

Sermon on Sunday 30 May 2021, Trinity Sunday by Rev. Alan Stewart

(Readings: 2 Corinthians 13. 11-13 & Matthew 28. 16-20)

Circle of Love

“Everyone’s special” – “Which is another way of saying no one is.”

You might recognise these as the words of 9-year-old Dash, one of a family of superheroes in the Disney Pixar movie *'The Incredibles'*. It's during a conversation with his mum, who's encouraging him to reign in his superpowers so that he can fit in with his contemporaries.

Let's face it, we all want to be special and yet so much of human life is also about fitting in.

The Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall suggests that in the West what eats away at us most is the gnawing suspicion that we may be superfluous – an accidental species with no real purpose on earth. Our greatest fear, he says, is a life without meaning.

And so, many of us carefully construct a reality and an image for ourselves to let others know how interesting or how successful or how happy or how individual or how

intellectual or how religious we are. We shop around for meaning; in the malls and on the internet; in spas and counselling rooms; in churches and at mind, body, spirit fairs; we travel to find ourselves; we search for the perfect relationship; we invest in our homes, our jobs, our children, our politics; anything to give our lives meaning.

To be human is to search for meaning, so I suppose a good question to begin with is - What makes life meaningful for you? And, might that have changed in any way over these past 14 months?

While you're pondering that, I want to suggest that the antidote to meaninglessness is to be found in an understanding and engagement with a bigger picture; a greater reality. We are, I believe, each born restless; born with an aching loneliness for something else, something more. We're infinite beings, I believe, trapped in finite bodies. It's as if we were each made for something beyond us and the great faiths of the world, of course, propose that that something is the divine; Christians in particular believe that we discover who we are and what our lives are for in relationship with the mystery we call Trinity.

You'll know, I'm sure, about this nonsensical belief in a God who is One yet Three; One God, one being, one essence, yet three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Unsurprisingly, our monotheistic Muslim and Jewish

neighbours assume that we believe in three gods. To attempt to explain the mechanics of the Trinity is a bit like trying to explain love; to dissect it is to misunderstand it, actually. God, like love, is not a riddle to be solved but a relationship to be entered.

It was St Augustine who said, 'God is not what you imagine, nor what you think you understand. If you understand, you have failed'. His point is that all talk of God is provisional, every revelation is an accommodation; our language fails us; our minds cannot fully compute. Pete Rollins says, in fact, that to speak about God with absolute certainty is idolatry. So, in the final analysis we all have to accept that there are aspects about which we are agnostic, we cannot prove or solve God.

Personally speaking, being in the company of fellow agnostics and heretics comes as something of a great relief.

So why even bother, then; why try to make sense of the divine? Well, the astonishing thing is that this Triune God has chosen to reveal aspects, clues, invitations to engage with - and indeed connect with - the divine mystery. God reaches out to us because we were created to find our completeness in him. We will always be lost until we discover that our home, our deepest belonging, our

richest meaning can only be found within this divine community; this circle of love, this dance we call Trinity.

Let me share with my own personal heresy; one that helps me in thinking through how the Trinity might, for want of a better word, operate.

The Father can be understood as the reality that surrounds us. The Son as the flesh beside us. And the Spirit as the breath within us. I'll say that again. The Father; the reality that surrounds us. The Son; the flesh beside us. The Spirit, the breath within us. I love that.

The Reality that surrounds us; what *is*; what others have called the ground of our being; the Real (capital R); the love that created all things.

The flesh beside us; Christians dare believe that, astonishingly, the power behind the universe has entered human history in human flesh. The one we call Jesus came to show us, in a language we can grasp, what God is really like; and the answer is - God is Christ-like. The flesh beside us also reminds us that Christ is to be encountered in one another; in the words of the Celtic prayer, 'Christ be in the heart of each to whom I speak; in the mouth of those who speak unto me'.

Finally; the breath within us. The rhythm that sustains all life; essential as oxygen; Spirit, Ruach, Sofia, Wisdom; the wind that blows where it will; the key, the channel;

the way ahead and the comfort around. As that beautiful hymn suggest; the enemy of apathy.

