

God the Most Holy Trinity – three persons, yet one God

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Trinity Sunday B – Rom 8 12-17

Rom 8 15 ... you have received a spirit of adoption. ¹⁶... the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Paul's saying we're adopted into God's family. It's a lovely image for us; we're more complete as human beings when we belong in a family or a group of friends. *Belonging in community* is intrinsic to our being fully a person; we're social beings. But why are we thinking about this on Trinity Sunday? We puzzle that out by going back to the source.

Let's go back to Genesis 1.26, where we read: ^{26a}...*God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness.* Well, what's God's image and likeness like? What are we really meant to be like? Today, on Trinity Sunday, the two questions come together. Our focus is on God the Most Holy Trinity – three persons, yet one God – *God in community* – and us adopted into that community.

It's a baffling and complex mystery, this three-in-one and one-in-three character of God. But at its most straightforward level, we can say that *God* whom we worship – God, in whose image and likeness we are made – *God is a community*. Our God is a community of such beautiful harmony that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are, for us, in a sense indistinguishable from each other. They have been revealed to us as completely one in their love – loving each other and loving all creatures.

That love is why theology teachers don't want us to replace the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit with alternatives like Creator, Redeemer & Sanctifier or Creator,

Liberator & Sustainer because that's not a loving community – we mask the relationship by calling it a division of labour. It's like saying God the Trinity is three engines, each specialising in different jobs that just happen to co-operate. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is a community of love who co-operate so closely that we can't say who does what. And the love is so complete that we can only comprehend what comes from God as coming from loving community.

But what does all this have to do with us? *God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness.* And Paul writes that we *have received a spirit of adoption. ... that very Spirit [bears] witness with our spirit that we are children of God.* So here we are; a community of people who are mostly not related to each other by blood, and who probably wouldn't know each other if God hadn't adopted us all into this family. And somehow, together in this community, we are called to embody the image and likeness of God. Our pilgrimage, our journey of faith, is to discover what that means; both who we are, and why we've been called.

We're different from a social club or a special interest club. The reason for this community is God's love; God has called us together. And the purpose of this community is the same love we see at work in the community of love we call God whose Name is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The clearest picture we have of the community of love that is God is given to us by Jesus – who we believe is himself God reaching out to people. We see Jesus gather people around him. He creates community. And he doesn't let this community stay indoors and keep all the love to itself. The community of love that Jesus establishes is shown how to be outgoing – active – to address everyone's need to belong in loving community.

Jesus's community of love is shown how to see broken hearts, broken relationships, broken people, and to respond with loving respect and compassion. A community of God's love is creative – Spirit-filled. A community of God's love offers new

ways, new connections, new freedoms, healing. A community of love is a wonderful networker; always creating life-giving connections; always going for hope.

Of course there are good and bad ways to be community. We can belong in a family or a group like a church or a class at school and be perfectly comfortable and fulfilled ourselves. But at the same time, we can also be completely oblivious to people who might feel on the outer. *Our* needs are being met; we're fine. But some aren't. And while that's the case, our community won't be a clear image and likeness of God. Whole church communities can be like that too.

We are in many ways a broken community; but that's not the end of the story. Because we're on the way – we are a pilgrim community following our Lord; we're being created anew, each day, more nearly into the image and likeness of the lovely community that is our God. We're sent help: prophetic voices still speak; gifts of the Spirit like our healing ministry flourish here; compassionate hearts; hospitality ... we're being recreated as a community every day, and we can risk being bold and join in that community-building venture. We can join with all people who exhibit the image and likeness of God and make the worldwide community stronger.

God is a loving community: in that image and likeness God has called us into being. Jesus has shown us how, and the Spirit gives us the gifts to do it. A final word from Jesus: a prayer he offered for his disciples, including us. ^{John 17.20-21} *'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

Amen