

Sunday Scribbling's No.10 – Trinity Sunday

Lectionary readings¹ for today are;

Psalm 8. Isaiah 40:12-17; 27-31. Matthew 28:16-20. 2 Corinthians 13: 11-14.

Today is Trinity Sunday. Rather than get bogged down in complex renderings concerning the make up and operation of The Trinity, which might call for a shot of something stronger than a cup of coffee, I thought we would take a walk through the lectionary readings in historical order and thereby attempt to get a flavour of the magnificence of the Trinity of 'God the Father', 'God the Son' and 'God the Holy Ghost' on this special Sunday.

But first, time for a bit of fun. Fill up your coffee mug and take a 3m 49s break to watch this short video on 'St. Patrick and the Trinity'. It also explains why there are no longer any snakes in Ireland!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQLfgaUoQCw&fbclid=IwAR2BB7DvtXrR17Y7yTvKNiZIUFJtKtCtqSEhWk26E2Hh-FvXka1oypdxHF>

(N.B. If the link does not work 'off the page' {it did when I tried it} copy and paste it into your browser).

***** Psalm 8 *****

"Psalm 8 is the first hymn of praise in the Psalter. It interrupts the sequence of prayers for salvation to say something very important about the God to whom the prayers are made: The LORD is the cosmic sovereign whose majesty is visible in the whole world. The psalm also discloses why the salvation of those who pray is so important for the reign of God: As human beings, they have an office in God's kingdom. Psalm 8 is clearly a hymn of praise, but it is unlike any other in structure and style. It is the only hymn in the Old Testament composed completely as direct address to God²."

Did you notice Professor James Luther Mays' words; "As human beings, they have an office in God's kingdom." Yes, you read that right ... '**you** are important to God'.

Verse 5; "**You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.**"

Putting that into context, we should not forget that: "The next phase of the drama, of which Jesus is the forerunner, will position humanity, who are the recipients of salvation, with the flesh-and-blood Jesus in a status that is superior to angels³."

Now you might think that the words of the KJV are far more beautiful than most modern translations, and in terms of this Psalm as a sung hymn I'd certainly agree with you, (Hint: Why not check out the KJV version?), which might help to explain why this Psalm is still used in Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and Anglican liturgies. It is also said to have been the inspiration for hymns such as "For the beauty of the earth" and "How Great Thou Art".

The psalmist's words are beautiful and start with a form of words that praises God whilst recognizing who He is in relation to the world and humanity; "**¹O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!**"

After acknowledging God's greatness the psalmist writes these extraordinary words; "**⁴what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? ⁵You have made**

them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.”

Clearly, the psalmist seems to understand the importance of man to God. But does this mean that the psalmist also understands why God has put man on the earth? Or in other words, ‘What is our real purpose here on earth?’ And is it fair to assume that as we are listed as **“a little lower than the angels”**, that we do indeed have a Godly purpose?

Now I don’t want to put words in the psalmists mouth but is it just possible that here we can see God laying down his plans for the future of mankind?

The ending doxology is a repeat of the opening verse and the psalm finishes after nine short versus.

To help us in our understanding of this psalm, there is an important question that we must ask ourselves. “Is Psalm 8 a Messianic Psalm? If so, how do we read Psalm 8 as Christian Scripture with relevance to the New Testament?³”

Andrew Abernethy, Associate Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, Illinois, provides us with an excellent, albeit long and detailed, explanation that can be found in the bibliography link below³. It is well worth a read as it brings home the problem and complexity we face in trying to use the OT in our modern day thinking and interpretations of the NT.

Now apply that train of thought to the concept of The Trinity and it becomes very obvious that trying to apply ‘modern day thinking’ to ancient texts and understanding is fraught with danger.

Be that as it may, the incredible way the texts have survived, mesh together and have provided real meaning for all God’s people throughout the passage of time whilst still remaining exceptionally relevant to both our way of life and our life style has to make me ask – “How can these **not** be inspired by and linked to God?”

***** Isaiah 40:12-17, 27-31 *****

Several hundred years after Psalm 8 is thought to have been written, Isaiah picks up the biblical baton around 740BC.

