God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

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Trinity Sunday C 16-6-2019: Prov 8, Ps 8, Rm 5, Jn 16

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ … God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. [Rom 5.1,5]

Christianity is the only faith where one God is revealed to be a community; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The two other one-God (monotheistic) faiths we know best – our sibling religions Judaism and Islam – don't share this understanding of God as a community. There's an Arabic inscription inside the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem which reads – *God is only One God. Far be it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son*.

So we know God as a community of three persons, and yet as one God. We see the community in the obvious love which our Lord Jesus shares with God – the one he teaches us to call our Father. And last Sunday – Pentecost – we saw how the Spirit of Jesus first came to dwell in and among us, drawing us into communion with God, with Jesus, and with each other. So if the Trinity weren't complicated enough, there's this fourth element; *us*. We believe God is a community, and we also believe we're invited to live our lives embraced in the divine community's love; nurtured so that we might discover ourselves to be the image and likeness of God; community.

This all sounds amazing, but what about our experiences of spiritual drought; our times of crushing loneliness? What about that God of community then?

We only know how important things are when we've had to do

without them. We can only really appreciate God as Trinity – really appreciate the love and wholeness and beauty of community – if we can know life cut off from it. If we don't know this – if we don't have personal experience of such a loss – some stories and analogies can be helpful. Such stories let us share these experiences safely, and not have to go through them personally. One story that helps me comprehend the desolation of life apart from the divine community is Tim Winton's wonderful novel, *Cloudstreet*. There we meet a woman who has experienced devastating loss of community. She's an extraordinary good, strong woman called Oriel Lamb.

Oriel is a rather grumpy mother of six. Tragedy struck her as a child; her mother and sisters were all killed in a bushfire, which she survived. Oriel says, *"Hell is being the last one left."* Tim Winton takes us with Oriel on an incredibly painful journey of life in isolation, and then, thank heaven, the return journey to belonging.

"Hell is being the last one left." It's so true. The *last one left* faces utter, terrible isolation – there's nothing you can share because there's no-one to share it with. No-one to love you; no-one for you to love. All joy, all hope silenced. Who could survive this? You'd want your own heart to stop beating. Oriel does survive – but the pain doesn't stop coming – and new pain comes too.

Cloudstreet begins with an accident that leaves Oriel's favourite son with a permanent mental disability. Part of that disability leaves him unable to see his mother any more. He can see everyone else – even spirits – but just not his Mum. This locks Oriel out all over again, in the terrible isolation she felt after the fire.

This story reminds me that we're only really who we are when we belong. Without someone else, we can't be a whole person; we can't even know who we are without someone to reflect us back to ourselves. Many of us learn how true that is when we

lose someone we've loved, we are suddenly empty; we are lost.

Community is the only way we can be whole people. To be lonely is to be less than whole. Like Oriel Lamb, we know that all too painfully when we're cut off from our loved ones. But I pray that like Oriel did, we will also experience the healing of that pain with the ever-new gift of love and re-built community.

The way we discover our own wholeness is by belonging in community, and that's an important insight we need if we are to grasp what it actually means for us that God is Trinity – three in one, and one in three. God our creator is a community. And the communal character of God the Trinity is stamped on creation; on the symbiotic interdependence there is between us and all Earth-creatures. Creation reflects the true nature of our maker.

We Christians recognise this interdependence – the costly giving by the one for the other – as love. Jesus revealed that love to us through his life and his teaching, but most particularly, through his self-giving love for us, and in his love for the Father.

The community of the Trinity is the reason we, Earth and the universe are the way we are; why everything is in relationship; why we all work best interdependently. It's also the reason that the highest value of all is love. Self-giving love describes the relationship that has existed from before time between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It also describes the way we experience God. Everything we know is freely given; this love is the grace that holds all things together. God is Love.

Before time, Jesus is in a loving relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. And he came to invite all of us to the centre of that relationship – to welcome us as participants in the divine dance of love – of community.

Jesus guides us into this dance in every possible way. His own self-giving life reveals the intensity and presence that he gives to make the dance accessible to everyone. And he sends us the Holy Spirit so we might hear her prayers constantly within us, calling us to join fully in he dance of love.

Trinity life is a relationship of self-giving love; knowing ourselves as loved and lovely. Let me finish with a few words and silences for meditation. Meditate for a while on any of the words that speak to you.

- Love seeks the happiness of the beloved – not ownership or control
- I am not loved because I am beautiful: I am beautiful because I am loved
- The wrath of God is God's wounded love https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s04zdvrBz-c – Jürgen Moltmann & Miroslav Volf
- Love rejoices in the joy of the beloved; suffers with the suffering of the beloved

Recognising that God is a community reveals God's basic character; God is love. As God's creatures, then, it's no surprise that we discover our own wholeness in relationship, in community, in belonging, in love. Amen