

Matthew 28.16-20

7<sup>th</sup> June 2020

The Trinity –  
*Three notes, resounding from a single tone...*

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Back in the early eighties of the last century I worked, before ordination, for The Midland Bank. I was a cashier in three Southampton branches and the middle one, Avenue branch near Southampton University was the most fun. My fellow cashiers didn't tell me about old Mr Smith, I forget his real name. Every Tuesday he came in just before closing and I wondered why, on the first three Tuesdays I was there no other cashiers were available to serve him. They called him the Pennies Man, because he collected loads of them and paid them in weekly. It was time consuming and fiddly dealing with Mr Smith two minutes before closing on a Tuesday afternoon. So, three minutes before the doors shut my fellow cashiers all seemed to lose a paper clip on the floor, so they disappeared from view searching for it, leaving me the only till open, ready to greet the Penny Man. That was until week four when a new cashier arrived, and I conveniently lost a paper clip at 3.28pm as well.

Trinity Sunday reminds me of those days because, in normal times, it's the Sunday when ministers mysteriously disappear from pulpits. When it comes to a sermon for this day, on a subject that can baffle even the the most eloquent theologians, we can lose our

nerve. Oh Trinity Sunday, we say, I have a family wedding the day before, it's half term, or I'll be travelling to a conference the next day – dear Pulpit Supply Secretary – please find a visiting preacher every year for Trinity Sunday!

Well, there's no escape for me this year in Lockdown – so here we go!

Of course the Trinity is a concept that pushes us.

Many faiths have a 'Binitarian', rather than Trinitarian, understanding of God – that is they affirm a two-foldness understanding of the divine. Our Jewish and Islamic friends do – because although they are monotheistic, they hold in tension the idea of God's transcendence, his otherness – alongside his presentness, his immanence in the world.

Believing in this two-fold revelation of God, as being both 'out there' and 'down here' has a certain appeal, even logic to it. It's when we Christians add a third person that others maybe scratch their heads and think we've over egged the pudding.

I love what the American Episcopalian priest and writer, Barbara Brown Taylor says of the Trinity that our encounter will probably be *closer to experience than understanding*.

The older I get the more I'm convinced that so much of

our faith is better expressed in poetry rather than prose. Richard Harries, the former Bishop of Oxford says: *for our limited human minds there is an ultimate unknownness about God before whom there can only be reverent silence.*

Perhaps that's why, at AFC in our morning service we don't follow the sermon immediately with a hymn or a prayer but we pause. We hold silence together. After all the words, all the verbal exploring our response is stillness and the absence of words.

This week, as I've pondered once more the notion of Trinity, I've been much taken by Barbara Brown Taylor's thought that it's *closer to experience than understanding.*

I sort of get that!

I'm drawn to the big ideas of God: Creator, The Ground of our Being, The Alpha and Omega. I long for there to be a beating heart of love at the centre of the universe. I pray that there may be an eternal truth that fills our existence and give meaning to our living. God the Father.

I'm drawn to the idea of God come amongst us. In fact, this part of my faith I think beats strongest in my experience. I'm utterly drawn to the person of Jesus Christ. I've known the stories about him since childhood and they have never grown dull. I'm constantly inspired by this Man for Others. God the

Son.

And I'm drawn too, by the realisation that we need a Helper in our pilgrimage. Looking back on all the churches I've had the privilege to serve, I have encountered hundreds of ordinary people who have had extraordinary moments. Folk who have risen to challenges, shown resilience, gone the extra mile, held out an open hand of forgiveness, kept hopeful at the most crushing of moments. These have been, I believe, moments when the Comforter and Enabler has touched our lives and blessed them with love, peace and joy. God the Holy Spirit.

Maybe I can't understand The Trinity, but I believe I've experienced it. God as my most cherished ideal, God as my most inspiring example and God as my most constant enabler.

Or as Malcolm Guite, the contemporary Cambridge priest poet says in his Trinity Sonnet which Heather read as today's Call to Worship: *Our God, beyond, beside us and within...three notes resounding from a single tone.*

My God the Trinity bless your life today, and always.  
Amen