

Parish of Esher
Christ Church, Esher with St George's, West End

SERMON

Trinity Sunday, 16 June 2019
9.00am Sung Communion, St George's, West End
10.30am Parish Communion, Christ Church, Esher
Proverbs 8.1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8; John 16.12-15

Ven. David Gerrard

In the Name of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I was not down on the preaching Rota for today but Carole Bourne who was due to preach has been called away to another parish so I am her replacement. This has happened several times recently so I will be changing my name to Default Dave.

I am especially pleased to step in this morning as yesterday I had a birthday so this will mean that I have now presided and preached during the past seven decades of my life. It also reminds me of twenty years ago when I was preaching in St. Andrew's Ham and had to talk to the children so I asked them. "I have recently had a very important birthday with a nought on the end of it. Does anyone know how old I am?" and this little lad shot up his arm and said very clearly, "Ninety."

Today is Trinity Sunday when we remember God the Holy Trinity. I have heard, and given, many sermons trying to explain the mysteries of the Trinity, some by comparing the doctrine of the three persons in one God to a three leaves clover, or to a wicket with three stumps, or some other analogy. It is such an important feast day that in the old Prayer books in place of the Apostles Creed we were ordered to say the Athanasian Creed. This contains the Creedal Statement "The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, the Holy Ghost incomprehensible." Now all of us know that in the seventeenth century when the Creed was translated from the Latin incomprehensible did not mean "without understanding" but "beyond

our knowledge", but nevertheless it does often seem as if the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is indeed too difficult for us to comprehend.

So I want to try something a little bit different this morning and talk about the Holy Trinity in terms of attributes, actions, rather than the relationships and nature of the three persons of the Trinity united in one God. This is, of course, heretical, but many good sermons do skirt the edge of heresy!

For the next few months there is an excellent retrospective exhibition at Tate Britain of the works of the artist Frank Bowling. He was born in 1934 in Bridgetown, Guyana and he came to England in his late teens during the Coronation. He served in The Royal Air Force during his national service, but Guyana, and especially his mother's home and shop remained very important to him, so that after his training at the Royal College of Art many of his paintings, although abstract, have maps of South America and Guyana, and shadows of his childhood home lurking amongst huge vivid colours. He move to America, and spent time painting in Manhattan, but settled in London and has since been painting great works of art in the unlikely surroundings of the Elephant and Castle centre. His fame gradually spread although shamefully I had not heard of him despite his being in 2005 the first black artist to become a member of the prestigious Royal Academy.

His health is not great but he still goes every day to paint at the Elephant. The curator of the exhibition ended his description of Bowling's works by writing. "At 85 Bowling still paints every day. His paintings embody his ongoing pursuit of change, transformation and renewal."

Change. Transformation. Renewal. It strikes me that these words resonate with the nature of the Triune God.

For Christians God the Father created the whole universe. We all know the story of the Creation in the Book of Genesis, and surely there can be no greater change than the creation of the World from nothing, absence. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep and God said, "Let there be light and there was light." We all know the daily change from darkness to light and how vital this is to our whole lives. With the creation everything changed. And the more we see new photographs of galaxies and nebula, of matter so vast we cannot understand it, so distant

that the most powerful telescopes in the world cannot reach trillions of stars, and of matter so minute, so microscopic that the finest magnifying machines cannot detect it the more we marvel at the wonders of creation God the Father is change.

God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, transformed the world. His power, his influence, his significance has been the greatest force throughout the world in the last two millennia. For us, as for all Christian, people he has transformed our lives. We would not be who we are without him. Our lives would be different, poorer, less complete without our knowledge of, and our relationship with, him. And he has not just transformed the lives of billions of individuals down the ages, he has changed our societies. Jesus came to bring not only individual salvation but to usher in a new age, the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice and equity, of peace and the equality of all, of nations and genders and races and ages. The Kingdom has never been totally realised but its values have influenced and permeated not just us and our families and neighbours, but countries and continents.

We are living today in a very divided nation. I believe that the mighty struggle over if and when and how we leave the European Union is fundamentally about how we see the future transformation of our nation. Will it be a transformation taking place as one member of nearly thirty other nation states with some common economies and laws and governance? Or will it be a transformation into a self-reliant, independent people taking more responsibility for our laws and human rights and economy and culture? These are profound, vital, yet very divisive, decisions about how best to implement the values of the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus taught us.

God the Holy Spirit, Renewal. In all our lives we not only need change and transformation, we also need renewal perhaps especially as we grow older. Life is not static. We change. To be blunt we deteriorate physically and mentally. We are not as strong, as active as we used to be. Our sight and hearing and memories were all far better when we were younger. It is sometimes easy to accept this, perhaps always to some extent a wise course, but often we feel that we are on a journey of an inexorable decline, and that we have nothing further to offer. We need to be renewed in our spirit if not our mental and physical attributes. We can help others. We can serve God. We can set an example to those close to us. We can create new

memories in others that they will carry with them. We no longer have to struggle for power, or promotions, or wealth as we did in our younger lives. With the guidance, the renewal of the Holy Spirit of God we should become kinder, more generous, less selfish and less conceited people.

Jesus taught us that when he departed this world he told his followers that his Spirit, God's Spirit, would come at Pentecost to dwell on and in his people. We are not left to struggle on alone, as individuals or as a church community or as a nation.

We are always supported in our lives, from the beginning to the end, by Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit who created, transformed and continually renews us.

Amen.