

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera Qld

26th May 2024 – Trinity Sunday

Romans 8:12-17

CENTRED IN TRIUNE LOVE

Not so long ago, if we wanted to find out both where we were, and which way to go to get to where we wanted to be, it was a lot harder to do than it is today. To determine our location, we would either have to identify landmarks and use a map or prior knowledge to work it out, or if we were somewhere like out at sea we would need to use a device like a sextant to take readings from the sun or stars and then use some complicated mathematical formulas to position ourselves on a map. And to discover which way to go to reach our desired location? A map and a compass were the only sure way to go. How things have changed thanks to technology. Now, to let others know immediately where we are in case of an emergency, we can activate an EPIRB (emergency position-indicating radio beacon), which can hopefully be picked up by authorities anywhere in the world and send help on its way to us quickly. And for directions? We've gone from using road maps/directories to having first of all a GPS unit like Navman or TomTom, to now using maps on our mobile phone or having navigation units built into our cars. To be centred on where we are, and to be sure of which way to go to reach our destination, is now easier than it has ever been before.

One way these location and guidance systems can work is by a process called Triangulation. For an EPIRB or GPS unit, this means that by exchanging signals with at least three satellites your exact location can be pinpointed by working out how far you are from each one. In the case of a mobile phone, and we see this sometimes on TV shows or movies when the police are trying to track down someone, it works as the phone exchanges signals with at least three towers, and again working out the distance from each one then gives the exact location. This might not be how it always works, but this method of triangulation between three points to find both your exact location and then your desired direction is one method this technology uses to help us out like this.

Three satellites or phone towers working together as one to tell us both where we are and give us directions and guidance on where to go. Sounds like the Trinity. The Trinity is one of those

teachings we have in the Bible which can be a bit hard to understand for our human minds, but it is so important. But it was only two or three hundred years after Jesus' life on earth that it was set out as a definite teaching, largely due to the Creeds of the Church being put together to clearly state what Christians believed. There is no place in the Bible which actually says, 'Triune' God, but this idea of God as three-in-one, tri-unity, Triune or Trinity, is there throughout the Bible. In Genesis 1:2, at Creation we read that, 'the Spirit of God was moving over the water', and in John 1:1, 'In the beginning was the Word (Jesus), and the Word was with God and the Word was God'. Both the Son and the Spirit have always been there. In Matthew's Gospel as part of His last words to the disciples, Jesus says, 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit', and in John 10:30 Jesus says, 'I and the Father are one'. Both our reading here in Romans 8 and today's Gospel in John 3 also talk about the Trinity, as One God, working together for us. And there are other Bible references as well to make us certain of this teaching so that it can be said that the basic measure of whether someone is a Christian, or if a church is considered a Christian Church, is; do they believe and confess the Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons, one God?

But it's not just a theoretical teaching, it is such an important part of our Christian faith. Knowing and confessing God in this way tells us so much about who He is, His relationship with us, and our relationship with Him both for this life and the life to come. A great way to have a look at the work of each person of the Trinity, and in there to see God's love for us and how the three come together, is to look at Martin Luther's very good explanation of the Apostles Creed in the Small Catechism.

The first part focuses on God the Father. Luther uses phrases in here like; 'I believe that God has created me and everything that exists'. 'God also gives me everything I need from day to day'. He talks about God protecting us from danger and keeping us safe. And why does God do all this? Only because He loves us, we do not deserve it. So, everything that God does for us and gives us comes solely from His love, not from any merit or reward for us. And the call for us now? To live a life in response to that; 'All I can do is thank, praise, serve and obey God'. That picture of the Father we are given here comes from so many accounts in the Bible; Psalm 23, the Parable of the Lost Son,

John 3:16, 'for God so loved the world ...'. As our Father, God loves each person so much that He does all He can to both provide for and protect us, and to keep us close to Him. In return all we can do is to live as the children He has made us to be.

The person of the Trinity we can perhaps relate to best is the Son, Jesus, because we can very much put Him into human form. It's important to remember that He was always there as part of the Trinity, He didn't just begin to exist 2,000 years ago in a stable in Bethlehem. Jesus is also both God and human, another very important Bible teaching even though it may be hard for us to understand. And His role, as we are told many times in the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments, was to come to save us; to be the one perfect sacrifice for our sins so we can come back to a full relationship with God. Luther sums up many Bible passages here when he writes; 'He set me free from all my sins, from death, and from the power of the devil.' And He did that at the price of His life. Think about that, and what that means to you. As a person who we can picture we can relate to Jesus' suffering in His life, to all He gave up for us, and His death for our sakes. But also, we know the good news that because He rose to new life, we also now have new life in Him. And again, our part now is laid out at the end of Luther's explanation here; we now belong to Him, He is our king. And we can now happily serve Him. Jesus dying and rising for me is not just an, 'okay it's over, let's just live off what we've been given', but in receiving His forgiveness and having Him as our King means we can now live our lives in and for Him.

And the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is for many of us the hardest to get our heads around. Most Christian churches agree on the work of the Father and the Son, but we have different churches because of differences in understanding how the Spirit works in and among us. This leads to different understandings of how we come to faith, teachings and practices about Baptism and Holy Communion, and how the Church is organised and carries out its ministry and mission. What Luther writes here sums up very well our understanding: 'I believe that on my own I can never come to Jesus Christ my Lord, or believe in him, no matter how hard I try. But the Holy Spirit has called me to Jesus by the good news about him. The Spirit has led me to know and trust Jesus, made me holy, and kept me in the Christian faith.' Our understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit, based on our

interpretation of the Bible, is that we are saved by our faith, and even that faith is a gift from God by the Spirit. This also comes out in our reading here today; ‘But you will live, if by the help of God’s Spirit you say “No” to your desires. Only those people who are led by God’s Spirit are his children.’ (v. 13b, 14). And as we are made God’s children by the Spirit we now also live in and with Him again. Jesus described the Holy Spirit as the One who would come when He had returned to heaven to be with us always in all things. It’s now by the work of the Spirit that we come to faith, grow in our faith, and try to live out our faith in everything we think, say, and do as God’s children.

All this coming back together helps us to be centred in the love our Triune God. When we are lost and don’t know where we are, it is the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together to bring us back to Him. When we struggle to know which way to go in following God and both living out and sharing His love, or perhaps we do know what way to go but we struggle to get there by ourselves, it is also God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit working in our lives who both calls us on the path to follow Him, and by His love and forgiveness helps us along that path. In reflecting on who God is, and how in three Persons He works together as One, we can live in His love, be thankful for His love, and respond in our lives to His love. As our Creator, Protector and Provider, Saviour and King, and the One who gives us the gift of our faith and helps us to go and grow in our faith, we can always know that with Him we are Centred in Triune Love. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Has technology changed how you both find your location and get directions at all? Has this had much of an effect on your life?
- Go back over the work of the three persons of the Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Think about the role each of the three plays in our lives, our faith, our relationship with God. What strength and encouragement do you get from the work of the Trinity?
- Is there one person of the Trinity you can relate to more than the others, or which is more confusing to you than the others? Is there a reason for this?

Pray: thank God for the love He shows to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ask Him to help us to live our lives in worship to Him and as those who wish to share His love with others.

Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
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