

Sunday 12 June – Trinity Sunday

Sermon by Liz Barnes

Today is Music Sunday, a day when the Royal Society for Church Music invites us to celebrate church music and musicians. The Royal School of Church Music instigated the idea of holding Music Sunday on Trinity Sunday many years ago, in this church and the wider team ministry we are blessed with so many talented musicians – Sunday by Sunday organists and choirs lead our worship, not to mention the bands, choral societies and choirs who perform in our churches – Music is a gift we give to God. It's also a gift God gives to us. Some people have beautiful voices---true instruments given by the Lord. Their gifts of singing or playing add so much to every worship service. Some people---like me---are gifted in other ways!

Music is an integral part of our worship and as we gather to celebrate the Most Holy Trinity our entire liturgy is wrapped up in the Trinity – the hymns we sing, the prayers we offer, the thanks we give, the sermon we preach and the bread and wine we partake of. Those great and beautiful words from our first hymn 'Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee' is itself a great doxology, an offering of praise to the Holy and undivided Trinity.

The role of music in worship is biblical. After escaping from the Egyptians and crossing the Red Sea, the people of Israel sang a song to the Lord. Singing was part of Israel's formal worship in both tabernacle and temple. The Psalms bear rich testimony that in joy and sorrow, in praise and lament, the faithful raise their voices in song to God. Hymn singing was practiced by Jesus and his disciples. The Apostle Paul instructed the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him".

The great reformer and occasional hymn writer, Martin Luther, said this about music: "Music is a fair and lovely gift of God which has often wakened and moved me to the joy of preaching... Next after theology, I give to music the highest place and greatest honour... My heart bubbles up and overflows in response to music, which has so often refreshed me and delivered me from dire plagues" The power of music!

Music can help us put it into context, and make sense of some of the complexities of life and it seems to me, that there are three aspects of music that make it such a vital part of worship:

- It creates the opportunity for participation by all;
- It can be an offering to God, an expression of our faith; doing the best we can for him who gave us everything;
- It can be a way to deepen understanding and enhance the worship of ourselves and of others.

Often hymns, anthems and musical pieces undergird, reinforce, and expand the message of Scripture and the sermon. When we plan the music for each service, we try to create a coherent whole, matching hymns to the theme and readings of the day. Music is a living expression of faith, it can amuse, charm, annoy and challenge, it can provide comfort and can be incredibly uplifting; it is quite simply a gift for which we should remain extraordinarily grateful.

The nature of God as Trinity was set out in the Athanasian Creed in the Prayer Book. That Creed, of great length and complexity, was recited at Morning Prayer on thirteen holy days throughout the year. It has largely disappeared now, but it was an attempt to set the Church's teaching into the context of worship. God is to be worshipped, and here we find the real clue to the Trinity. If we see the Trinity as a biblical problem, and intellectual difficulty, or an historical debate, we have misunderstood, for the Triune God is the focus of worship. The only proper response to God is doxological, and so we praise God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has led us into the truth that God is to be worshipped in this threefold way.

Christian liturgy down the ages has emphasised this – that is why we find the invocation of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit at the start of worship, as we baptise, in the structure of the Collect, at the end of a Psalm, as a benediction or blessing at the close of worship.

The language of the Triune God permeates and punctuates worship. This is how it should be. This is the Trinity in its proper setting, as the heart of worship and if our worship is authentic, it should impel us into mission. As we draw near to God in worship, we come to understand the love, unity and relationship of the Trinity which then forms the basis of our mission as we respond and participate.

It is as we offer praise to God that we are most aware of the Trinity. The Trinity should also permeate our Christian lives because the great binding principle is love; and that love overflows like a fountain to drench the whole world. Our

worship should bring us to the living water that we may drink and no more be thirsty, that we may wash and always be clean. The Trinity is our model and our guide, and there, in the unity of Father, Son and Spirit, are held together wisdom and love. So, we are to know God and to love God. And loving him, we must know him better, and witness in both love and knowledge to the glory of the eternal Trinity.

On this Trinity Sunday let us give thanks for church music, our musicians and choirs, our congregational singing, may God always give us all the grace to sing his praise, live in his love and walk in his light. So, we are bidden to say:
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen