St Peter the Fisherman – Whitianga
Sunday June 4th

Theme: (Matthew 28 The Holy Trinity)

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I runga i te ingoa o te papa, te tama, me te wairua tapu.

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

*Amen*

Image of the Trinity

An appropriate prayer to begin a sermon on the Holy Trinity.

All today’s readings build an image of the Holy Trinity – the Father (God), the Son (Jesus) the Holy Spirit (the Helper).

The doctrine of the Trinity is considered to be one of the central Christian affirmations about God. It is rooted in the fact that God came to meet Christians in a threefold entity:

Firstly, as Creator, Lord, Father and Judge, as written in Genesis,

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth ……

and reiterated in today’s Psalm.

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you have established, what are humans that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Secondly, as the Lord who, in the incarnated human figure of [Jesus Christ](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jesus), lived among human beings and was present in their midst as the “Resurrected One”.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me”.
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Thirdly, as the Holy Spirit, whom the first Apostles experienced as the helper or intercessor in their new life, who would support them in their faith journey. This was presumed presence and power of God among them, whose coming was connected with the celebration of [Pentecost](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pentecost-Christianity).

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were specifically linked in such [New Testament](https://www.britannica.com/topic/New-Testament) passages as the Great Commission in today’s reading from Matthew:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.

Then Matthew finished off with another set of my favourite ‘comfortable words’ – (Yes, I do have more than one favourite, and only my strange sense of logic can make that OK)

“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”.

For the early Christians, there was considerable debate and difficulty reconciling this concept of Three in One. It was not until the 4th century that the distinctness of the three and their unity were brought together in a single doctrine of one essence and three persons. It is still a challenge, however, for many people to comprehend how one entity can also be three distinct ones, each with different characteristics and meaning.

No illustration is perfect, or even completely adequate. The closest I can come to getting this right in my head, is the case of identical triplets. Three humans from one egg, forever connected by that fact, but also separate identities. Different names, Anna, Beth, and Clara, and unique even with the huge number of similarities in looks and/or behaviour.

(Image of the Trinity)

 In the case of the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are also distinct Persons. In other words, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. Anna is not Beth, Beth is not Clara, Clara is not Anna. Jesus is God, but He is not the Father or the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God, but He is not the Son or the Father. They are different Persons, not three different ways of looking at God. Just as Anna, Beth and Clara are three different persons, but have a bond, an essence, that makes them uniquely integrated. They may grow up to have three different careers, but statistically triplets more often than not, will work in very similar environments, with very similar values and work styles.

Another analogy might be the identity of water. We know because of its different nature and cause, that water can exist in three forms. Liquid, solid as ice, and vapour as steam. Each of these forms is generated under different circumstances, yet all are in essence, water.

Trinity Sunday is the day when we take a deep breath, and consider the sameness of essence of the Son and the Holy Spirit with God the Father. Just as we might reflect on the sameness of essence we see in Anna, Beth and Clara. Just as we accept the sameness of essence of liquid water, solid water, and vapour water. We don’t need to unpick and separate those elements, we just need to acknowledge that like these examples, God has multiple identities, each of them important to us in their different ways and at different times.

However, the Trinity does go further than our Triplets, or the components of water. While the three members of the Trinity are distinct, this does not mean that any is inferior to the other, which so far is much the same for our other two examples. Instead, they are all identical in attributes. They are equal in power, love, mercy, justice, holiness, knowledge, and all other qualities. This is not the same as Triplets or water, as we can figure out when we think about the attributes and functions that occur in them. This is the unique difference between the Trinity and our Triplets or water.

Now for the mind stretching bit, and the reason the Holy Trinity becomes hard to get into our comfort zones of understanding.

If each Person of the Trinity is distinct and yet fully God, then should we conclude that there is more than one God? Obviously we cannot, for Scripture is clear that there is only one God: Having seen that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, that they are each fully God, and that there is nevertheless only one God, we must conclude that all three Persons are the same God. In other words, there is one God who exists as three distinct Persons.

If there is one passage which most clearly brings all of this together, it is Matthew 28:19, where Jesus says to the eleven apostles:

 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

Notice that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinguished as distinct Persons. Jesus doesn’t say baptise them in the name of God.

Although the three divine Persons are distinct, we are baptized into their name (singular), not names (plural). The three Persons are distinct, yet only constitute one name. This can only be if they share one essence. Just as the Triplets shared their source from the one egg, the one ‘being’.

And, before the essence of water in the form of steam is seen rising from your heads, I leave you with the great apostolic benediction:

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:13).

Paul **Got It**, primarily by not overthinking or overanalysing it, but just by accepting the reality of the Holy Trinity in Faith. We can too, remembering Matthew’s final statement from Jesus -.

“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”.

Amen