

Trinity Sunday  
27/5/2018

Mark the Evangelist

1 John 4:13-17, 5:3-5  
Psalm 29  
John 3:1-17

**The three-in-one God**

Sermon preached by Rev. Dr Rob Gallacher

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“God so loved the world” John 3:16 is such a gift to the preacher that You’ll all be expecting me to wax strong on love, like Bishop Michael Curry at the royal wedding of Harry and Meghan.

But I am going to direct your attention to the next verse:

**“God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”** John 3:17

**“Not to condemn... but to save”** We can find plenty of things in this world to condemn – the behaviour of the banks, the treatment of asylum seekers, the slaughter of Palestinians, domestic violence, - the list goes on. It’s not that God approves of such things, but God’s nature is not to condemn but to save. These tragedies we condemn are a rejection of God’s saving way and produce their own dire reward. God sent the Son to offer us an alternative.

There are three points to be drawn from this.

1. The **WORLD**, the whole world, with all its freedom and folly, is within the embrace of the one God whose nature is to save.
2. **THROUGH HIM** – in order that the world might be saved through him. The saving God is not some ephemeral distant spirit, but in Jesus becomes flesh and blood, visible, tangible, and in our worship that physical, substantial presence is manifest in the consecrated elements of bread and wine.
3. We **PARTICIPATE** in that saving life of God. In the language of 1 John 4:13 **“We know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Saviour of the world.”** Or John 3:21: **Those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.** To be saved is to believe in the Son and through him to participate in the life of God.

Now I want to see how these three points are expressed in the icon of the Trinity.

1. The **WORLD** is within the embrace of the one God whose nature is to save.

*(Place circle around the 3 figures in the icon)*

The outer line of the three figures form a perfect circle - eternal for a circle has no end, and also inclusive of all that goes on within it. The hand of the Holy Spirit indicates the rectangle in the table. This is the four corners of the earth, the world. See how small it is in relation to the life of God. Whatever catastrophes we create we cannot shake the being of God. As the profligate actions of the prodigal son do not change the nature of the father. Somehow, in

ways we cannot fully grasp, God holds together all the dualism – light and darkness, life and death, spirit and flesh, good and evil – and is constantly offering to all saving grace, eternal love.

The life of God is community within oneness, as each submits to the other with an inclination of the head. Each is equal in power, as all carry the same sceptre, and all are the same size indicating they are equally important. When one is present all are present.

2. **THROUGH HIM.** Notice that Christ is painted in solid, substantial colour, whereas the Father is more mystical, and the Spirit is a bit of both. The Son is the one sent into the world, the physical presence, God incarnate, the one we see. The red indicates his humanity, the blue, divinity. When I was painting the inner garment, I looked to see if there was anywhere else I could use the paint I had on the brush. There is one spot, in the chalice. And Christ's hand is blessing it! This led to long prayerful contemplation. What is the substantial visible presence of Christ in our world today? It is his body in the sacrament, and through our consuming of the elements, it is through Christ in us.

*(Place the marked-out chalice over the inner lines of the Father and the Spirit)*

Now look at this. The inside lines of the Father and the Spirit make a chalice, and Christ himself is in that chalice. Superimposed over the table and chalice is the larger picture, real presence of Christ. Uniting Church people would do well to contemplate the real presence of Christ in the sacrament more deeply. Receiving the elements means participating in the one whom God sent to save the world. It's not some airy-fairy spirituality, nor is just imaginary symbolism, it is being the body of Christ in the world, solid, physical, substantial, actual. Sacrament and incarnation are inextricably linked in the story of salvation.

3. **That the world might be saved.** When we live in Christ and he in us, the whole world looks different. That's what the dialogue with **Nicodemus** is all about. You are born into a different world. You still have to go out and live in the old world, but you see it differently when you abide in Christ. I John speaks of abiding in all the first four chapters. **God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God.** 1 John 4:15. And the gospel talks of abiding in the vine, (ch 15) or dwelling in God's house (ch 14)

See how the icon expresses this abiding

*(place cut out on the lines of the footstools)*

The lines of the footstools are in inverse perspective. The lines meet outside the picture. They activate the space in front of the picture and the space beyond it. (i) It's as though, you, the viewer, are looking out through a window into an ever-expanding but unseen reality which is God. There is much to contemplate prayerfully in this, but that's for another day. (ii) When you look at the icon in this way it draws you in. The lines are like arms, drawing you in. Notice that there is a space at the table, a place for you. It is sometimes called The Hospitality Icon, taking its origin from the three angels that visited Abraham under the oaks at Mamre. If Abraham had not invited the strangers to stay salvation history would be altogether different. So too the triune God invites you in, to be part of the life of God, to take your place in the life of the divine community that is unshakeable and eternal and exists for the sake of the world.

That's what is real. The outside world, the old world, is only a shadow of what can be. But it can be saved, through him

I hope that by picking out the artistic devices that I have not turned the icon into a diagram. The whole is to be contemplated all at once. It is a living entity, opening for you the life and saving power of Father, Son and Spirit. There is a lot more that can be seen in this icon. This is only the way I see it in relation to today's text. But I hope it is enough for today, to confirm you in your faith.

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