

Last week in our introductory teaching on the Creeds we explored the importance the Creeds play in our lives of faith and discipleship; we explored why we say them and finally we explored what impact they might have on us, both individually and as a worshipping community. Today we turn to what is contained within the Creeds, the substance of the faith we pray and proclaim each week. Today I want us to begin with a brief examination of why each of the three authorized Creeds – the Apostles, the Nicene, and the Athanasian which we will use later today – have a heavy emphasis on Trinitarian understanding of God, before exploring what it is we pray and proclaim about the first person of the Trinity, God the Father.

If there is any particular doctrine which separates Christianity from other major world religions it is the doctrine of the Trinity. As I mentioned the three great ecumenical Creeds are all undergirded by the conviction that God is three in one. The former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams concerning the Trinity wrote “Trinitarian theology, in so far as it is concerned with what ‘kind’ of God Christians worship, is far from being a luxury indulged in solely by remote and ineffectual dons; it is of cardinal importance for spirituality and liturgy, for ethics, for the whole of Christian self-understanding.” That is to say that understanding the Trinitarian nature of the God we worship has immense impact on our daily lives of faith, and isn’t just a philosophical enterprise. And yet despite its importance the Trinity is a difficult concept to wrap our heads around. St. Augustine, one of the great theological minds of church history, once commented that “in no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable.” (*On the Trinity*, Book 1) If we only understand the Trinity superficially, then it can seem illogical, how can three be one and one be three? The mathematics of it seems to defy mathematical reason, and to some degree when we speak about the Trinity this will always be the case, none of our analogies or metaphors will ever come close to fully describing the life of the Triune God. As much as we can seek to grasp and get a deeper understanding of this crucial element of our faith, there will always be an inherent mystery about it, our goal as followers of Jesus is to not give up our search for understanding, we must not throw up our hands in disbelief at this puzzling yet life giving doctrine about who God is, but rather continue to wrestle and struggle with it.

We could spend all year delving the depths of the Trinity, but I just want to give a brief description of what we mean when we say we believe in Trinitarian Theology and why it is important to us in our lives of faith. The doctrine of the Trinity means that there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct Persons — the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Stated differently, God is one in essence and three in person. These definitions express three crucial truths: Firstly, The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, secondly that each Person is fully God, and finally there is only one God. The Athanasian Creed, which we will use later today, puts it this way “Now this is the catholic faith: That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons, nor dividing their essence. For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit, still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.” We can often get tripped up with the words “persons” and “essence”, especially since these words aren’t found in the Bible, but essentially when we think of essence we need as, Christian pastor and thinker Kevin DeYoung puts it, to think of Godness. Each of the persons of the Trinity are no more God than the other, and when we think of “persons” we maintain their distinctiveness, that we find in Scripture. God is one in essence, and at the same time three in persons.

Presenting the biblical evidence for our Trinitarian theology, is important and extensive, however it will have to wait for another day and instead I want to touch upon why and how proclaiming and praying the Triune God has impact on our lives of faith and discipleship. First and for most seeking to grasp the intricacies of the Trinity has an impact on our worship. If the chief purpose of humankind is to enjoy and worship God, having a better sense of who God is and what he is like is essential. By

endeavouring to understand who and what God is like also gives God honour and glory, something that is at the heart of our worship and discipleship.

Proclaiming and deepening our understanding also has a great deal of impact on prayer. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, speaks about prayer as through Christ, in the Spirit having access to the Father. Prayer is an act of the Trinity. Prayer is where we experience the love of the Trinity, prayer is where we are invited into the divine Trinitarian relationship. Even if we find ourselves drawn to one person of the Trinity in our prayers – some will always pray to Jesus, others God the Father, and perhaps a smaller number to the Holy Spirit – we nonetheless are experiencing the fullness of the Trinity as we pray.

Finally the Trinity matters for our understanding of love and relationships. If we embrace a Trinitarian understanding of God, then love, community and relationships are at the heart of who God is, because from the very beginning the Trinity has been a relationship of mutual love and community. If we as people are made in the image of this Triune God, then love, community and relationships are essential to what it means to be human, let alone what it means to be a Christian disciple. Although we are not perfect, the fact that the Church centres itself on these proclamations and prayers of the Trinity in the Creeds, gives us hope that the Church can be a place where we experience the divine love, community and relationship with God, but also with one another.

As we continue to grapple with what it means to proclaim and pray the Trinity each and every week, a journey we will continue each and every day of our lives, we turn now to the individual “persons” of the Trinity, and specifically for today we are going to explore the first person of the Trinity, the Father. In the Nicene Creed we declare “We believe in God, the Father Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.” It might seem like a rather underwhelming statement about the Father – especially considering the amount of time the Creeds spend on the other two persons of the Trinity – but in these short lines we hear and proclaim the awesomeness, immensity and totality of God the Father. We believe in God the Father, who has created everything around us: each tiny atom, each person sitting in this room, each star and planet in the sky, each galaxy in the universe. This in itself is a pretty immense statement, it means that we believe that everything we see, and even the things we don’t see are reliant on God, that our whole existence is dependent upon God, and in particular the Father for our Creation. Our readings from Genesis and the Gospel of John, emphasize God the Father’s primary role in creation, but as with anything regarding the Trinity, he does not do this alone: in Genesis we hear tell of the Spirit or wind of God hovering over the face of the waters and in our passages from the Gospel of John and the first letter of John, we hear of the role the Word, Jesus Christ the Son, played in Creation. Even as we hear of the primacy of God the Father’s role in creation, we get a glimpse into the divine relationship of the Trinity, we get a glimpse into the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Reminding ourselves of the splendour, majesty and sheer awesomeness of God at the beginning of each week, can help to orient our lives around God – it reminds us that this Triune God, is the only thing worthy of our worship, that the idols we cling to in our daily life, are nothing in the presence of the Creator of all that is seen and unseen, that they are worthless in the face of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Each and every day we are faced with temptations that lure us away from the worship of the One, True, God, each and every day we are faced with challenges to our conviction that this God created all that is seen and unseen, and so each and every week we remind ourselves of this fact, each and every week as we proclaim the Creed, we stand with brothers and sisters in Christ and affirm and pray together the hope that is inside us, the faith that we have been given.

Thanks be to God. Amen.