Isaiah is a difficult book to get to grips with; partly because of different authors and partly because of the long period of time over which it was written. “Scholars generally divide Isaiah into three distinct sections based on the changes in the timeline, assuming that there were at least three authors. Presumably, Isaiah (“proto-Isaiah”) wrote chapters 1–39; an anonymous author living during the exile (“deutero-Isaiah”) wrote 40–55; and another anonymous author living after the exile (“trito-Isaiah”) wrote 56–66. These authors are also referred to as First Isaiah, Second Isaiah, and Third Isaiah.⁴”

“Based on the above, the Israelites might have had the following questions uppermost in their minds (when reading Chapter 40); “(1) Does Yahweh *want* to deliver us (vv. 1–11)? (2) *Can* Yahweh deliver us (vv. 12–26)? (3) *Will* Yahweh deliver us (vv. 27–31)?”

By answering all of these questions affirmatively, Isaiah successfully establishes the foundation of divine grace for Chapters 41–55⁵”.

From the words of verse 12 of our reading there can be little doubt that the Israelites were once again focused on the might, majesty and magnificence of God: **“¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?”**

Maybe their time in captivity, after the destruction of the temple in 587BC, was having its desired affect and helping the Israelites to re-focus their minds on God. V14 continues the re-education; **“Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge, or showed him the path of understanding?”** Certainly none of the man made icons that might have led the Israelites astray.

The reading continues with descriptions that show us just how small we are in God’s grand scheme of things. The nations are likened to **“a drop in a bucket”** or mere **“dust on the scales”** – both analogies that the Israelites would be familiar with in their desert environment and which they would understand.

The grandeur of God and the smallness of both the earth and humanity are then confirmed in verses 16 & 17 where Lebanon with its great forests and huge numbers of wild animals are reduced to a sacrificial comparison that would be insufficient to satisfy God; **“Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. ¹⁷ Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.”**

Now, the vast majority of great Cypress trees of Lebanon have gone. Most of the wild animals have gone. Desert and dynamite have damaged much of the fertile, God given beauty referred to by Isaiah, as war after war fails to resolve the people’s differences.

Our reading finishes with an exposition of the wonders of God and ends thus; **“³¹ but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”**

Which brings us back to v4 of our Psalm: **“⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?**

***** **Matthew 28:16-20** *****

At this point in the lectionary cycle you might be asking yourself ‘Why is Matthew still referring to a time before the Ascension?’ Good question.

- Maybe because these are the last few verses in the Gospel of Matthew, and as they carry the title of “The Great Commission” they have some special significance for us on Trinity Sunday.
- Maybe it’s because they contain some important words and guidance from Jesus.
- Maybe it’s because He is reaffirming the significance of the baptising of the nations.
- Maybe it’s because he is confirming the authenticity and authority that He commands.
- And who are **“¹⁹ all the nations”**?

I’ll leave you to ponder these questions. As you do, bear these two points in mind:

(1) By baptising the nations “¹⁹**in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**”, the disciples are also blessing them in the name of Jesus, and that brings added meaning and purpose especially as Jesus has just told us that “¹⁸**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**”

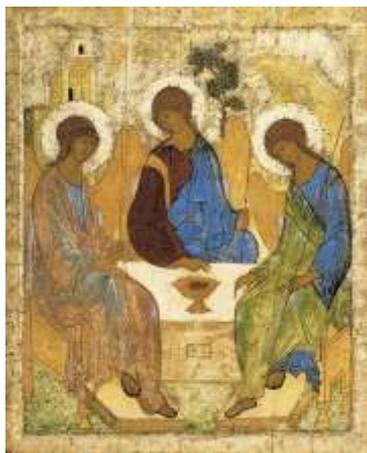
(2) Do not make the mistake in thinking that Jesus is introducing us to the concept of ‘The Trinity’ as we know it today. He is not. This ‘concept’ was initially publicised by Tertullian early in the 3rd Century; then further advanced by the Council of Nicaea in 325AD before being refined and formulated as a doctrine of the church in the 4th Century by the Cappadocian Fathers - St Basil of Caesarea, St. Gregory of Nysa and St. Gregory of Nazianzus.

