

**Exodus 34<sup>1–8</sup>; 2 Cor 13<sup>11–13</sup>; Matt 28<sup>16–20</sup>**

*Ballarat Cathedral*

*4<sup>th</sup> June 2023 Trinity Sunday*

When you first realised that what today is, did you think to yourself, “Oh, great—I love Trinity Sunday!”?

There are a few special days in the church’s year that we enthusiastically participate in: Christmas, Easter Day, Palm Sunday (especially if there’s a donkey involved and palms to wave). The college in London of which I was principal used to have Toy Sunday. Children brought in their beloved toys, which were blessed during the service and afterwards taken to the local children’s hospital and given to the sick children. What an enjoyable service that was! In the church in which I grew up, we all looked forward to the Sunday School Anniversary. The children loved it—they all performed various songs and stories they had learned throughout the year; the adults loved it, because the children all looked so cute, and if we were lucky they messed things up.

*Daffodil song.*

These are some examples of engaging, heart-warming services. But **Trinity** Sunday? For most of us the Trinity is the most difficult doctrine of the church, often expressed in learned words like *three in one and one in three*, *consubstantial* and *co-eternal*. It is an elusive idea that we all struggle with. One God, yet three persons. How can this be? You will be relieved to that I have intention of

trying to explain it—most of the explanations I've heard over the years have left me feeling more confused than ever.

So what is today all about? What is the point of having a Sunday celebrating a doctrine most of us don't understand? Well, to put it simply, Trinity Sunday is not meant as a sort of philosophical talk-fest, but as a chance to celebrate the living story of our faith. On this Sunday we remind ourselves of God's total involvement in our day-to-day, ordinary, and often confusing lives. The holy Trinity is an experience, not a theory.

Let me explain. We have just heard the ending of Matthew's record of Jesus' life. It has been a fascinating and exciting life, full of amazing public miracles, powerful teaching to vast, enthralled crowds, and also deeply intimate conversations between Jesus and his inspired but uncertain disciples. And, as Matthew has taken us through his story, we have been there in our imagination with those disciples, and in hearing the story, we have experienced much of what they experienced. Jesus has come to us, has spoken to us, has shown us God's love.

And Matthew brings this amazing life to a triumphant end by Jesus' words summing up the three ways in which the disciples—and we—have experienced God. These three kinds of experience we call the Trinity.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,

baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

But this sounds more like a beginning than an end, surely? It's about how we should live our lives from now on, in the context of the Trinity—not a concept, but a living force.

'Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations'. Share the wonderful news with everyone that heaven has come to earth, 'baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. That is not just a ritual formula: it is a summary of what makes new life possible. The Father has come to earth in the person of His Son; the Son is leaving physically, but his Spirit remains with them, and us, forever: 'I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

So, Trinity Sunday is a reminder that we, Jesus' struggling disciples, are being charged to carry on the work of God that Jesus started among us. God became a human being so that we humans might become divine. It is a day to celebrate and live out our salvation, to give thanks for the fact that the eternal God who is *out there* is also *in here*.

We don't know how the disciples responded immediately to Jesus' words: what was there to say? In this sense, we are better off than they were: we can respond with that great celebratory chorus that we know as the Nicene

Creed. It summarises the Trinity as the dynamic core of our Christian lives.

It was put together 1600 years ago as a corrective to some ideas that were being put about by various teachers, which undermined the whole glory of the faith. They were saying God is so perfect, so far above and beyond humanity, that he can have nothing to do with us. Jesus, was simply a great man who pointed out some aspects of this unreachable God. The spirit is just our memories of the good things Jesus did and said. There is ultimately no hope for us.

No, said the church leaders, ours is a threefold faith of hope and assurance. We have come to know the almighty, untouchable God, maker of heaven and earth. We have also known him when this true God came down to earth and became human. God and his son share with us their spirit, the one who gives us life, to the end of time.

In that sense, the creed is more of a personal testimony than a definition of what are, and are not, the right things to believe in order to be saved. It sums up the joyful message of Trinity Sunday. None of us can ever completely explain these statements, but we can now, on this Trinity Sunday, stand and join together and repeat those joyful words.

... *the creed*