

**Trinity Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

**Isaiah 6, 1-8; Romans 8,12-17**

**Sermon by Bishop Richard Harries**

**St Mary's, Barnes, 30<sup>th</sup> May**

Sometimes looking up at the night sky you cannot help wondering about the vast, incomprehensible mystery behind the universe. The same feeling can arise when we think of the thirteen and a half billion years it has taken from the big bang to evolve into you and I sitting here this morning. How can we say anything sensible about that mystery? It's good to have that feeling sometimes because it reminds us of the very limited nature of our human minds and words, of the need for a proper reticence, agnosticism is you like. As the great bastion of orthodox Christianity John of Damascus said in the seventh century 'What God is in himself is totally unknowable and incomprehensible'. We can only hint at it by use of paradox, apparently contradictory statements, such as Meister Eckhart's statement that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

With that caution, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, despite their obvious differences, all claim both that there is a creator of this universe, and that this creator has made something of himself known to us in a way we can understand. All three would begin with the affirmation in this morning's first reading from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC prophet Isaiah- the utter otherness and sublime holiness of God to which we respond every Sunday in the words of the Sanctus. 'Holy, Holy, Holy, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory.' Then to Jews he made known his faithfulness and the morally based community life he required from them in return. For Christians this faithfulness comes to a head and focus in Jesus and his imperative that we love God and one another. -the definitive disclosure both of the heart of God and what it is to be a human being. Nor does it end there. For that disclosure survived the death of Jesus and all the vicissitudes of human history only through the conviction

that Christ continues to be close to us and that through his working within us we are being changed moment by moment into his likeness.

The Christian affirmation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not a puzzle to be solved, not an empty formula, it is our very life blood as Christians. The second reading set for today from Paul's letter to the Romans, reads.

<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba!<sup>[a]</sup> Father!" <sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness<sup>[b]</sup> with our spirit that we are children of God,

The whole of God is there in those short verses-the God whom we address in trust as Abba, the spirit who enables us so to pray, and Christ whose sonship we share and to which we are being conformed. This is our spiritual life blood.

There is at the moment, as we know, a proper and urgent concern about the environment especially amongst young people. There is something spiritual in this movement because as human beings we all experience the life-giving power of nature, particularly at this time of year. As Wordsworth famously put it

And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

For some people this sense is so powerful that God and nature become indivisible-what is technically called pantheism. Wordsworth

was not a pantheist, he was an orthodox Christian, but orthodox Christianity does hold to panentheism, God in and through all things.

Within the mystical tradition of all religions God is not only in and through all things, but especially in the deepest places of our soul, is indeed our soul's soul. For some this has been so profound that they have thought that the soul and God were one. The Christian view is rather that our soul's soul, our true self, is Christ, to whom we are being conformed. To quote another poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, everyone who acts justly.

Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —  
Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Perhaps we can see that humanity's different spiritual insights that God has been discerned in and through nature, and that he is known in the deepest places of our inner being are all contained and expressed within the Christian understanding of God as Holy Trinity.

Some people find the creed which we say every Sunday difficult. I regard it like the National Anthem, only infinitely more important. The point is that it is not my individual faith. There is a prayer I like which goes 'Regard not our sins but the faith of the church'. It is the faith of the church. Like all language about God, it is of course symbolic. Sometimes it may seem to make no sense, at other times we may feel personally rather distant from it, but the point is that it is the faith of the church, which is fundamental to my identity as a Christian; the faith of the body of Christ in which I am a limb.

When we were baptised, we were joined to Christ with the words 'In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit'; When we make the sign of the cross or receive a blessing it is again in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is, as I say, the very life blood of the Church and each individual Christians. This is the faith that allows God to dwell in us and we in him.

By education and temperament, some people are theocentric, and others Christocentric. Some people prefer simply to pray to God, others more specifically to Christ or Jesus, or indeed the Holy Spirit. It does not matter which and it may shift and change over the course of a life. But however, we pray the whole Trinity is involved. It is the Holy Spirit within us enabling us to reach out and deepening our communion with the Christ alongside us.

Moment by moment we are held in being by the Father. There could be nothing. But shock O shock, there is something, there is me here, now, alive. You are here, there is a world, a universe. Are people so numbed today by our secular society that they no longer experience the shock of being, that things exist, that they exist I wonder?

Moment by moment we are enclosed in Christ, friend and brother beside us, intimate companion on our life's journey.

Moment by moment the Spirit stirs within us, lifting our heart to God and leading us in his way.

Moment by moment we live the life of the Trinity, the ground of our being and the goal of our longing. To whom be all glory, now and for ever.