To aid your deliberations I thought that it might be interesting to read the 1536 Tyndale rendering of our Gospel reading. (Good luck).

“Fynallye brethren fare ye well/be perfecte/be of good comforte/be of one mynde/lyve in peace/and the God of love shall be with you. Grete one another in an holy kysse. All the saynctes salute you. The grace of oure Lorde Jesus Christ/and the love of God/and the felishyppe of the goly goost by with you all: Amen”⁶.

***** 2 Corinthians 13: 11-14 *****

Do you remember this familiar picture – The Rublev Icon?



I don't intend to wax lyrical about the icon. I just want you to think about the concept of ‘The Trinity’ and for you to know that your concept, whatever that might be, is as relevant as anyone else's.

The theologians and philosophers may know a lot of ‘stuff’, and they may be able to think widely and deeply about esoteric subjects. But take heart ... they don't know anymore than you do when it comes to the experience of faith, hope and salvation as experienced by you - a child of God.

And that's what makes Paul's letters remarkable.

Not only is he a newly minted convert to a new religion who seems to clearly ‘see and understand’ what the entire missional message from Jesus is, but he is able and willing to articulate both his understanding and his newly formed belief with authority.

In just thirty-one words in v11 of today's reading, Paul encapsulates the length and breadth, height and depth of what a Christian life should entail.

Brothers. Sisters. Rejoice. Restoration. Encouragement. Be of one mind. Peace. Love. God be with us.... Sounds simple enough don't you think?

If only ...

He continues by instructing the Corinthians to; ¹² **Greet one another with a holy kiss.**”

“The command to greet one another with a holy kiss also appears in Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; and 1 Peter 5:14.

- Why does such a kiss need to be commanded?
- Is it a new practice that needs encouragement?
- Is it to be restricted only to worship, or does it apply wherever Christians meet⁷?”

“W. Klassen” (in his book *The Sacred Kiss in the New Testament: An Example of Social Boundary Lines*) “argues that the kiss is to be seen in a living context of people who are building a new sociological reality rather than in restrictive eucharistic or liturgical terms. He thinks that it is the kiss which ‘saints’ give each other when they meet.”⁷

Today, we might regard a kiss on the cheek or a friendly ‘Welcome’ on entering a church as a style of ‘holy kiss’, whilst others may see the ‘sharing of the peace’ in a similar light.

Paul finishes his chapter with a blessing; ¹⁴ **May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.**”

Note that Paul’s final blessing (which closely resembles the words of Jesus in our Gospel reading) incorporates all three members of ‘The Trinity’ as we know it today, but as with our Gospel reading, were not yet known as “The Trinity” when he wrote this letter.

Amen.

1. All biblical passages from the NIV.
2. Mays, J. L. (1994). *Psalms* (p. 65). Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.
3. <https://journal.rts.edu/article/psalm-8-messianic-psalm-reading-psalm-8-christian-scripture/>
4. <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/who-wrote-isaiah>
5. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2040&version=NIV>
6. Tyndale, W. (1536). *The 1536 Tyndale Bible New Testament* (2 Co 13:11–14). N.P
7. Garland, D. E. (1999). *2 Corinthians* (Vol. 29, p. 554). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

To finish a short prayer.

Let us pray ...

This week brings sad news of several of our own who need our prayers.

Garth requires two operations – one to replace a heart valve and the other a kidney transplant.....

“Nothing can be done because of chronic kidney failure. Similarly, a kidney transplant is out of the question because of the weak heart. The prognosis is a stroke or heart attack or total kidney failure. The timescale is not clear. I am at peace and place myself totally in God’s hands. Prayers have been appreciated” says Garth.

Lord Jesus, we pray for Garth, his family and friends.

We also pray for the family and friends of Julie Morely who lost her life this week in a motor accident. And we pray for Mark and his extended family; one of whom is facing major medical challenges.

Lord Jesus, bless and care for these children of yours. Comfort their friends and families.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with them all, and also with us ... both now and forever more.

As we draw to a close, let us lean on the words of Jesus for hope and comfort from the final sentence of today’s Gospel reading.

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Amen

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