

### Being an icon of the Holy Trinity

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If you would like to take your exercise books out and open your textbooks to page 101 Explaining the Trinity, then we'll begin. That is often what Trinity Sunday feels like, the only Sunday in the Church year where we try to boil down a complex theological doctrine to a 10-minute sermon. Somehow in amongst kettles being boiled, plugs re-wired, clover leaves being crushed and mathematical gymnastics I think something will be lost, as preachers talk the tightrope between orthodoxy and heresy. If you hope to leave here this morning finally understanding the Trinity, then you will be disappointed. St Gregory of Nyssa writing in one of his treatises claims theology is about “using riddles.”<sup>1</sup>

The Eastern Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware has written, “each social unit - the family, the school, the workshop, the parish, the Church universal is made to be an icon of the Trinity.”<sup>2</sup> How much more are we, dedicated as we are to the Holy Trinity. So, this morning I want to riddle this, if we are dedicated to the Holy Trinity what kind of an icon should we as a parish church be?

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Ware, Kallistos, *The Orthodox Way*, p.31

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.39

### Being an icon of the Holy Trinity

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Proverbs gives us our first idea. When we talk about wisdom, when we think of wise people, quite often there is a seriousness, some might say, a dullness attached. But here is Lady Wisdom, crashing onto the stage, promiscuously offering her wisdom to all and sundry, singing “to the tune that makes the universe dance.”<sup>3</sup> In verses 30-31 we have the translation as ‘rejoicing’ and ‘delighting’ but it is more accurately translated as playing; Wisdom plays at the creation of the world, Wisdom plays with humanity, delighting in the goodness of all God’s creation. Wisdom shares God’s joy in creation, and shares with us “the knowledge of how to live with joy as a child of God in the world that [God] has made.”<sup>4</sup>

This personification of Wisdom is often related to the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ the Son of God. The word that John uses for Jesus is *logos*, which can mean word and wisdom. This image from Proverbs reminds us that Jesus was present at creation, as was the Spirit. And it gives us a slightly different picture than Genesis: creation wasn’t sombre, nor a checklist of tasks achieved on assigned days; the Wisdom literature presents a much-

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<sup>3</sup> Williams, Jane, *Lectionary Reflections – Year C*, p.76

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.77

### Being an icon of the Holy Trinity

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needed corrective to Western Theology's obsession with the Fall. Creation was an explosion of joy, an overflowing of the love and joy that the persons of the Trinity had for each other, the inter-penetration of each person in the other. Ready for a big word? their perichoresis – that's not just me showing off, it's an important concept. Although we believe that there are three persons in the Trinity, their inter-relationship, their inter-penetration, their perichoresis means that they are completely intertwined with each other. And it is out of this relationship that creation keeps happening. It didn't just happen however many years ago, it is still happening. "The triune God is a joyous, dancing God who pours out overflowing gifts to humanity with gladness."<sup>5</sup>

So, if that is who we are dedicated to then my friends it is time to joy! The Persian poet Hafiz, writes, "I often forget that I was created for joy." As Christians we often forget that we have been created out of and for joy. But it is time to rediscover it, time to learn what it means to play, time to take ourselves less seriously and God's call to joy utterly seriously. Paul reminded us in the reading from Romans that God has poured love into us, poured, not

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<sup>5</sup> Pascal, Jeff, *Feasting on the Word: Year C, volume 3 – Pentecost and season after*, p.31

### **Being an icon of the Holy Trinity**

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dripped unwillingly, poured! I am told that Christopher Smith would say, “Berwick is a party waiting to happen,” then let’s honour him and his ministry and get the party started!

In nearly every Eucharistic prayer the president will inevitably pray, “it is our duty and our joy.” We need both, and we are good at duty here, I’ve learned that in a very short time. Friends, fellow party animals, let us also be good at joy! Let us be known as the joyful church, the church that accepts everyone as they are and makes a space at the feast for them. Yes, there is hard work to do; yes, the world is dark and dangerous and dirty with injustice and fear; yes, there might be more reasons for us to cry than to laugh. But we can only shine a light in our joy, the joy of the Triune God who delights in each other and in all that they have created.

That image of the Triune God delighting in each other brings me to my second hope of how we can be an icon of the Trinity, community. Back to this big word again, perichoresis, that intimate inter-dependency on each other and for each other. The Trinity is an entirely unselfish community. In John’s Gospel our reading this morning follows Jesus’ warnings about suffering and promise of

### **Being an icon of the Holy Trinity**

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joy. Both are essential if we are to be a community bound together by the Spirit. Throughout the Farewell Discourse Jesus has been teaching about the giving and receiving of each member of the Trinity, how the Father takes of the Son's offering, how the Son receives from the Father, how the Spirit takes and receives from the Father and the Son to give to us. The Trinity is an unselfish circle of love, that brings glory to each other.

Friends, we are called to be a community, called to be inter-dependent on each other, called to make space for each other to flourish. In the great dance of being in community together, bound in the Trinity, we are called to be unselfish and to give glory to God. In all areas of our life together, not just in our worship, in the way that we make decisions, in the way that we celebrate, in the way that we discern, in the way that we disagree. And we do so with and for each other and for all who live in this parish and beyond. Bishop Kallistos Ware has written:

“Because we know that God is three in one, each of us is committed to living sacrificially in and for the other; each is committed irrevocably to a life of practical service, of active compassion. Our faith in the Trinity puts us under an obligation to struggle at every level, from the strictly personal to the highly

### Being an icon of the Holy Trinity

---

organized, against all forms of oppression, injustice and exploitation. In our combat for social righteousness and ‘human rights’, we are acting specifically in the name of the Holy Trinity.”<sup>6</sup>

If we are to be like the Holy Trinity then we are called to be a joyful community, dancing to the tune of the love of the Trinity poured into us, and out of us to the community and world around us. And then we need to learn one final thing – to shut up!

Shaddap You Face as Joe Dolce sang back in 1980. The Trinity is ultimately a mystery. The Incarnation is a mystery. Sacraments are mysteries. Sometimes we should just shut up and inhabit the mystery. Icons are powerful precisely because they point beyond themselves. The Trinity goes beyond our human ability to reason; it challenges us to accept our limitations and hand some control over to God. During communion we’re going to sing my favourite hymn, ‘Let all mortal flesh keep silence’. Shut up! Too often we rush for words, or arguments, or apologetics when we should stay quiet. Too often we

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<sup>6</sup> Ware, Kaillistos, *The Orthodox Way*, p.39

### **Being an icon of the Holy Trinity**

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rush to make our point made, our voice heard, our position clear when it might glorify God more to stay silent.

In the SIAMS report for Holy Trinity school, pupils and parents said that they felt a sense of awe when they came to services here. If we are to be a parish that is an icon of the Trinity then awe, and mystery has to be part of that.

Learning to balance silence with words, contemplation with intercession, awe with joy. We do that in MP and EP so if you want to start somewhere come along. We can do that by talking to God before the service and to our friends afterwards! Sometimes being a community means sitting in silence with someone, humming in the darkness together.

My friends if we are to be an icon of the Holy Trinity here in Berwick and beyond then we must be shaped and formed in the likeness of the Trinity. Overflowing with joy and love, a community for and with each other that is constantly reaching out to draw others in, and one in which we can keep silent to inhabit mystery when we need to, and all for the glory of God. As an icon of Trinity to whom we are dedicated, let's get this party started.