

7th June 2020, Trinity Sunday: Ephesians 4:1-6, Matthew 28:16-20 – Our True Identity

If I was to ask how you picture God, I wonder what you would say? Obviously the Almighty Lord of the universe will always be at one level beyond our imagining, but bear with me for a moment. Usually our mind tends to picture God using a human image we can visualise.

Sadly for some people this will be a scary moral policeman or a harsh tyrant. For others, God appears as a jovial Father Christmas figure. I think the fact that in our modern Christmas we celebrate both Jesus and Father Christmas subconsciously works its way into our minds and sort of overlays one over the other. Make of that what you will.

But there *are* more positive images, and in the New Testament you'll find 3 intimate pictures which come to define **our true identity in relation to God: the child, the friend and the servant**.

Firstly, the child – and in this we take our cue from Jesus, who teaches us to pray: *Our Father....* In other words, we learn to see God as a parent, and to relate to him on that basis. Theologically this actually becomes a spiritual reality for us as we follow Jesus. Through Jesus' death and resurrection we are adopted into God's family, so this idea of God as a loving parent is not just a nice way to pray but an actual eternal reality. We are sons and daughters of our true heavenly Father.

Let's take the idea of **the servant** next. Now that might not seem so intimate, but this is really an issue of cultural translation. We don't have the sort of extended households anymore which were common 2,000 years ago. In the culture of the day, the trusted household servant was every bit as much a part of the family as anyone else. The 'Lord' of the household confided intimately in them, and they were trusted to do their boss's business. It is this image that Jesus repeatedly refers to as defining one way of seeing our relationship to God, and its value is that it reminds us that we are more than just children, we have important work to do on God's behalf. The servant is an active role, a role of trust and responsibility, someone who makes things happen in the world.

Finally, there's the less used but perhaps most important of all – **the friend**. In a way it combines the best of each of the other two images: intimate and active, loving and mature. Just before Jesus dies, he tells his disciples that they are no longer just servants but friends. They have graduated, as it were, into the highest level of intimacy with himself.

And that, in a sense, remains our goal today. As our faith matures, as we grow in our understanding of God, and walk closely with Him over many years, we start to see things as God does more instinctively. We never forget who God is, His glory and majesty, but we relate with an ease that defines a true friendship. Just like Abraham, may it be said of us that we were 'friends with God'.

Today is Trinity Sunday, and for many of us, the idea of God as 3-in-1 is a head-scratching mystery. But the point of the Trinity is not to remind us how big and mysterious God is – rather the opposite. It is there to give us multiple, accessible ways to know and love God. It makes God more real. We can have a 3-dimensional relationship with a 3-dimensional God.

The three relationships I've just described relate intimately to the three persons of the Trinity. As children we can know God as Father. We walk with Jesus as a friend. By the Spirit, we serve God with power, joy and love. God as Father Son and Spirit means God as Parent, Friend and Helper.

And the glorious truth that God is our Parent, Friend and Helper enables us to know him and love him in a very real and deep way. Without any one of these three faces of God, our capacity to know him would be diminished.

At its heart, the Christian faith is not about what you do, but *who you are*. If you follow Jesus, you are a child of God, a trusted servant, and (hopefully) a growing friend. God is not just the 'big scary boss' – he's near, and close.

And as I close, I invite you to reflect on how you relate to God. **How do you see Him?** Is there one of these ways of relating to God that you know in your heart you need to develop? To see yourself more as God's child, with all the freedom, security and trust that implies. To see yourself more as a trusted servant, taking responsibility and turning your faith into fruitful action. Or perhaps to see yourself as growing towards true friendship with God, that deepest level of intimacy and authority.

This is the true journey of the spiritual life, and the reason why today we can celebrate the fact that God is 3-in-1. A three dimensional God leads us ever on towards three dimensional faith. May God grant that to each of us, that we with the great hymn-writer Reginald Heber might say:

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea;

Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty,

God in three persons, blessed Trinity! Amen.

We'll take some time reflect on these truths by singing that great hymn – do sing or pray and reflect as you feel led....