



TRINITY SUNDAY

Every morning in lockdown there's been a maths lesson in our house. Fortunately this hasn't involved me. This has been Wendy giving a lesson to two grandchildren in Edinburgh, two bright little buttons who've benefitted greatly from having an Oxford maths graduate making maths fun.

So I've got used to hearing words like hexagon, inverse angle, isosceles triangle and so on, ringing out boldly as I hurry through the lounge. (Isn't isosceles a lovely word? Try saying it - *isosceles!*)

Another couple of words I've been reminded of have been 'equilateral triangle.' Do you remember? A triangle where all the sides are the same length. It's my starting point for a sermon on the Trinity.

Because, where *do* you start? The schoolmaster in Alan Bennett's play *Forty Years On* says, 'Three in one, one in three, perfectly straight-forward. Any doubts about that, see your maths master.'

But there *are* doubts, of course. Mention the Trinity as three Persons in one God and most people start to glaze over. But what we have here is a brilliant

model of God. It reflects the experience of the first Christians that they knew God in creation (the Father), in history (the Son) and in themselves (the Spirit).

So, God above, God beside, God within.

God to protect, God to befriend, God to inspire.

The Trinity is the 'dream team' of the Christian faith.

St Augustine spoke of the Lover (the Father), the Beloved (the Son) and the Love that passes between them (the Spirit)

I could go on: the Father is God, beauty beyond beauty, the Son is God down to earth, the Spirit is God reaching out.

Or a favourite of mine - Bishop David Jenkins talked of God as greater than great, more loving than love, closer than close.

You get the idea. There are lots of images by which we try and understand the nature of God, but this image of the Trinity has a richness about it that's both simple and complex, accessible and subtle. It's brilliant!

We're bound to be out of our depth in speaking about God so, as the Oxford theologian Alister McGrath says, 'The doctrine of the Trinity doesn't solve any of our problems, but it does stop us from making serious mistakes about the Christian understanding of God.' There's a balance and a beauty about the image of the Trinity that somehow *works*.

Nowhere is that seen more perfectly than in the most famous of all icons, the fifteenth century icon of the Trinity by the Russian Andrei Rublev. Here it is.

Rublev has depicted three angels sitting equi-distant from each other (this is where we get back to the equilateral triangle!). They have a harmonious elegance about them as they sit round a table. On the table is a chalice with bread and wine. The angels look at each other with mutual affection, and at the bread and wine with reverence and adoration.

But the way the icon has been written (the technical word) is so that we're drawn into the scene. There's a space at the table for us. We're being invited *to share the very life of the Trinity, the life of God*.

And that's where the doctrine of the Trinity finally makes sense.

What's the purpose of our Christian faith? It isn't to have somewhere nice to go to on a Sunday morning. It isn't to be reminded of how to be good. It isn't even to learn more about the Bible and doctrine and worship and ethics.

The purpose of our faith is to be drawn into the very life of God, to be in union with God, so that the lifeblood of God flows in our veins. 'To be participants in the divine nature' is what it says in 2 Peter. Faith isn't something we look at from the outside and say 'how nice.' It's something we enter into and say - nothing. Because we're speechless, embraced in a love greater than words.

This is not a faith of small things. This is a faith of ultimate things. And you can't get any more ultimate than sharing the very life of God. *That's what we're for.*

And that's what the Trinity is about at the end of the day. I may never really get as excited as Wendy about an isosceles triangle, but I'll certainly get excited about joining in the dance of the Trinity, being in communion with God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Think what these familiar words mean: may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us - embrace us, fill us, draw us into this Holy Trinity - both now and evermore.