

Trinity 2023, 10.30am.

May the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of all our hearts, be now and always acceptable to you, o Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

There is an old joke - or should I call it a meme these days? - about lay readers preaching, that the 2 occasions we are generally invited to preach, are Low Sunday, (the Sunday after Easter), and Trinity Sunday. I should say that neither apply in St George.

Low Sunday is when weary vicars take a much needed rest after the most demanding season of worship. But why is Trinity seen as something a vicar might be reluctant to address? It is not an unfamiliar topic.

We acknowledge, even more in the old services of mattins and evensong, after every psalm and canticle – Glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...

The collect, the formal prayer for each Sunday, addressed to the Lord or Almighty God, ends with the words “through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.”

In the creed we declare our faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, and in the Holy Spirit, proceeding from and worshipped and glorified with, the Father and the Son.

The closing blessing, in words reflecting the end of the second letter to the Corinthians, invokes Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as does the Grace with which we often end meetings or short services.

All these references – why then is the subject of the trinity seen as difficult, something a vicar – but clearly not our Fr Sam - might feel challenging to expound to a congregation? And why do I feel honoured to be trusted with the topic, and more than usually apprehensive of doing it justice?

Is it that dread word theology? It should be a beautiful topic – theology, talking about God, the study of God. But when I did the diocesan course for lay people, a great many years ago - developing disciples, 3D – (it has gone through several names since first prepared by our then vicar Robert Grimley) – I really expected to be shown an answer, a form of words that would be the right answer to any question of faith, of understanding and explaining what we

mean by God. (I should perhaps say that my schooling very much followed the line of there being one right answer to any question). Suffice it to say in some ways I knew less by the end of the discipleship course – but perhaps was starting to feel my way to using my own mind – and, I pray, the Holy Spirit.

In the year-long basic course provided to train lay readers, we had one day on theology, and that was mainly trying to develop in us a practice of reflecting on events, real-life problems, in the light of faith and scripture. I still hankered for that one correct answer.

It was perhaps only when Fr Sam introduced a passage from a new book – on the nature of God – that I accepted that while minds greater than mine were wrestling with my longed for answer to everything – as the faithful have been doing since the first followers of Jesus – they can write with passion and faith, inspiring even when far beyond the comprehension of most of us. This passage, by Katherine Sonderegger – tried to address the attributes of God – most especially that God is beyond, and other than, all created things, all that we can know, and that our finite minds can take in. Science is indeed hinting at this, that the world itself is more complex than we can ever fully understand. As theories of physics are becoming almost incomprehensible to non-experts. Theology can be, should be, passionate, driven, enthused by love and wonder, but never a final answer or explanation.

As the Isaiah passage reflects – God, the creator who carries us in his arms like a shepherd with new born lambs, also made the earth and all that we know – all that we are learning now – of stars and planets and space, of the extraordinary detail of particles making up all structure, or the working of our bodies and minds, of the extraordinary variety and complexity of nature – birds navigating the world, bees working together, trees aware in some way of other trees and sharing resources, tectonic plates shifting to make new land. Who has directed the spirit of the Lord or as his counsellor has instructed him? Isaiah sounds as if the answer is no-one, but is there also a hint of the book of Proverbs? when wisdom, personified as a woman, speaks of being with God at the beginning of creation, delighting perhaps sharing in the creative process. And this seems to link with John's gospel – the spirit that will remind the disciples, and us, of all that Jesus has taught them, the spirit that will explain the teaching to them and us, teach them and us what is needed to follow the Christ.

The choice of epistle and gospel for today's readings rather draw attention to the scarcity of references to the three persons in scripture. It took some three hundred years of the Christian communities wrestling with the ideas, studying and praying, discussion, arguing, disagreeing, even alas fighting, to come up with the creed we use today; have we learnt anything yet about disagreeing well? – for it seems that from human disagreement the Spirit can point a way forward to wisdom.

I myself no longer expect to receive a “divine revelation”, a complete understanding of God – rather I have come to accept that that is utterly beyond me – God the creator, the redeemer, the friend of those who seek him, the merciful the all-powerful, yet humble as a human being, closely involved with every one of us - this God is far beyond my explaining, or that of the most able of us.

But it is worthwhile, perhaps supremely worthwhile, to come to know this God better, by whatever means we have: by prayer, by thought, by reading and study – and so to love him better, and follow him more closely in every part of our lives.

Jenny Uff.