In nomine… Life is a journey. It’s a phrase you hear so often that it’s hard to take it seriously. When a 22-year-old footballer publishes his ghost-written autobiography and calls it ‘my journey’, you can’t help thinking that he has a long way still to go!

But in all sorts of ways the cliché is true: life is a journey. Standing here today, I’m only about twenty miles from the place where I was born, but still it feels to me that the path that has brought me here has been a journey – and an unpredictable one at that. Some of you have travelled much shorter distances, some of you were born and raised in sight of these dreaming spires or at their ‘base and brackish skirt’, but I bet that, looking back over your lives, the word journey seems fitting for you as well. And some of you have journeyed thousands of miles from the places where you were born. One of the most remarkable things about the church of God is that it gathers us from such a huge variety of backgrounds and gives us a home under this roof. For each of us the journey that brought us here has been completely different, but it has still been a journey.

Describing life as a journey feels like a modern cliché, but actually human beings have been using the image for centuries. The Bible is full of people on journeys. Sometimes the journeys are literal and long: think of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt to their homeland in Israel. And what the scriptures tell us of Jesus’s life is a journey from beginning to end. First there is Mary and Joseph’s journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem; then the holy family’s flight as refugees into Egypt; then their return to Nazareth. The three years of Jesus’s teaching and healing are a series of journeys: he and the disciples covered many hot and dusty miles each day as they spread the good news of the kingdom. But, just as with us, journeys in the Bible don’t always involve huge mileages: think of the prophetess Anna, who greeted Jesus when Mary and Joseph brought their son to the temple to be blessed. The gospel tells us she ‘was of a great age and never left the temple, but worshipped there with prayer and fasting day and night’. Eventually after all those years of faithful service in one place, her life found its fulfilment in her meeting
with the infant Son of God: ‘she began to praise God and speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem’. Physically Anna’s journey took her nowhere; spiritually it was the longest journey imaginable, that led her to a face-to-face meeting with God’s only son.

So all of us are on a journey. But what happens when we lose our bearings, when we get lost on the way? Broadly speaking, there are two ways you can react when you discover you are lost. Either you can look at the map; or you can ask someone else for guidance. Different people are drawn to one approach or the other: some feel it’s a matter of pride that they should find their own way out. Always trust the map is the motto, even if they’re not sure where they are on the map; others have little time for maps and take the simple course of asking a local for advice.

These are two different human responses to the fact of being lost. And what’s true of physical lostness is true of spiritual lostness too. When we go off course in our spiritual lives, we can look at the map or we can ask for help. Both courses of action have a lot to commend them and both have quite a lot to do with today’s feast of Trinity Sunday.

In one way, Trinity Sunday is a feast for lovers of maps, because the doctrine of the Trinity is the next best thing we have to a map of God. Of course a map of God is something that it’s impossible to imagine. The prophet Isaiah warns us against striving with our maker (45:9): earthen vessels that we are, how could we make a map of the one who made us? The doctrine of the Trinity is not a map of God, but it is a map towards God. Perhaps as a child you may have learned the Athanasian Creed from the BCP:

The Catholick Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance.
For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son:
and another of the Holy Ghost.
But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one:
the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.
And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other: none is greater, or less than another;
But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together: and co-equal.

The Athanasian Creed certainly doesn’t have the snappiness of a soundbite, but it does take us into the reality of God, the mystery of God, the love of God. Anything we say of God falls short of the reality. The doctrine of the Trinity is not a complete description of God, but it is the starting point – the starting point, we might say, of our journey. Our
worship begins and ends in God. That’s literally true: the first words of this service were
‘In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’, to which you all said,
‘Amen’; and the last words will be blessing and dismissal in the name of the Father and of
the Son and of the Holy Spirit: again you all will say ‘Amen’. This Sunday worship
intentionally reflects the whole of our lives. Our lives begin in the mystery of God: our
baptism is an Amen: when we are christened ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit’, we recognise the origin of our life in God. And our lives end in
God too: our funerals are another Amen, when we are commended into God’s care ‘in
the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’.

But Trinity Sunday is also a day for those who like to ask for directions. Because the
doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that none of us can be a Christian on our own. Trinity
Sunday reminds us that the very nature of God is always to be open, hospitable; always
directed outwards to draw us into the widening circle of the divine love. Inevitably we
lose our bearings and go astray; but the Holy Spirit, in the words of today’s gospel, is
there to ‘guide us into all truth’, speaking most commonly through the words and actions
of our companions on the journey.

It’s inevitable that we will go astray, but the first five words of the creed we say each
Sunday remind us that to stray is not the same as to be lost. ‘We believe in one God’.
Believing is not something I do alone: I believe in the company of you, my fellow
believers; and we all believe in the greater company of the whole Church throughout the
world, past, present and future. When we find ourselves at sea we have others to turn to
for help and guidance. And, still more important, we believe in God. We might say we
believe within God, within the context of God, who is greater than us, who is the one in
whom we live and move and have our being.

In the mystery of God’s love, we are bound to be overwhelmed, but we cannot be lost.
Even when we do not know it – indeed perhaps most of all when we do not know it – our
journeys take place within the loving care of our maker, redeemer and sanctifier, God the
holy and undivided Trinity, to whom on this Sunday above all we give glory and honour
and into whose loving embrace we entrust ourselves for the flourishing of all that is.

In nomine…