



THOUGHTS FOR TRINITY SUNDAY

7 JUNE 2020

Two's company

Isaiah 40:12-17, 27-end, II Corinthians 13:11-end, Matthew 28:16-20

There are many handy aphorisms in regular use which contain a distillation of truth, founded on experience, but which are not immutable laws. One such is, "Two's company, three's a crowd". In the summer of 1979 I had just moved into my first flat in Barnet, north London, and two friends of mine from S. James's, themselves recently married, invited me round to dinner in the evening of my first day back at work after the move. It was a kind invitation and a pleasant evening, but my hostess rather clouded my recollection of it by saying as I left, "don't expect this to happen every week." I really had no such expectation, but the vocalisation of the thought made me realise the truth of the aphorism; in their newly married bliss, this couple had only limited capacity to welcome others, and that is something I understand, though the recollection is surprisingly painful even 40 years on!

On the other hand, I was brought up in the parish of Holy Trinity, Darnall, in Sheffield, and there Trinity Sunday was our patronal festival, and a cause for real celebration of this feast day, despite all its complexities. The concept of three persons and one Godhead is not one that is easy to sell to the multitude, and preachers have been known to think it a doctrine too far as they rummage round, in their heads and in their books and, now, on-line, to find convincing analogies or explanations, but perhaps that is not what is most required?

Both the epistle and gospel for today refer to the three persons of the Trinity, without making any attempt at explanation and almost as though it was the most obvious way of talking about the Godhead. Well, perhaps it is. Perhaps the fact that three persons can co-exist in such harmony and mutual affection that there is no division in the Godhead tells us all we need to know about God. And it is a revolutionary insight into God. We might, as many have done, infer the creator of everything there is to be very powerful, to be very knowledgeable, to be very present, we might even go further and infer him (forgive the masculine pronoun) to be very merciful (or at least open to being persuaded to acts of mercy), but I think that being loving is an attribute most people would not, from cold, ascribe to the Godhead. This concept of God, as three persons bound entirely into this loving relationship, surprisingly does not mean that God is exclusive. The fact that creation happened at all testifies to the fact that God was determined that there should be more than just the three happily co-existing together and it suggests that all of that creation is held within the same loving bond. Those of us who are thinking creatures clearly have the opportunity to know this, that three can be an utterly loving 'crowd' but that that love embraces the whole of the creation.

One of the challenges of the pandemic lockdown for me has been to try to reconcile my sense of the loving comfort of my own household with the pressing needs others are experiencing. Perhaps in ordinary times the problem exists just the same, but I overlook because of busy-ness and distraction. When the most loving thing one can do for society is to stay at home it is much less possible to overlook, but the opportunities to do anything about it are limited. Nevertheless it is impossible to ignore the imperative of love that the triune God engenders, and how we work that out is something we are all called upon to resolve for the future.

We find encouragement in the Old Testament lesson for today. It begins with a glorious image of the hugeness of God, compared with whom large pieces of his creation are like fine dust, a being who does not faint or grow weary, altogether the picture of what I suggested might be inferred from observation of creation. But then, suddenly, in the reading, the focus shifts to the created. Even the strongest among them will faint and be weary, all part of the natural order in creation, but those who 'wait upon the Lord' shall renew their strength and shall not faint or grow weary. God gives of himself to those he created, and makes them like himself. In the beautiful words we hear sometimes at funerals, and at the bedside of the dying, "they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Perhaps this is just the text for us who 'wait' in our care-worn world today?

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