

It's Trinity again!

A Starter for our thinking at Bible Book Club

"One of those undiscovered treasures when one finally cleans out the attic". You dust it off and you have a newfound appreciation for a very old idea. Is that what happens when we think about the Holy Trinity?

Like many treasures, it has had a battered history.

Some have taken the Trinity to be a "mystery", an example of how our language is inadequate when we try to describe the "ineffable".

Others take it as a contradiction, an example of religious communities requiring belief in an idea not completely expressed in the Bible and yet used as a basis to secure loyalty.

It has formed our creedal and liturgical language for centuries but it is not clear that all of us could explain why; and if we try, do our explanations stand up to scrutiny?

For me the idea of the incarnation and Trinity is grounded in relationships, not in a single individual, but in the interactions and connections with one another. In life, no one is an individual completely removed from society and this reflects the way that God is. We exist in relationship one to another.

The Trinity has had significance for most of the life of the Christian Church and with a broad spectrum of communities, suggesting not an esoteric doctrine, a puzzle that cannot be solved, but rather an idea that touches on something vital in human experience. We can discern patterns in our world and ourselves.

The pattern of the Trinity points to the importance of community. God never acts alone but is in constant mutual love and reciprocity between the persons of the Trinity. From this, we have a model for living.

Jürgen Moltmann, the great theologian, advocates that God is present in all things, and all things are present in God. Pushing further, he speaks of our existence within this fellowship in terms of our salvation or wholeness."

The first time we read of the Spirit in the Bible is in Genesis. There the Spirit of God, hovers over the deep, and begins the first act of creation by separating water and the land and the light from the darkness. That is, the Spirit separates and makes distinctions, which makes for individuality.

Abram is driven out from his people into the desert, and like Jacob, is given a new name to express the creation of something new, a new people, a transformed individual. It is the Spirit that names who Jesus is in the waters of his baptism and it is the Spirit that drives Jesus into the wilderness to take stock before his public ministry.

So the Spirit is involved in creation and the individual, of uniqueness, and identity. The Spirit names things, separates people out, and creates new individuals. When we grow up we learn to separate ourselves from our parents so our individuality emerges, with a unique set of gifts, ideas, and personality to give to the world.

Giving to the world, not just as an individual but to take that individuality and put it in the service of others. Paul identifies Christ as the power that makes for salvation.

The moment you invite others into your community, you are inviting them to transform you as much as you will transform them.

This is a three-fold process:

The first is the act of creating individuals and individuality, the Spirit.

The second is taking the gifts of individuals and sharing it with others, the Christ.

The third is the deepening of relationships, the transformations of individuals and communities, God the creator.

All three presuppose each other. You cannot create individuals apart from other people in community. You cannot create growing communities apart from individuals adding their uniqueness to the mix. You cannot deepen relations apart from the encounter with others. All three are necessary, all three need each other, and all three become the creative workings of God.

It is only when individuality and our relations with others work to build communities which sustain both that we can produce the creative good in life, that is when the act of creation becomes divine.

Love Jo

The Bible Book Club meets on the first Tuesday of every month (2nd June) at 8:00 pm. Future topics are chosen at the meetings