

Trinity
16/6/2019

Mark the Evangelist

Romans 5:1-5
Psalm 8
John 16:12-15

The simple Trinity

In a sentence:

Trinitarian faith expresses what God must be like if love is to be possible.

Despite the fact that Christian trinitarian doctrine has not often lent itself to comprehensive expression in less than several hundred pages, John's gospel this morning puts all of the 'dynamic' of that doctrine into just a few words.

John can put it so briefly because is concerned only with the 'What' of the dynamic of salvation which eventually becomes fully developed and defended 'doctrine'. *Argued* doctrine is usually about the 'How' of what is believed – how to make sense of God-things. This involves intersecting such simple statements as the New Testament makes about God with the vast and complex theories we bring with us about what the world is and what a god could be. In this way we sometimes seek to 'prove' trinitarian doctrine.

But we will stay with the simple What this morning: the Spirit will glorify Jesus by taking all that Jesus has – which is all that the Father has – and giving it to the disciples. To borrow from a chapter or so back: to see Jesus is to see the Father (John 14.9), and the Spirit makes it possible for us to see Jesus.

This pretty much sums up the church's interest in trinitarian doctrine. Without Jesus there is nothing to look at, without the Father there is nothing to see, and without the Spirit we wouldn't know what we were looking at in the first place.

In itself, this is straightforward as a set of connections, whether we believe it all or not. The question then becomes, what does it mean to *believe* it?

Believing, here, cannot mean simply reciting the creed happily as a set of things to which we give assent, agreement. This is because 'the things of the Father' which Jesus brings are not a series of beliefs. What Jesus has is the Father. This, then, is what we have.

Yet having this is not clearly relevant to every other thing we have, until we place flesh on those connections – our own flesh.

One way of doing this is to consider the Eucharist. Here we pray for the gift of the Spirit, that the elements of bread and wine might be for us 'the body and the blood' of Jesus. That is, we pray for what Jesus describes in our reading: when the Spirit comes, it will bring me. The prayer for the Spirit – for the 'Remembrancer divine', as we'll sing later – is a prayer that the Spirit will 'declare' Jesus to us, make him and his benefits present to us through these elements and through our consuming of them together.

But there is one more thing to add to this. Eating the Eucharist does not 'save' us in the narrow sense that the elements might be a kind of medicine. Rather we eat and drink, as the prayer goes, that 'he may evermore dwell in us, and we in him'. The 'in him' is the clincher. Clearly Jesus is 'in us' because we have eaten and drunk of him, if even in

only a figurative sense. But this does not account for our being 'in him'. To be 'in him' at this point is to speak of the *effect* of his being in us: 'in him' means becoming as he is.

This is the truly confronting thing of Christian faith. Cut apart from what Jesus promises with the Spirit, trinitarian doctrine looks quite foolish and unnecessary.

But there is something much more foolish at that heart of the matter, which is that the Word did not just *become* flesh – a couple of thousand years ago, around Christmas. It *becomes* flesh – our very flesh – here and now. The foolishness of faith is in the notion that God might lift human beings to such heights, for how could mere mortals as us be crowned with such honour, as our psalmist today wondered (Cf. Psalm 8)?

It is not only in the Eucharist that we encounter this understanding but the Eucharist is especially rich in language and symbol which make the point. We pray that the Spirit make Christ present to us in the elements, and we speak of becoming what we eat – Christ's Body. This 'Christ's Body' is 'Word made flesh', but now *our* very ordinary flesh lifted up, filled out. We become here what we have prayed for: an 'on earth' which is 'as it is heaven'.

Jesus says, 'When the Spirit comes it will announce to you all that I am. And I will be yours, and all that is the Father's will be yours, in me'. This is not *information* about God. It is the promise of *transformation* of our bodies into the *body of God* in the world.

Now *that* is a foolish and even dangerous thing to say. And so it must seem that it cannot be true. And yet it is.

The only safeguard in place is the consequence of such a claim for those of whom it is said – for *us*. It is not for nothing that John – the evangelist who most encourages this kind of problematic thought – is the one who states most explicitly and pointedly the ethic which corresponds to such thinking: *Love one another*. Why? Not because love is good. But so that 'the world may know'. And may know what? That God has sent the Son, that we might find ourselves in him.

We don't need several hundred pages of theological 'How' and all the necessary political and ethical qualifications to prove the gospel's bold assertion about God's trinitarian presence to the world *in the Body of such bodies as ours*. The proof of the gospel of God is in the love God's body manifests. Trinitarian is a question to us as much as it is a statement we might make: Is there love here?

What *leads to* trinitarian thinking is the experience of that divine love which crowns *even us* with glory and honour. What *flows from* trinitarian thinking is an answering love which receives God's embrace and, as the body of God, extends it towards others.

'When the Spirit comes, it will declare to you all which is mine, which is all which is the Father's. And your joy will be complete. And love will be the only response which can make sense of it all.'

Let us, then, strive ever more earnestly to prove what we confess, in love which startles, as God is startling.

By the grace of God, Amen.
