

## **Sermon for Sunday 26 May 2024 – Trinity Sunday**

**Revd Canon Simon Pitcher, Rector**

***Isaiah 6.1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8.12-17; John 3.1-17***

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Please do be seated.

Jesus talks about being born of the spirit, and Saint Paul writes, 'All who are led by the spirit of God are children of God'. When I was thinking about what to say this morning, that phrase caught my attention. What does it mean to be children of God? I want to begin by telling you a story from the Book of Genesis, and it relates to the picture that I've given you, so we'll come back to that in a minute. In the Book of Genesis, Chapter 18, there's a beautiful story concerning a meeting between God and Abraham and Abraham's wife, Sarah. The story tells us that Abraham and Sarah are old and without children. Abraham faces the prospect of no descendants; of his name being forgotten, and of course, it's a cause of emptiness and sorrow for this elderly couple.

One day, he and his wife are camped at the oaks of Mamre. Looking up, Abraham sees a visitor, and he understands that he's being visited by the Lord. But interestingly, the Lord, singular, is described in the story as three angels. So it's the Lord, but Abraham sees three angels. And so for Christians, this Old Testament story appears to be a revelation of the Holy Trinity to Abraham. And the Lord comes to Abraham where Abraham is, in his life, at the Oaks of Mamre, but where he is in his life is feeling old and feeling empty and feeling a bit pointless. But Abraham receives the Lord with honour and with worship. We're told that Abraham bows down to honour the Lord and invites the Lord to wash in a little bit of water, to rest, and to receive hospitality. Sarah takes some flour and she makes the best bread that she can make for the Lord, and Abraham takes the best calf from the flock, that's killed and it's cooked.

While the Lord, three angels, rest with Abraham, the Lord promises to Abraham and Sarah that they will have a child despite their old age. Sarah is so incredulous was that she laughs. The Lord says, Well, why did you laugh? She said, Well, I didn't. Yes, you did laugh. It seems so unlikely that at this stage in life, the Lord will bless them with a child. But the Lord God's promise to Abraham was that he would have so many descendants, that they would be more numerous than the sands on the seashore or the stars in the sky. That's how many descendants Abraham would have. Abraham believes the promise that the Lord makes, and the promise came true. Where once there was emptiness and loneliness and sorrow and a sense of loss, the visit of the Lord replaces those things with a sense of joy and life and a future.

It's a Christian understanding that all those who come to God through faith are children of Abraham. That each of us here are descendants of Abraham because God's promise wasn't just a genetic promise. It was the promise that all those who share Abraham's faith will be children of Abraham. Each one of us called here then, is evidence that God's promise to Abraham came true. We belong to the family of God through the gift of the spirit, through faith. That's how the promise to Abraham came true. What St Paul writes to the Romans is that our membership of the family is sealed and becomes true because God

blesse us with the gift of the Holy Spirit of Jesus, and when we receive the Holy spirit of Jesus, we receive the joy, the grace, the blessing of knowing that we belong, of knowing that we are known, that we're loved, that we are accepted by God where we are.

I've given each of you a copy of a very famous icon, if you'd like to turn to it now. This icon is called The Trinity. It's also called the Hospitality of Abraham because it's an illustration of the story that I've just described to you. It was painted in the 15th century in the Ukraine by an artist called Rublev. What you have in front of you is on the left, God. These are the three angels, the Lord that Abraham saw, and the artist is conveying how he understands the story. So on the left, it's God the Father, and you'll see that God the Father's hand, is raised in a blessing towards the cup in the middle of the table. The central angel is Jesus, and he in turn is also blessing the cup that seems to be offered to him by the Father. So that possibly reminds us of the words of Jesus as he prayed in Gethsamene, 'Father, if it's possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but as you will'. Then the angel on the right-hand side is the Holy Spirit. If you look, the three angels form a circle, don't they? They each lean into each other and acknowledge each other. The artist is intending in this picture to convey the fact that there is worship and prayer and love flowing between the three characters of the Trinity.



