

Sermon Feast of the Most Holy Trinity Year C 2019

This coming week and next Sunday we have been asked to join in and support the Deanery Mission. Now, this is important because it reminds us that the Anglican Church is not a congregational church, we are an episcopal church. We are not self-governed. We are part of a much larger network of churches under the authority of a bishop. In this diocese, the archbishop has delegated some of his authority to his assistants. And so, in a very simple, modest way the 'mission' this week reminds us that our life here does not exist in isolation; that we are called to relate to and interact with others; and that *alongside others*, we are to find our place in the larger life of the church. It is a great sin of the church to imagine that what happens in our own small corner, amongst our own people, (in the way we like and are most familiar with) is all that there is to the church of God.

Next Sunday night we have been asked to host an evensong. Bishop Genieve will be present, and so too members of the other deanery churches, their clergy and people. We will have students from both Ridley and Trinity Theological colleges share the whole day with us. The opportunity for us to share in this and to play host to the deanery community is important because it reminds us that we are part of bigger reality. And that in this we are called to be *generous and charitable and hospitable*. Next Sunday we need to take personal responsibility about that. Next Sunday, I don't want the situation to be in which Margaret Harvey and Ian Pollard are the only ones extending a warm and generous welcome to our deanery brothers and sisters"!! This is an opportunity *for us all* to present our church as a valuable and essential part of the church. And that we are warm, and welcoming and gracious in this.

Why is this so important? Why can't we just do what we do in our own quiet corner and forget the rest of the church (which like the rest of the world, some of you might think, is going to hell in a hand basket)? Why should we care about the big picture of the church and the call to be generous, charitable and hospitable? Well, because of what we celebrate today, on this Feast of the Most Holy Trinity. The great temptation about this mystery of our faith is to treat as so mysterious and esoteric, that it needn't impact our lives. Yes, we give our intellectual assent to this foundational Christian belief, but we say to ourselves, it's not a *practical* belief. It can't really influence my life. But this little delusion we so often insist on couldn't be further from the truth.

In the Mystery of the Trinity we hold that God is revealed to us as three Persons, equal in majesty and glory and perfect in unity. In the mystery of the Trinity we affirm that the very essence of God – the god-ness of God – is as communion. God in God's very Self is a community: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And this is what the church is called to reflect. The church does not exist for its own glory. The church does not exist for itself. The church is not its own end. The church exists to point the world toward God. And so, our life together, our structures and our institutions are to point to - to reflect - something of the God who exists in a communion. The church exists to direct the world to its ultimate destiny; the destiny which will see us joined to God, enjoying forever the perfect bond of love the Trinity itself enjoys from all eternity.

This is why living alone in faith - doing our own thing in glorious isolation - *is not* an authentic witness to Trinitarian faith. This is also why both bland conformity *and* division are equally inauthentic expressions of Trinitarian faith. God in God's own very life exists as communion. That is why we always need to place before us the bigger picture of the church. This is why the church keeps on about 'community'. That is why we must seek to live in charity and gracious, generous hospitality to our brothers and sisters. Because we are to strive – while here on earth – to that unity, that communion, God is calling us to (and indeed the whole of creation.)

Yes, it is difficult. Yes, it is frustrating and at times disappointing to put up with other Christians. And not just 'put up' but actively seek to walk along side. In fact, sometimes it can be profoundly hurting and traumatic. Would it be easier to just ignore everybody else out there and just concentrate on doing our own thing? Yes! Of course, it would be. Would it be easier if we just ignore our divisions? And wouldn't it be easier if everyone was just like me, believed just like me? Well, yes. And does it mean compromise at times, and hard listening, taking time, and committing to each other even when it is difficult, and the disagreements are real and profound. Well, yes, to that as well. But that is what is required *of all* peoples who live together. But *especially* required of Christians who hold to the vision of the Trinitarian God.

Now, serious - indeed very serious - pressure points are being applied once more to the Anglican Church. The issues surrounding human sexuality are pushing hard against our communion; pushing so hard against it that not only fracture lines are appearing, actual breaks are as well. Just over the ditch in New Zealand, schism has occurred. But this just continuing what has already occurred in the US and Scotland.

The liberal side of the church has pushed and pushed until it got what it wanted. And the hard-line evangelicals associated with GAFCON have pushed and pushed and got what they wanted, which has been schism. But both sides must be condemned as breaking communion. And both must be condemned for a failure to exercise restraint, generosity and charity. Both sides. The tensions are heightened by the wider cultural phenomenon in which we regard people we disagree with as not just as expressing an alternative opinion, but as evil! This has crept into our church as well: a complete inability to respect others different from us.

But in this country too. The bishops on Perth, Wangaratta, Gippsland, Ballarat are all itching to jump the gun and prove how progressive and inclusive they are. And the GAFCON churches, itching for a fight, are escalating their threats. For those who push *and* those who leave break communion because they end the conversation; they break the commitment to journey together. We cannot have a conversation with people who are not in the room! This is a reminder of the great sin in imagining that what happens in our corner is the church in its entirety, that we can do what we want without thought or consequence to the wider church. The Trinitarian God urges us to place ourselves into ever-widening circles of communion.

The distinct Anglican gift to wider church of the *via media* - the 'middle way' – is being sacrificed for small agendas. And it *has been* a gift to the wider church as vastly different churchmanships and theologies *have been* held together in one church for 400 years; and so pointing to the communion we hope to share in God. Now, really the current dramas are an exact replay of the issues of the 1990s. The characters may have changed. The presenting issues may have changed. But really, it's the same, and those who survived and remained know how painful that time was. I would suggest that those Catholics who survived the faith wars of the 1990s over the ordination of women and have remained Anglican are perfectly placed to offer genuine and *positive* leadership to our church over the issue now before us.

Faith in God as Trinity ought to shape our lives and our church. Faith in God as Trinity, God as community - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - means we commit to journeying together, to keeping the conversation open, and accepting the compromises required of those who share life together. Now, this is not a case of anything goes, and giving up everything important to keep the peace. Not at all. We are still right to insist on the Truth as we understand it. But to do so hospitably, and in generosity & charity. Amen.