

Trinity Sunday: 16 June

Just after 9 o'clock on the evening of 22nd November 1956 I cried for the first time. Having just been born, I guess that was expected of me. I have no recollection of the event, but as most babies cry when they are born, I think it is safe to say that I was no exception. Shortly after that no doubt, my Mother fed me. Being her fourth child, she would have known what to do. In between times I would have slept, and slept for a great long time. And then, sometime after, I would have opened my eyes for the first time. I have no idea who or what I saw; no doubt those impressions may be stored in my brain somewhere, too deep to retrieve. All I can say is that I had begun the long childhood of taking the world in, seeing the world, experiencing the world. Understanding the world, or, rather, forming opinions about the world, which is something quite different, would come a fair bit later, but at least, for now, the lights had been switched on.

Two to three years later and I started to talk. Listening to my parents and my brothers speaking to me gradually sunk in and I started to mimic them, and then, as I became more confident, answer them. Then I learned to initiate conversations with them. Nothing startling at this stage, you understand, just basic requests and desires, like 'Narna,' or 'milk.'

I was toddling by this stage as well, learning to run round the room and burying my head into the cushions on the settee. I began to pick things up and look at them intently, wondering how this square shape would fit into a round hole (something I have been attempting to do ever since), and gradually building up my first store of knowledge. I began to remember things, storing my memories in such a way that I could retrieve them. I could tell the time by the age of three, something that my Mum remarked on as being quite special.

As I got older different, more expansive experiences began to make themselves felt. For some unknown reason I listened to my Mum's record of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony when I was about six, was sent to boarding school (as all Norfolk farmers' children were) when I was 7, and then my Dad died in a farming accident when I was just ten. I was growing up, pleasures and pains vying in equal contention to make me the person I was becoming.

At school I made friends, some of them, indeed, becoming quite significant. And the thing that struck me about them was the range of friends I made; all very different from me, and that I very much liked. It was informative. It was fun. I learned a lot about people.

And then God got hold of me. Not through a Damascus experience, and not through a weighing of potential possibilities about who or what created the world and all that was in it, but in the joy and beauty of a Midnight Mass in a Norfolk

village church, with incense rising to the rafters. It was not just the beauty that attracted me, it was the *mystery*. I guess I have been living with that mystery ever since; God, and Jesus for that matter, have always been slightly beyond my reach. But I can remember, as a child, walking around my father's farm – on my own, as a six-year-old – you couldn't do *that* these days! – looking towards the horizon wondering what *does* lie beyond that! And that, living with the mystery, intrigued by the attractiveness of the horizon, has been the feature of my faith to this day.

I don't necessarily want to collapse my life since then in a sentence or two, but time on my part, and patience on yours, prevents me from waxing lyrical about getting married to the lovely Lois, becoming the father of two lovely children, and stumbling, eventually, into the ordained ministry, believing, as I still do, that God wants me to experience him and to serve his world in this capacity, and, though I am the humbler creation and though feeble my lays, I have been trying to sing my Lord's praise with true adoration ever since.

And here I am standing before you today, looking out upon the world, counting you as my friends in Christ, sometimes crying to be satisfied, often speaking to turn my curiosity into understanding, always conscious of that mystery floating through, above and beyond us all. And in so doing I am being nothing but Trinitarian.

Ah, the Trinity. I bet you were wondering when I was going to mention the "T" word; the preacher's nightmare. A theological/philosophical conundrum that has dogged theologians for centuries. I once did an Open to Question session, about three years ago, on modern discussions of the Trinity, and it barely scratched the surface. God, the Three-in-One deity. Three for the price of one; what is not to like?

Well, no philosophical convolution from me this morning. I will mention *perichoresis* just to show that I have heard of the word, thus indicating how clever I am, but I won't attempt to explain it, because simply stating that the Trinity is all about the circum-incession or co-inherence of each Person of the Godhead with the other will only, I fear, beg a certain number of other questions.

But I can talk about myself. And you can talk about yourselves, and when you do you, as am I, are being completely Trinitarian. 'No man is an island', John Donne wrote, and how true that is, because as soon as I uttered my first cry, and as soon as I opened my eyes for the first time I was reacting to (if I wasn't wholly aware of it) the world around me. From the very first I was not in isolation, but my whole being, my whole person-ality, what makes me who I am, was being formed, not by me being isolated and remote, but because I was engaging with the world around me. And that world, my family, my home, the colours, the objects, other people, the Beethoven, the Midnight Mass, the marriage, the birth of my children, all

gradually focussing in my mind, shaping me who I was and who I was to become. And that is as true now as ever before: you all have a part to play in making me me. (And just for the record, I am not going to get into that old nature/nurture chestnut, well not today anyhow.)

In classic Trinitarian terms: I am the subject, you are the object, and what is kindled between us – interest, curiosity, love, hate, is the force of emotion and intellect that changes me, and possibly you as well. And that change, whether we are aware of it or not, whether we like it or not, unites us in a mutual exchange: you, me, and the connection between us. It is a bit like the Chuckle Brothers, really: to me, to you, to me, to you...and gradually in that reciprocity some form of unity is achieved. The furniture does get moved!

Of course, this Trinitarian way of relating is very hit and miss. None of us relate to each other perfectly; we don't understand ourselves, let alone each other; in fact, our stumbling relatedness is all about increasing our capacities to understand and to love. This is how faith works as well: Jesus is always beckoning me from beyond the horizon of my experience, still (always) slightly out of reach. But that doesn't matter, because the *desire* is still there, the desire to know and to be known, to love and to be loved, to offer myself in faith to him, and to receive him through his Spirit in return; the quintessence of Trinitarian relationships.

God is nothing more, and certainly nothing less, than the perfection of this. Don't worry about *perichoresis* or circum-incession: what is important to realise that what is true of our relationships with each other, is also true of God's relationship with himself: perfect love giving of itself and receiving itself: what we stumble towards, God just *is*. Or as Gerard Manley Hopkins put it in his poem *Margaret Clitheroe*:

She caught the crying of these Three,
The Immortals of the eternal ring,
The Utterer, the Utteréd, the Uttering.

We could say more, of course, much more: but just let the beauty of that poetry suffice. Or failing that, summon up the image of the Chuckle Brothers moving a table. And as we stand before the mystery may our hearts and minds be united in offering our praises:

Let all things their Creator bless,
and worship him in humbleness,
O praise him, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, three in one.
O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Loving God we thank you for the beauty and wonder of your creation. Help us to love and respect all that you have made; to share your gifts with our brothers and sisters in need and to protect and nurture all that is fragile and vulnerable on this earth.

Loving God we thank you for the huge diversity of peoples who share this world. We pray for a renewed spirit of longing for peace and reconciliation wherever there is conflict, injustice and oppression. Help us to do what we can to bring peace into our own lives and to seek your ways of peace for the welfare of all your children.

Loving God we thank you for the love and fellowship of friends and families. Help us to be generous with our time, with our love and with ourselves to care for all who are lonely and in need of our support.

Loving God we thank you for all who work to improve care and treatment of those who are physically ill or mentally distressed. We pray that your loving and healing presence will surround all who are suffering today and that your Holy Spirit will comfort and uphold them throughout their troubles. We also pray for the departed...

Lord, we rejoice that you are our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. May we perpetually rejoice in the knowledge of your salvation, and that we may reflect your glory in the world around us. Amen.