

Sunday 30th May 2021
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Romans 5:1 – 5
Theme: “How shall I call you?”
“The Trinity: a summary of our experience of God”

Introduction:

The Trinity? Boring, well incomprehensible anyway! Creeds? Long-winded and tedious!

Well, sure sometimes we tend to think this way when we think of the Trinity and the Creeds of the Church....

But I want to suggest to you this morning that the Creeds of the Christian Church give us a concise statement of what we know and believe about God, and that the doctrine of the Trinity is a summary of our knowledge and belief about God. Our confession that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit not only sums up our experience of God, but it also provides us with a framework to talk to our friends and others about our faith *about who God is, about what He has done for us, and about what He is still doing for us.*

Well, this morning let's use the framework of the Trinity to talk about what we as Christians have experienced with regard to God and what we believe about God. As a guide to help us flesh out this framework, I thought that this morning we would use that song of Robin Mann's that we just sang, the song *How shall I call you? (AT #43).*

Verse 1: The Father

This song is structured around the doctrine of the Trinity: that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The song begins:

**How shall I call you? Maker of heaven,
Poet of sunset and painter of sky.**

Father almighty who's running to find us,
Giving his Son who must suffer and die (v. 1)

Robin Mann begins his song where our experience of God begins: with the world around us. When we look at the wonders of the world and universe around us, and when we look at sky above us, these wonders drive us to the conclusion that there is an mighty powerful Being out there, an “almighty” God who has made it all. In one of his letters, Paul sums this up when he says:

Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen: they are perceived in the things that God has made (Rom. 1:20).

Of course, there are many people today who refuse to acknowledge the existence of an “almighty” Creator. They refuse to acknowledge the existence of God, and rationalise away the existence of everything by saying that it has come about by chance, by “blind” chance.

Why do they refuse to acknowledge the existence of God, and rationalise his existence away? Well, because basically they don’t want to change their life. And if they acknowledged God’s existence, then they know that all sorts of consequences would follow: because it is totally illogical and irrational to acknowledge the existence of God, and then to live as if He doesn’t exist....

The mere existence of this world *and the universe around us*, and the order and the design in the world around us, point us straight to the existence of an “almighty” God. We may not be able to see God face to face, but we most certainly can see his footprints wherever we look. So Robin Mann begins his song by writing:

**How shall I call you? Maker of heaven,
Poet and sunset and painter of sky.**

We can deduce that God exists from staring in wonder at the world around us, but the world around us doesn’t tell us a whole lot about what God is like. If you look at beauty in nature, it is easy to believe that God is loving and kind, but if you turn again and see instead some of the horrors of nature *such as animals eating other animals*, then it is not so easy to believe that God is loving and kind.

The only way that we can discover the heart of God, the only way that we can find out what God is like, is by God showing us what he is like.

And the God “above us” has done that: by sending His own Son into this world! (*John 1:1, 14, 18*).

We can confess, as Robin Mann does in his song, that God is our dear Father because we have listened to what Jesus, God’s Son, has to say about God. Jesus made it clear in his preaching and teaching that God loves each of us as a dear Father loves his dear children (e.g., *Matt. 6:9; 7:7-11; Luke 15:11-24*).

Furthermore, Jesus claimed that God, His Father, had send him to this earth for a reason: not only to tell us about Him, but also to suffer and to die “for us”, *to take upon himself our blame and our punishment*, so that we might be enabled to forgiven by God (*Mark 8:31; 10:45; Matt. 26:28*).

And God showed us that we can trust what Jesus said about Him, and what he said about why he had to suffer and to die, by raising Jesus from the dead on the third day....

So Robin Mann can write about the God “above us” that He is:
**Father Almighty who’s running to find us,
Giving his Son who must suffer and die.**

By the way, I think that this is a great line:
‘Father Almighty *who’s running to find us*’.

It reminds us of Jesus’ great parable of the Prodigal Son, where the father runs to his son. Remember what Jesus said:

The younger son was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was moved to compassion, and he ran, threw his arms around his son and kissed him... (*Luke 15:20*).

It is through looking at Jesus and listening to Jesus of Nazareth, God’s Son become a human being, that we can know what the God “above us” is like (*Matt. 11:27; John 1:18*).

Verse 2: The Son

The confession of those who followed Jesus as his disciples, and those who wrote about him in the books and the letter of the New Testament is that Jesus wasn't only a spokesperson for God, but that he was in actual fact God Himself "among us". It was the only way that they could make sense of their experience of Jesus: to confess that Jesus was God among them.

The disciple Thomas, for example, when he saw Jesus alive again, he cried out to Jesus:

"My Lord and my God!" (*John 20:28*).

Matthew, in his Gospel, calls Jesus "Immanuel" which means "God with us" (*Matt. 1:23*). John starts his Gospel with those famous words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word became a human being and lived among us (*John 1:1,14*).

