**Sunday 23rd May 2021**

Psalm 29. John 3: 1-12. Acts 2: 1-11

Three readings this morning. In the Psalm – God represented as being a thunderous voice – more powerful than anyone could imagine. Confirms that He has control over all things.

In John 3, Nicodemus approaches Jesus as a teacher. Knowing that He was from God, performing miracles, being involved with people. An approachable and gentle character.

Finally in Acts 2 – the record of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit being sent to the disciples to enable them to speak in tongues. The appearance of the Holy Spirit could not be described accurately – it sounded “like” a violent wind and it appeared as what “seemed” to be tongues of fire.

These experiences show that God met people in a threefold figure.

1. Creator, Lord of the history of salvation. Father and Judge.
2. As the Lord who in the incarnated figure of Christ, lived among human beings and present in their midst as the “Resurrected One”.
3. Holy Spirit, experienced as the helper or intercessor in the power of new life.

The Holy Spirit has been alluded to all the way through the bible. But the term “Holy Trinity” was never used either in OT or NT. The only time that all three were brought together was in Matthew 28:19, in the great commission – “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.

There have always been tensions in describing the Trinity. When Jesus came as man to earth, it was never to contradict the Hebrew OT scripture in Deuteronomy 6:4 “The Lord our God is one Lord” – but His coming presented the early Christians especially the task of coping with the implications. One God, but with the coming of Jesus and the presence of the power of God among them through the Holy Spirit.

In the 4th Century Arius sought to maintain a formal understanding of the Oneness of God. In defense of the Oneness, he was obliged to dispute the sameness of essence of the Son and Holy Spirit with the Father.

To maintain the Oneness of God (monotheism) there had to be one Supreme Being; therefore, the Son and the Holy Spirit became subordinate to God. This recognized their unity, but it came at the cost of losing their equality.

As the 4th Century progressed the distinctiveness of the three and their unity were brought together, in single doctrine of one essence and three persons.

In 325 the Council of Nicaea stated a crucial formula for that doctrine in its confession that the Son is “of the same substance as the Father”, but very little was said about the Holy Spirit.

Over the next half century St Athanasius defended and refined the Nicene formula. By the end of the 4th Century the Trinity took substantially the form it has maintained ever since.

No more confusion then??!!

How do we come to terms with our own understanding of the Trinity?

I confess that I still struggle sometimes with my understanding of the Trinity and can succumb to both extremes stated above – separating them so much and acknowledging God as the one with power and authority and therefore seeing Jesus and the Holy Spirit as sub-ordinate. I deny them the power over creation that they also hold – I deny their full authority as God. I can fall into the trap of separating them into their individual representations in the readings; God is the thunderous, controlling Father. Jesus is knowledgeable, gentle and approachable – so much so that I can fall into the trap of representing Him as a really lovely man who has God with Him. The Holy Spirit remains difficult to pin down and describe – a wind blowing here and there with no way of explaining. His purpose within me is simply for the benefit to provide me with ways to speak to other people.

Other times I acknowledge that all three persons are equal in power and authority, capable of all things equally, that I forget their distinct characters and individual purposes.

And once we have overcome the challenge of how we personally understand the Trinity, we have to be sensitive and careful about how we represent the Trinity to others.

If we lump them altogether then the whole character and desire of God towards His creation is diluted and lost – we leave the impression that God is simply a powerful Judge – and often portrayed as angry.

If we give each of them an individual character, which sit in opposition to each other, then we portray that we worship three gods. If we desire justice, we pray to God, if we desire mercy and healing then we pray to Jesus, and if we desire words or giftings then we pray to the Holy Spirit.

Here is my attempt to explain the Oneness of three persons.

We have a puzzle of three pieces. When the pieces are together, they form one picture. If we take the puzzle apart, we are left with three individual pieces.

Each one has a part of the picture on it, but none of them has the whole picture.

Each piece will survive as an individual piece, but until they are joined their purpose is not complete.

Which piece is the most important to provide the fullness of the picture? None of them – they have to work together.

If one piece is taken away and put somewhere different, it will not be completing its purpose. There is no other puzzle the same as this one. So you cannot interchange one piece with another piece from another puzzle – or try to fit it into another.

Each piece requires the other two pieces in order to show the whole, complete picture.

God is Father and Judge, who shows compassion, mercy and love to everyone.

Without Jesus, His one and only Son, His compassion, mercy and love will not have been represented in fullness. His willingness to show sacrificial love for our sake.

If Jesus had been willing to die on a cross, but was not the Son of God, then what purpose would that have served? He would have been a good man, but not able to provide the forgiveness from the Father. His death would not have provided the opportunity for us to have a relationship with God. Jesus always spoke of His Father in heaven, for us to have a share in His kingdom – He did not work in solitude for His own glory, ever!

The Holy Spirit enables people, both in the bible and ever since, to hear God more fully, to interpret His teachings. He provides the gifts that we need at any and every circumstance. But again, the purpose is to declare the wonders of God. He does not simply provide us with power because He is able to, or to make us look good, but for the sole purpose to bring God to us and those around us more fully.

Each person is part of the full picture of God. Each piece needs the other two pieces to show the whole picture – or character of God. No piece on its own can reflect the whole character and desire of God. Unity of all three persons is required – but in no way dilutes the truth that “The Lord our God is one Lord”.