



Christ Church Cathedral

OXFORD

7 June 2020: Sunday Worship

Trinity Sunday

2 Corinthians 13:11–14; Matthew 28:16–20

The Venerable Jonathan Chaffey, The Archdeacon of Oxford

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.' 2 Corinthians 13:14

In his two letters to the church in Corinth St Paul displays a remarkable blend of passion yet tenderness in seeking to nurture a Christian community. On the one hand he tackles divisions within the church family, calling out false teachers, demanding holiness in lifestyle and propriety in worship; yet on the other, he encourages and inspires with an extraordinary depth of pastoral care. 'If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol.' He writes as a man whose authority has been fashioned by humility, whose credentials are underwritten by suffering.

So it is no surprise that Paul's final words to this church have become some of the most oft-quoted of all scripture. He offers a Trinitarian benediction because he desires his somewhat wayward flock to know the full riches of communion with God, not as a theological conundrum but as a living experience. The grace of the Lord Jesus comes first, his death and resurrection being the most profound revelation of the love of God the Father. In receiving Jesus, sent from the Father, we enter the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, whose gift for the church we celebrated last Sunday. The use of the genitive rather than the dative case is significant, for it is not our love for God that is the dominant thought but rather the love of God for us. His grace comes first. This is as true for us as it was for Paul's immediate audience. So whatever might hinder us, perhaps a sense of

unworthiness, some regret about past, an unreconciled relationship, fellowship with God still beckons through the one who calls us to lay our burdens at the foot of the Cross.

It is not always easy to receive freely given love – as George Herbert described, ‘Love bade me welcome but my heart drew back’. I remember once travelling on holiday through France with my family and calling by Taizé, that remarkable ecumenical community of reconciliation in Burgundy. At the conclusion of prayers, where many hundreds of young adults were gathered, one of my very young daughters made a beeline for the Prior, Brother Roger. I was embarrassed as she walked at low-level through the crowd, but it was profoundly moving as he smiled, welcomed and blessed her. Jesus calls us to be like children who know that they are fundamentally loved: “Just come.” I wonder if you have observed that wonderful depiction of the Trinity in Rublev’s icon, entitled ‘The Oak of Mamre’. I’m sure that Rublev, creating an inspired icon for worship in C16 Russia, would have been intrigued that you can now view his work at home via the internet. For me the most dramatic aspect of this imagery is that the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, represented by the 3 angelic visitors to Abraham in Genesis 18, is not a closed circle but is rather open and inviting. We are invited to share in the grace, the love and the communion of God, a foretaste of Heaven as we live on earth.

As so often in the Christian life invitation leads to commission. On the night of his betrayal Jesus prayed for his disciples: “May they be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, that the world may believe” (John 17:21). Then before his ascension to heaven, Matthew records his departing words: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” Similarly, in his Corinthian letters Paul calls the church to be agents of reconciliation and to build a new community on earth. At the end of a week when racial inequality has been exposed again on the world stage we are reminded how much this communion is needed. And whilst in recent days we have applauded key workers and experienced a new level of neighbourhood generosity, the current pandemic has also shone like a laser on the values of society, exposing injustice in areas such as pay, access to healthcare and education.

Christian community is desperately needed for a society crying out for grace and reconciliation. Yet it is no easy matter. We are learning again that it consists more of 'living the faith' than 'going to church'. Our internal passions can be intense, our divisions real and reconciliation for the church often needs to begin at home. At its best, however, it is not just a remarkable window into the life of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but an invitation and a commission: first to taste of that fellowship ourselves and then to live such outward-focussed and hospitable lives that God's community is more widely experienced on earth.

And so... 'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.'