Over the central figure of Jesus, you can see a tree, and that's possibly the tree of life. It's meant to perhaps indicate Jesus's death on the cross, and the subsequent resurrection of Jesus and the eternal gift of life that we receive through faith in Christ. Over the Holy Spirit, you can just make a a horn shape. It's a a bit like a crescent shape, and that is a mountain. It's a bit bent over this mountain, but possibly that reminds us of Jesus ascending to heaven. It also reminds us of our journey home to God, our spiritual journey home to God in the Spirit as we climb up towards God. What we have is a picture that reminds us of some words we heard from Jesus a few Sundays ago when he prayed, words from St John; 'That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, that I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me'.

The blue colour on Jesus's robe symbolises his divinity; the brown is meant to be his earthly life. Gold speaks about the glory of God, and the The Holy Spirit's colours are blue and green - the blue colour is his divinity, and the green is the gift of new life. You'll see that the Jesus figure and the Holy Spirit figure both bend their heads towards the Father, but the artist paints them all, all three of them, on the same level to indicate their equality. But the other interesting thing about the story, or the picture, is that this side of the table is open. It's as if the artist has intended the viewer to look at this picture and to be drawn in. So the figure of Jesus is blessing the cup, but seemingly offering it to the viewer, to us. So It's a Eucharistic image to receive from Christ and to receive in the love and the prayer and the worship that is the life of Christ. The opportunity to add our prayers and our worship and to be drawn into the life of the Trinity. So the unity of God, the togetherness, the love that flows between Father, Son, and Holy spirit, it's not exclusive, it's inclusive. We're invited to be drawn into it, to add our worship and our prayers and our love into that dynamic nature of God. And that's what the church is called to be, the figure on this side of a table, each one of us, but all of us together, sharing in the worship and the love and the work of the Spirit and of God.

I want you to take the picture home, it's yours to keep. Use it to remind you that, just as to Abraham, the Lord comes to you where you are and meets you where you are. As a church and as pilgrims, we're given the opportunity to receive the Lord where we are and to worship him and to offer the best that we have to offer. The Lord will bless what we have to offer as he blessed what Abraham offered, and he would invite us into that same relationship that he invited Abraham, to become children of God through faith. And then we'll be equipped by the Spirit to live as witnesses, disciples, evangelists, to help others to come and take their place at the table with the Lord. That's what that picture says to me and what our readings say to me today, and you might like to think about that.

It might all sound a bit daunting, and we might therefore with the Prophet Isaiah. In the first reading that we heard this morning, the Prophet Isaiah has a vision of heaven, and he sees the glory of God, and he feels totally overwhelmed by it. It's actually a reading that proves that God invented steam engines, because we've got shaking pivots and we've got smoke and we've got our coals burning. So you see, steam engines come from God. Actually, it's a vision of heaven, really. We're given words, a description of the overwhelming glory that Isaiah sees. Because he's just mortal and he sees heaven, he says, 'Woe is me', and we can sense his unworthiness. The prophet is going to be sent by God to speak to the people of Israel in exile, far from home, and he's going to be called by God to give to the people of Israel

words of comfort and hope. He's basically saying, 'Who me? Why am I here? What have you chosen me for? Who am I to share in the work of God?' The prophet is touched on his lips by a burning coal, which are basically a symbol of saying, 'Yes, you, you are cleansed, equipped, and freed and empowered to speak the words that God will give to you, speak those words and live those words to your community.' That, too, is an image, hopefully to us, the gift of the Holy Spirit to free our lips and our lives to be witnesses to God.

From those things, from the picture and our Bible reading, we see that the nature of God is the prayer and the love and the worship that flows between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That circle of love and worship and prayer isn't a closed one that keeps people out, but it's an open one that draws others in, to be included as children of God. We might feel unworthy, we might feel not lovable, we might feel ill-equipped to accept that invitation. But we've been redeemed by Christ Jesus on the cross and made new. The Holy Spirit blesses us to equip us and to welcome us and to draw us in and to enliven us. We don't need to feel unwelcome or unloved or unworthy. Instead, we feel blessed, embraced, and equipped. We're sustained by Christ Jesus in the Eucharist and given the Spirit so that we have the words that we need to say, the life we need to live, so that others too might see the life of the church, might see the life of the disciples of Christ, and be drawn to become children of God in their own right. In that way, the Kingdom of God grows, and in that way, in every generation, the promise to Abraham continues to come true. Amen.