



Trinity Sunday 11 June 2017
Matthew 28:16-20

Today is Trinity Sunday when we reflect on an understanding that relationship is at the heart of God. God, in the different ways we know God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit dances together in a dynamic, pulsating dance of joy and love,¹ so that the very essence of God is relationship, community, unconditional love.

It is even more remarkable then that God, who in this Dance needs no other, chose to create you, me, and everyone else, and the whole world of creation--so that we might join in this Dance of love. The invitations have been sent. There are to be no mere spectators on the dance floor. No outcasts, no outsiders. We are all, like the Persons of the Trinity, truly beloved.

In a discussion I heard on ABC Radio National the other night, the person interviewed had done some research on happiness, and discovered that we are most happy not when we buy things for ourselves, but when we give things away, either to family and friends, or to people overseas,

¹ <http://www.gotquestions.org/perichoresis.html#ixzz33oApKWDo>

and that we are happier purchasing and having experiences than stuff..

Being in relationship with others.. is what brings happiness.. God knows that!

The icon which defines the very essence of Trinity is the one which shows the Trinity in the form of three angels, by 13th century Russian iconographer, Andrei Rublev entitled, "The Trinity".

A few words about icons first. An icon is not a painting in the sense we normally regard pieces of art, although it is an image that is painted, or written.

An icon is a window out of the obvious realities of everyday life into the realm of God. Every paint-stroke has a meaning hallowed by centuries of prayer. Icons are religious images that hover between two worlds, putting into colours and shapes what cannot be grasped by the intellect. Rendering the invisible visible.

Icons are the visual equivalents of the Divine Scriptures.

Not every religious painting can be considered an icon. Icons are religious pictures that convey the inner spiritual meaning of their subject matter. The Son of God came to restore the divine image in human form. Iconography is the graphic witness to this restoration.

This icon of the Trinity takes as its subject the mysterious story where Abraham receives three visitors as he camps by the oaks of Mamre. He serves them a meal and, as the conversation progresses he seems to be talking directly to God, as if these 'angels' were in some way a metaphor for the three persons of the Trinity.

In Rublev's representation of the scene, the three gold-winged figures are seated around a table on which a golden, chalice-like bowl contains a roasted lamb.

In the background of the picture, a house can be seen at the top left and a tree in the centre. Less distinctly, a rocky hill lies in the upper right corner. The composition is a great circle around the table, focusing the attention on the chalice-bowl at the centre, which reminds the viewer of an altar at Communion.

On one level this picture shows three angels seated under Abraham's tree, but on another it is a visual expression of what the Trinity means, on the nature of God, and how we approach God.

Reading the picture from left to right, we see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

- Rublev gives each person of the Trinity different clothing. On the right, the Holy Spirit has a garment of the clear blue of the sky, wrapped over with a robe of a fragile green. So the Spirit of creation moves in sky and water, breathes in heaven and earth. All living things owe their freshness to the Spirit's touch.*
- The Son has the deepest colours; a thick heavy garment of the reddish-brown of earth and a cloak of the blue of heaven. In his person he unites heaven and earth, the two natures are present in him, and over his right shoulder (the Government shall be upon his shoulder) there is a band of gold shot through the earthly garment, as his divinity suffuses and transfigures his earthly being.*
- The Father seems to wear all the colours in a kind of fabric that changes with the light, that seems transparent, that cannot be described or confined in words. And this is how it should be. No one has seen the Father, but the vision of him fills the universe.*

Their wings are gold. Their seats are gold. The chalice in the centre is gold, as is the roof of the house. When there is no activity apparent on the part of God, God's way is golden. All is perfect.

The Father looks forward, raising his hand in blessing to the Son, his gesture expressing a movement towards the Son. "This is my Son, listen to him..."

The hand of the Son points on, around the circle, to the Spirit. In this simple array we see the movement of life towards us, The Father sends the Son, the Son sends the Spirit. The life flows clockwise around the circle.

And we complete the circle. As the Father sends the Son, as the Son sends the Holy Spirit, so we are invited and sent to complete the circle of the Godhead with our response.

We respond to the movement of the Spirit who points us to Jesus. And Jesus shows us the Father in whom all things come to fruition. This is the counter-clockwise movement of our lives, in response to the movement of God. And along the way are the three signs at the top of the picture, the hill, the tree, and the house.

- *The Spirit touches us, even though we may not know who it is that is touching us. The Spirit leads us by ways we may not be aware of, up the hill of prayer. It may be steep and rocky, but the journeying God goes before us along the path.*
- *It leads to Jesus, the Son of God, and it leads to a tree. A great tree in the heat of the day spreads its shade. It is a place of security, a place of peace, a place where we begin to find out the possibilities of who we can be. It is no ordinary tree. It stands above the Son in the picture, and stands above the altar-table where the lamb lies within the chalice. Because of the sacrifice this tree grows. The tree of death has been transformed into a tree of life for us. The tree is on the way to the house.*
- *Over the head of the Father is the house of the Father. It is the goal of our journey. It is the beginning and end of our lives. Its door is always open for the traveller. Its window is always open so that the Father can incessantly scan the roads for a glimpse of a returning prodigal.*

Each person holds a staff, which is so long it, cuts the picture into sections.

Why should beings with wings, that can fly like the light, have need of a staff for their journey?

Because we are on a journey and these three persons enter into our journey, our slow movement across the face of the earth. Their feet are tired from travelling. God is with us in the weariness of our human road. The traveller God sits down at our ordinary tables and spreads them with a hint of heaven.

The table or altar lies at the centre of the picture. It is at once the place of Abraham's hospitality to the angels, and God's place of hospitality to us.

That ambiguity lies at the heart of communion, at the heart of worship. As soon as we open a sacred place for God to enter, for God to be welcomed, it becomes God's place. It is we who are welcomed, it is we who must 'take off our shoes' because of the holiness of the ground.

Contained in the centre of the circle, a sign of death. The lamb, killed. The holy meal brought to the table. All points to this space, this mystery: within it, everything about God is summed up and expressed, God's glory, and above all God's love. And it is expressed in such a way that we can reach it. For the space at this table is on our side. We are invited to join the group at the table and receive the heart of their being for ourselves.

We are invited to complete the circle, to join the dance, to complete the movements of God in the world by our own response.

Below the altar a rectangle marks the holy place where the relics of the martyrs were kept in a church. It lies before us. It invites us to come into the depth and intimacy of all that is represented here.

Come follow the Spirit up the hill of prayer.

Come, live in the shadow of the Son of God, rest yourself beneath his tree of life.

*Come, journey to the home, prepared for you in the house of your Father.
The table is spread, the door is open. Come.*²

On this Trinity Sunday, God gives us a priceless gift that we can share with all those we meet, all those whose life's baggage has become so full, so heavy, that they have forgotten who they are and whose they are. We can dare to look them in the eye and quietly remind them that they are not God and don't need to be. There is one God, who is relationship, who is Divine Dance, who is Love. And they are God's Beloved.³

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² <http://www.sacredheartpullman.org/Icon%20explanation.htm>

³ http://day1.org/1947-the_dance The Revd Canon C K Robertson