

Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church, Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Trinity Sunday, 15th June 2025

Text: John 16: 12-15

Two weeks ago I found myself standing with my four-year-old granddaughter in the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin.

You get very honest responses to art from four-year-old. But they also have a wonderful capacity for wonder and beauty!

Despite my best intentions after about 10 minutes of strolling through the galleries and saying no you can't touch some fantastically tactile pieces, we were at the cafeteria near the Clare Street entrance

There stands the statue of a bearded man wearing a suit with arms crossed – which you can touch!

It's the poet and playwright George Bernard Shaw, a son of Dublin

It was he who famously said in a rather envious way later in life: "Youth is wasted on the young!"

I thought of that in terms of my first encounters with the work of another poet as part of my A-level studies in English literature, TS Eliot

I have still got the copy of poetry book I used, full of notes anxiously dictated by our teacher who, looking back, sadly thought it was more important to just give us the "right" answers for the exams rather than invite us to engage with the poems

But nevertheless, from the recesses of my memory still come fragments of some of that poetry, The Four Quartets

and as I paused to pray and prepare this sermon on Trinity Sunday this is what I remembered:

"Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still."

On this Trinity Sunday when Christians find themselves making the bold but illogical assertion that God is Three in One these words fit the bill

As we do so, "words strain", under the tension words and ideas "slip and slide" but over the last 1700 years since the Council of Nicaea from which comes our Nicæan creed, the Trinity is a cornerstone of orthodox Christianity

During the three hundred years between the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, then the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost ordinary believers had reflected on their experience that they encounter God as: Father, Son and Spirit – and that came together at the Council of Nicaea

Particularly the wrestling had been about the person of Jesus – how can it be that He is both fully God and fully Man

and at the same time hold firm to the assertion of the Jewish origins that God is One, but that we know of Him as not only the father or Creator.

The experience of the early church was of God among us, like us in Jesus and God with and in us by the Holy Spirit.

This is what TS Eliot meant about how the words we use of God run up against their limitations – how can we speak fully of the infinite with finite language and ideas

But speak we must, Christians say, in order to be true to our experience and our calling to preach good news!

Look at the gospel reading

It is Jesus on the night before he will die, what in John's gospel is called being "glorified" – already strange and wonderful language for the pain and mess of public execution that seems like nothing but failure, but in fact through resurrection is a strange victory

This speaking and wrestling with One God, not three, but three persons distinct but united, is part of what in v12 Jesus calls "the many things we cannot bear"

But with the coming of the Spirit, we are given first and foremost One who will teach us by and through experience

All that the Father has is mine, says Jesus. And the Spirit will take what is mine and declare it, speak it to you

Despite the struggle logically, our foremothers and forefathers in the faith said we have to stick with this – why should that be?

It's a bit like the way Newtonian physics only take us so far. The physics of Einstein are counter-intuitive but speak to a reality we find to be true, even if it stretches the very limits of logic and beyond. So too with the Trinity.

Sticking with the Trinity isn't only necessary, it also keeps us rightly humble in our dealings with God – our own searching and thinking will only take us only so far. We only know what God reveals. And God has revealed God-self uniquely in terms we can grasp in Jesus

Which means while we may not fully get Him, He does fully get us

And not only gets us, that He is alongside and with us

Most especially that is in the moments when we feel most misunderstood and bewildered, in suffering

If Jesus is both fully God and human, then the two meet most profoundly in the cross – God-self suffers and absorbs the pain, the sin, the injustice and recycles it, transforms it by and through His illogical, self-sacrificing love

Trinity also helps me to understand who I am by understanding whose I am – Christians say that we are made in the image of God – complementary in our gender, relational at our deepest, made for relationship with one another, with the world around and with God

who is in God-self relational – Father, Son, Spirit in what some Eastern theologians call a dance of love

Which is also why we are called to be together as church, to not just attend but belong

Sticking with the Trinity, despite the illogicality, is about an openness to the possibility that as believers we are called to gather, and in doing so we are living out something profound and prophetic and deeply welcomed in a Western world where one of the greatest diseases is ...?

Loneliness

At its heart, Christians' continued, dogged, assertion of Trinity is this: it is saying that ultimate reality is about eternal, personal love

We do not worship an idea

We worship a personal God who is also a relational God

And you and I, we together, are invited into that relationship of love between Father, Son and Spirit