And John goes on to say:

No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father's side, he has made him known (*John 1:18*).

Paul in his letters says of Jesus:

In him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell... (*Col. 1:19; cf. 2:9*).

Robin Mann in his song makes this same confession, about Jesus' "God-ness", *although he does it in a poetical way*. He writes about Jesus:

**How shall I call you? Saviour and shepherd,
Lover of children and teacher and friend;
Healer of blind man and healer of leper,
You are beginning and middle and end.**

Robin Mann is saying here of Jesus: "You were there at the beginning, and you'll be there at the end", which is the confession that John makes of both God the Father, and Jesus in the last book of the Bible when

he says of both God and Jesus that both are “the Alpha and the Omega”, the beginning and the end” (*Rev. 1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:13*).

Robin Mann also adds that Jesus is “the middle”, which is his way of reminding us of Jesus’ promise of his continued presence with us in this “middle” part of time. Remember Jesus said just before he ascended:

“I am with you always, to the end of the age” (*Matt. 28:20*).

Well, if Jesus is “God among us”, then by looking at Jesus, we see what God is like.

Listen again to how Robin Mann describes Jesus, and see in this description a picture of God’s love for you and for all people:

**How shall I call you? Lover of children,
Shepherd and teacher and brother and friend;
Healer of blind man and healer of leper:
You are beginning and middle and end** (*v. 2*).

If we want to introduce our friends to God, there is only one way to do it: and that’s by introducing them to Jesus. When people encounter Jesus, they meet God.... Jesus was God “among us”.

So, it is important *as I’ve said in the last weeks* to know the Gospels so that we can introduce people to Jesus by telling the stories that he told to people, and by sharing with them what Jesus said and did.... As we do this, *and as we encourage our friends and others to read the Gospels for themselves, they meet Jesus, God “among us”*.

Verse 3: The Holy Spirit

Our experience of God, though, isn’t limited to God “above us” or even God “among us”. We who are God’s children *through our baptism and our faith in Jesus as our Saviour* have also experienced God “in us”. Jesus promised his first followers that after he ascended to “heaven”, he would send the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, to live in them: the Holy Spirit would lead them and guide them, and empower them to live as his followers (*John 14:26; Acts 1:8; cf. Gal. 5:22-23*).

And we, too, have experienced the power of the Spirit working in us. It is my confession, and I guess your confession, that your life has been utterly changed by the power of the Spirit working in us, by the presence of God “in us”. It is certainly Robin Mann’s confession in his song.

He writes of God:

**How shall I call you? Spirit of comfort,
Cloud in the daytime and fire in the night;
Guide as we wander, protector in danger,
Listener and helper and giver of sight (v. 3).**

There are some, *like the members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses*, who argue that the Spirit of God in us is just the force or energy of God in us.

But that is not what Jesus says. He regards the Holy Spirit as a person, as part of God. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit with the personal pronoun “he” (*e.g., John 14:26; 16:13*). And Jesus links the Father, the Son, and the Spirit tightly together. Listen to what Jesus said to his followers shortly before he ascended. He said to them:

Go, then, to peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

Nor is it the confession of writers of the books and letters of the New Testament. Their confession is that the Spirit is a person, and is part of God (*e.g., Acts 5:3-4; 13:2; 2 Cor. 13:13*). The Holy Spirit is God “in us”.

Robin Mann makes the same confession in a poetical way, when he calls the Spirit of God:

**How shall I call you? Spirit of comfort,
Cloud in the daytime and fire in the night.
Guide as we wander, protector in danger,
Listener and helper, and giver of sight.**

This description recalls the fact that *God* led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt by means of a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire in the night. In the book of Exodus, we are told:

During the day the Lord was in front of them in pillar of cloud to show them the way, and during the night he went in front of them in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel night and day (*Exodus 13:21*).

In the same way, God “in us” or God “with us” leads us as we live our life: he reminds us of Jesus, leads us in the right directions, and empowers us to live like Jesus: in love and compassion to those around us. As Robin Mann puts it:

**Guide as we wander, protector in danger,
Listener and helper, and giver of sight.**

Conclusion:

Robin Mann’s song concludes with him praising God, the God who has revealed Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Whenever we think about who God is, about what He has done for us, and what He is still doing for us, how can we not end our chain of thought by praising God.

Listen to how Robin Mann finishes his song:
**How shall I call you? Master and servant,
Lord of the seasons and Lord of the years;
Faithful and constant in loving and mercy,
Giver of laughter and taker of tears.**

***Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit,
Let’s sing it again and again.
Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit,
For ever and ever. Amen.***

The doctrine of the Trinity is not a boring, irrelevant notion. No, rather, the doctrine of the Trinity gives us a framework to say thank you to God for all that He has done for us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*as we did in the Children’s Address*).

And the doctrine of the Trinity gives us a framework to talk to one another and to others about we know about God (*as we have done this morning using Robin Mann’s song to flesh things out with*).