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Becoming like Christ in Unity

2 Cor 13: 11-14

In his response to the horrific terrorist attack in London last weekend Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury said "We must stand in unity; it is division that the terrorists want". These few wise words sum up a foundational truth. God wants unity for his people. As St Paul puts it in our reading this morning, in his appeal to the people of Corinth "Agree with one another, live in peace." And if we can do that then "the God of love and peace will be with you". God wants his people to live in peace and in agreement, that's unity.

Note unity doesn't mean uniformity. God loves diversity, just look at His creation, all the millions of species of plants and animals, how different we are from one another, yet unique and made in the image of God. But the enemies of God will do anything they can to stop God's people living in unity by causing, division, fear, separation, conflict. They will cause us to doubt God's love for us; they will throw us off course.

However can we do this unity stuff? In our world of confusion, where we see so much uncertainty around us, so much pain and struggle. Nevertheless unity is God's ultimate plan, this is what the Kingdom of God is all about, a new heaven and a new earth where we all live in peace and love.

One thing is certain we will not be able to live in unity in our own strength we will need God's help. The good news is this help is available. God himself models unity for us.

Let's see how

I'm sure the closing words of our Corinthians reading sound very familiar to you. They are the words of the prayer we know as The Grace.

This is a very useful short prayer that we can use anytime but we usually use it at the end of a service. It is means of us blessing each other, that's why it's OK look at each other, as a way of passing the blessing one to the other. Only the ordained can give us the priestly blessing.

It's an all encompassing prayer.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ", we have access to God because of everything Jesus has done for us through his death and resurrection,

" the love of God", because of the Father's great love the whole of creation has been brought into being and

"the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" drawing us all into a community that can share God's love, in other words drawing us towards God so we can be increasingly united.

We believe in One God who exists in 3 persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Trinity. Today is Trinity Sunday. Terry and I had quite a heated debate as to when is the birthday of the Church, he said it was last week with the coming of the Holy Spirit, at Pentecost, entering the lives of believers and 3000 being baptised in one day. But I say its today. Our Church is Holy Trinity Sunningdale and today is Trinity Sunday therefore today

must be our birthday. Sorry if you missed the cake last week! Of course we are both right because Terry was talking of "the church" and I was meaning "this church".

The trinity, like a lot of the things of God, is hard to get our heads round. In fact Pretty much impossible. Our brains are limited and concepts like infinite and eternal we can't really grasp. I think this is why the use of story and metaphor is so helpful. It's probably why Jesus told so many parables.

I thought this morning it might be helpful to share a metaphor and a story that may help us get a bit more idea about the trinity.

The first is the metaphor of "the dance". The sense that the bible gives us is that the trinity, father, son and Holy Spirit, really are 3 in one. Not 3 separate entities but 3 who live in constant relationship with each other in the continual, connection of mutual self-giving love, a dynamic flowing circular movement, a dance. I love this idea.

It was years after I first started work as a relationship counsellor that I first heard the words "dance of intimacy". I knew relationships were important but then I realised they were crucially important. The heart of life is relationship, God lives in relationship with the son and spirit and invites us to join Him. All the relationships in our lives can be expressions of Gods love. If this is God's plan then we can understand why we have so much difficulty with relationships, they are really hard because they come under attack from God's enemies.

The first time a relationship was attacked was in the Garden of Eden. When you have a moment check out the conversation between Eve and the serpent in Genesis Chap 3. "Did God really say???" The number one strategy of the enemy is to cause us to doubt God's goodness towards us. This has been the case throughout history. Then the serpent lies to the woman. "You will not die, you will become like God". The enemy always causes confusion? Can I trust God? Does he have my best interests at heart?

As I said earlier there is a lot we can't understand. But one thing we can be quite clear about God always tells the truth. It's the enemy who lies. But the lies can be subtle and sound like truth, so like Eve, it's easy to fall for them.

Shall we take a moment to pray:

Lord please give us the wisdom to discern your truth for our lives and notice the lies of the enemy. Amen

Now the story.

Have you read The Shack? It is an allegorical story. It tells of a disparate grieving father, called Mack, whose little girl has been killed, his grief is so profound he just can't move on. So he goes off on his own. As he journeys through his suffering he travels to a place where meets God. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as 3 quite surprisingly different characters. A big black woman, a Middle eastern man and a slight Asian woman. He asks "which one of you is God? And in unison all 3 reply "I am". The story continues ending with Mack, the father of the little girl, being able to let go of guilt, find peace and being reunited with his wife and the rest of the family. It's a fascinating book but just as fascinating is the story behind the writing of the book.

We heard the author William Paul Young speak at New Wine. He wrote this story for 15 family members, one Christmas, it was for him a means of sharing the long journey of healing God had brought him through which had all come to a head when his affair was discovered 11 years previously. Paul Young never intended it to be published as a book, but God had different ideas!

Maybe God has different ideas for our lives too. Can we sense that our Heavenly Father wants more for us?

We are all yearning for love and fulfilment. Yet somehow we never seem to be satisfied. We drive ourselves unconsciously, thinking if I lose weight I'll be more loveable, if I earn more money, if I pass my exams, if I'm less grumpy, get more qualifications, be seen in a smarter car, the list could go on and on! Going back to the shack there is a little phrase I have always valued, it is:

"Learning to live loved". That's what we need to do.

Can we keep reminding ourselves that we exist because we are loved by God, he shaped us in our mother wombs, his thoughts of us outnumber the grains of sand, he knows every hair on our heads? If we could learn to trust God's stupendous, incredible, everlasting love for each of us, it would be so much easier to live in unity.