**Sermons by The Rev’d Dr. Grayhame Bowcott ©**

***“It’s Just the Way that God Works”***

**Trinity Sunday - May 30th, 2021**

**St. George’s, The Anglican Parish of The Blue Mountains**

## John 3.1-17

## Nicodemus Visits Jesus

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

‘Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

***Let us pray:***

God the Father,
embrace us with your love;
God the Son,
sustain us with through our communion in You;
God the Spirit,
revitalise us with your power and send us out again.
Embrace, sustain, and revitalise us, O Lord

and send us out again with the blessings of Your Trinity.
In the Community of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

***Amen.***

Its on this Sunday, Trinity Sunday, when preachers are tasked with the responsibility of trying to explain the doctrine or teachings of God as being the Holy Trinity,

and I can think of no better way to do this then to talk about the *Missio Dei* or Mission of God and how the divine nature of God calls us to model our faith relationships on community, growth and taking risks for the sake of the Gospel.

When we look at God through the various relationships that we have with Him,

we recognize that there is no one understanding of God that works.

The reason for this is because God relates to us in an abundance of different ways.

For instance we might relate to God as a Father,

a Father who welcomes home his children,

a Father who goes out to bring us back when we are lost or straying,

a Father who protects us and enfolds us in his Grace,

a Father who forgives us and accepts us for who were are.

But then we also understand God in the person of Jesus Christ.

God made human, just like us.

A man who lived and died as we do,

who walked the earth in hardship and in joy in the same way that we live out our lives.

For many people, God, as known in Christ, is personable, someone we can relate to,

someone who redeems us and calls us to be his followers in a community that we call Church.

But then we can’t forget that God is also the Holy Spirit.

A entity that breathes new life into our set ways and expectations.

A Spirit that guides us in our faithfulness,

who enables us with gifts for service and worship,

and then sends us out again into the world to share the love of God with others.

One of the easiest ways to describe God is to understand Him or Her

as being a grouping of Community Relationships.

Its within the very nature of God to find diversity, cooperation, and unique relationships – simply put, that’s just the way that God works!

I’ve now come to a point in my faith where I have changed my interpretation of the understanding that we are created in God’s nature.

I used to take this understanding very literally:

male and female, God created us in the image of God, therefore each of us must contain some of the characteristics and attributes of God.

I used to think: ***individually,*** we are all like God in some way.

But, in my wise old age (and baldness)….. I’ve come across a problem with this understanding.

If you and I, as individuals, are like God,

how can we be like a God who is Father and Son and Holy Spirit,

unless, of course, we have multiple persons or personalities too?

And that’s not to say that some of us don’t! (smirk)

But what if we understand ourselves as being created in the image of God,

not as individuals, but rather as a community?

Is it possible that in the same way that God accepts and embraces us as a Father,

and then sustains us through the communion of Jesus Christ,

and then sends us out into the world through the gifts and guidance of the Holy Spirit,

that this is the way that things are supposed to work for us too?

What if we understood ourselves as being created for the purpose of being Community?

That the function and purpose of our congregations was to model ourselves on the Community of Relationships that we call the Holy Trinity?

How would that change the way we act as Church?

Allow me to share three examples of groupings of people who are connected together in some way because of their faith, and I want you to think about them for a moment and decide, voting for or against, as to whether or not you believe them to be Church.

Okay. I’ll share all of them with you first and then I’ll ask which ones you think are Church.

Example #1:

Our first example is of an ordained minister travelling once a week to visit a retirement home facility.

Each week she leads a bible-based conversation with elderly residents (some a little more aware of the happening than others) who gather together in a circle and, for the most part, simply enjoy hearing her tell stories about the Bible.

An average of 25 residents participate and the sessions usually last for forty minutes or so. At the end they share a prayer and then continue on with their day.

Example #2:

Our next example is of a gathering of children and young families that takes place every other Friday night. Within an hour and a half period of time parents come with their children, who are then dressed in costumes, led through Bible stories, crafts and games, with the evening concluding in a family-style dinner.

Throughout the evening their may be simple prayers shared and modern Christian themed songs learned. And sometimes the gathering gets a little messy and rambunctious along the way!

Example #3:

Our final example finds itself spread out across the Toronto area.

While commuters travel back and forth to work on the Subway, they use their cell phone or ipad to open up an app called Redeem the Commute.

Through the app they are introduced to prayers, Bible readings and a video made by a young Anglican priest who explains the readings and prayers to them in contemporary language and understandings.

While this example consists of around 100 individuals each accessing the app by themselves, the participants are invited to come together once a month for a social event at a predetermined location: a park, a bar or maybe a movie theatre.

Now that you have heard the three examples, which ones do you think are Church?

A nursing home. A youth gathering. A online app that connects others together on their way to and from work on the transit.

They are so very different, aren’t they? But isn’t that just the way that God works?

How is our definition of Church based on the way that we understand God in our midst?

Archbishop Rowan Williams, the past Archbishop of Canterbury, defines Church as “what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter in their encounter with each other.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Let’s think about this definition for a moment.

What insight does it share with us about God and about the Church?

For starters, we’d have to admit that there is no one type of being church.

God in Jesus Christ is encountered by different people in different ways all the time.

If God is diversity, then we need to accept diversity amongst ourselves,

(perhaps even in our definitions of Church).

This might mean being more flexible and open to changes and differing ideas of how church looks and what church feels like.

And then we need to practice what we preach.

Like the Father who welcomes, embraces, protects and forgives us,

as a Church we need to make sure that our doors are always open.

Once we see the end of this wretched pandemic:

Why can’t our church be full of guests seven days a week?

What are we doing to actively invite seekers, partners, those perhaps frustrated with past faith experiences to join us,

that we may give ourselves in service to others,

and that we reconcile our differences and set aside the barriers that divide us?

And, just like Jesus, the Son, who walks along side us,

And sustains us through our relationship with Him,

as a Church we need to actively engage in the Community in which we live.

We need to continue to care for the needs of not only our congregation, but the needs of the neighbourhood,

and we need to invite the wider Community to consider experiencing the way of Jesus not as experts, but as lifelong pilgrims on life’s journey together.

Like the Holy Spirit who renews us,

equips us with the gifts of ministry

and then sends us out into the World,

as a Church, our focus should be on spiritual renewal,

on celebrating the gifts God has given us,

and then never being satisfied by remaining within these four walls,

for we can box up the Spirit in any place or community.

But we can follow the Spirit to where she is leading us to go.

I passionately believe that Church need to reflect the diversity of God as expressed in the relationship of the Holy Trinity.

This might be in the necessity of a retirement home.

This might be in a community hall or gymnasium with a group of young families.

This might even be on the Go-Train that carries thousands of people to and from work every day.

But it will be in those places where these growing congregations are ministering and reaching out to those not in our pews for the express purpose of introducing them to our God who is a God of mission, of relationship and of diversity.

So, if there is one thought to take away today, may it be the understanding of

God the Trinity as diversity, relationship and mission in the world.

Allow me to close in prayer.

 God the Father,
embrace us with your love;
God the Son,
sustain us with through our communion in You;
God the Spirit,
revitalise us with your power and send us out again.
Embrace, sustain, and revitalise us, O Lord

and send us out again with the blessings of Your Trinity.
In the Community of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

***Amen.***

1. Graham Cray, editor., *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*. (London, England: Church House Publishing, 2009) v-vi. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)