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And so, upon this feast of the holy and undivided Trinity, it occurred to me that I would actually have to talk about it. However, as I sat to write my sermon early last week, I was suddenly reminded of how complex this doctrine is. As most of you know, the doctrine of the Trinity has well and truly flummoxed (I love that word), *flummoxed* Christians, throughout the entire history of the Church. It is, to say the least, one of the most daunting things a preacher can ever tackle. One God, who, as many theologians have put it, is three distinct persons, yet mutually indwelling, co-

interdependent, interpenetrating (crikey), distinct yet present within each other throughout all of eternity. Ok.

Of course, I had a whole week to write so I did not worry too much at the start. Since I had preached on this subject before, I looked at my previous sermons. However, when I looked at my past Trinity Sunday sermons I realised they were crap. So I consulted one or two books in my possession on the topic, and that... made it worse.... I hunted around on the internet trying to find something I could steal, and other people's sermons weren't very good either. I felt stuck. But there was still time. However, after a few days of writing notes and trying to think of fun stories to share, as usual, I still could not think of how to begin my sermon, let alone explain the subject. Yes, I had The Bible in front of me, and our reading this morning from John's Gospel. But, being a good Westcott House student from Cambridge, The Bible was the last place I would think to look... and so I was well and truly muddled.

Until, Friday afternoon... On Friday afternoon last week, I found myself in Wembley, visiting a long-standing member of our congregation, to take Communion to her at home. Misjudging my journey time, a common feature of my life with TFL, I arrived at

this person's home, about twenty minutes early. Not wanting to bother them too soon, upon reaching their street, I saw a park which I had not noticed before. It had been something of a mad day, so I afforded myself the luxury of taking fifteen minutes to walk round the green and let my thoughts wander.

It was a huge green space; with a play area for children, a tennis court, and a huge swathe of grass, which had been recently cut. I sat down on a nearby bench, in the sunshine for a few moments. Suddenly, a gentle breeze blew the smell of the freshly cut grass into my face. The smell, the sensation of that experience, the grass, the sunshine and the breeze, swept over me. And for a few moments, on that park bench in the London Borough of Brent, I was no longer simply in Wembley, but was immediately taken back to what I think was the first time I ever noticed the smell of freshly cut grass. I think I was about five years old, and I was walking across a similar green with my mum, around the primary school I attended as a child. It was a warm Summer's day, school had ended, and we were walking home across the green next to my school. And the smell of the grass, the sunshine, the breeze and the sudden sense that everything was okay in the world, entered my consciousness, and made me feel at home.

What's more, this memory then triggered another memory. I remembered my school. I remembered the village I lived in at the time, the house I used to live in. I remembered the next town along the coast, and I suddenly remembered things like the library in the town, the place we used to get ice cream, the street we used to walk the dogs... it went on...

And as I snapped out of it, I realised that in one, swift moment, I was no longer just sitting in Wembley, on *this* afternoon, in *this* place. I had simultaneously been transported to, or maybe not just transported, rather I felt as though I was simultaneously dwelling in, with and through every experience, every sensation, every memory, every moment of peace and belonging I had experienced as a child. I could even sense things I couldn't actually remember; where there wasn't a crystallised memory, but a feeling about something that had happened before, which was somehow happening right now in my mind.

Now, before you think I've lost the plot completely... I probably didn't have it in the first place, come to think of it... I suddenly realised that maybe this was how I might explain, or simply live in the Trinity.

Nicodemus visits Jesus at night, and he asks Jesus how he can know what God is like. Jesus' response is interesting. He doesn't explain who or what God is, or who *He* is. He simply says, "You must be born from above." And when Nicodemus says to Jesus, "But this doesn't make sense, it's not logical, how can you be born again?" Jesus says, "Do not be astonished. The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

I think I often make the mistake Nicodemus made at first. It's so easy in our life to try and objectify and explain everything. So much of our culture is about analysing and finding simple labels and explanations for things. We constantly feel as though we need to be in control, to understand everything before we make a commitment, like signing a contract or an agreement, wanting to know what we're getting ourselves into before we jump. But God's not like that. God is not an explanation. God is not an answer, as such. God is life. God is love. God is experience; experiencing, living, breathing, being. If we want to know what God is like, *Jesus says*, just live. Stop analysing everything, and just live as though you and everyone and everything around you is a gift. That is how we are re-born in the

Spirit, from which point we learn to live and love in the way God's whole life exists.

Like Nicodemus, if we want to know God, we can't begin by knowing the answer already, we begin by sitting down, on a bench, in a pew, and letting ourselves live and breathe. We stop, and we allow ourselves to think, to feel, to believe. And then you remember. You feel something. Suddenly, you are not just you on your own, you realise you are a whole life; with a past, a present, and a future. You are a whole life of relationships, complexities and intricacies, trying to weave it all together into one and make sense of it. And instead of running away or ignoring it, or trying to simplify it, you engage with it, you embrace the complexity. And you feel more inspired the deeper you go, because suddenly you realise that the complexity is fascinating, and what makes it so fascinating is because it's beautiful, and it's beautiful because this is the image of what God is like. One God, one divine life, but rich in complexity; manifested and transcendent, incarnate, human and divine, flesh and spirit; past, present and future; diverse yet united as one; and indeed touching and transforming all of our complex tapestry into His story of redemption.

And we could throw the papers up in the air. We could

give up trying to understand it. But we won't. We carry on, embracing the contradictions and complexities, and giving thanks every day that we are interesting, and that God is interesting, and that we believe in a God who is so deep, so incredible, so beyond and yet within our grasp, that even though He is so awesome and huge we can still sense Him everyday in the very fabric of our world. And it is because God is so complex that we no longer need to be afraid of going deeper within ourselves and with one another, because He went there first, and He invites us to engage, to be in relationship, with each other, and with Him; and through this He transforms our complex, messy universe into an amazing, beautiful, divine dance.

I don't know if what I've said has helped, but maybe we can begin like Nicodemus. To begin where we are right now, and let the Spirit where we are now re-born, and the Father and the Son together, show us how to live in love, deeply, and madly, but truly, forever.