This is, of course, a blind stab in the darkness, it fails to capture the un-capturable. I have to say that although I do not understand the Trinity, I love what it suggests about God.

God, it seems, is not a remote being, an island, but a self-giving equal community of love; the dance at the centre of all life. And, blow me, we are each invited into this dance; for it is here within that supreme acceptance that we find the meaning we crave; it is here that we find ourselves; our true selves; we come face-to-face with who we are - the damage and the potential, the light and the shadows, the beauty and the glory that is you and me. It is here that we come to understand that we matter; that we are loved, and that we each have a unique destiny.

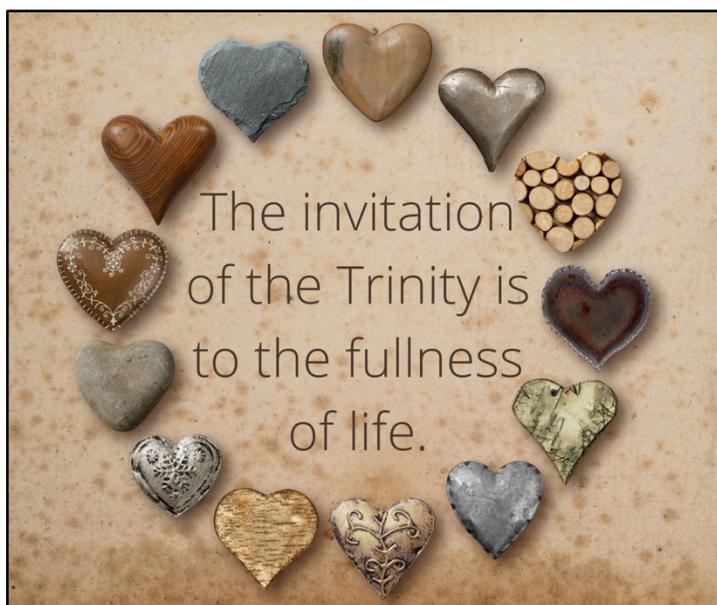
Just as God is not an island, nor are we. I am because you are. And this engagement with God was never meant to be a solo enterprise.

An old priest was once told by a younger man, "I don't need to go to church to be a Christian". To which the old priest said nothing, he simply took some tongs and removed a hot burning coal from the fire they were enjoying and left it all by itself on the stone floor. Away from the heat of the fire it soon went cold and grey. He

then reached forward and returned the coal to the fire where once again it burnt bright.

One of my favourite authors, Barbara Brown Taylor, writes:

'The Church exists so that God has a community in which to save people from meaninglessness, by reminding them who they are and what they are for. The Church exists so that God has a place to point people toward a purpose as big as their capabilities, and to help them identify all the ways they flee from that high calling. The Church exists so that people have a community in which they may confess their sin – their own turning away from life, whatever form that destructiveness may take for them – as well as a community that will support them to turn back again. The Church exists so that people have a place where they might repent of their fear, their hardness of heart, their isolation and loss of vision, and where, having repented, they may be restored to the fullness of life.'



The invitation of the Trinity is to the fullness of life.

There is a fear among some that getting religion will erase our personality and absorb us, like Star Trek's sinister alien species The Borg, into some

bland collective. Well, if that's religion, count me out.

Relationship with the Trinity isn't about denying who we are or even about fitting in – it's about becoming more fully the person we were always meant to be.

Life lived in denial of the Trinity is like being born with wings but never thinking to unfurl them; living with our heads bowed to the earth when we were made to soar the endless skies. The truth is that none of us, whatever we believe or don't believe, are beyond the reality that surrounds us, the flesh beside us, the breath within us. It's a question of unfurling those wings, daring to look up, to risk welcoming the source of our being. Only then can we discover the deep meaning of our lives. Only then can we find the love that recreates us; only then do we

find our unique place in this world, our special place
within the heart of the Trinity.