

SERMON FOR THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY: TRINITY: 26/6/2024: GEOFF

CHADWICK

TRINITY:DEPENDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

The doctrine of the Trinity speaks to us about dependence and independence. As we contemplate the mystery of God's being, and the Christian understanding of this as Trinity, we are drawn to the idea of mutual dependence and independence. Let me explain...

The Trinity speaks of the Three persons of God, (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) bound in perfect unity and separate identity. Each keeps their own personal quality whilst at the same time being completely one with the others. Whilst we may wrestle with how this might be – as an idea it speaks volumes about relationships. It is an idea which can transform how we act as human beings. Somehow, to image God - to be God's ambassadors in the world – we are called to get our relationships of dependence and independence right. Somehow we are meant to be at one whilst at the same time able to express our individuality.

I think we struggle with this all our lives. The tension between dependence and independence lies at the heart of much of our human behaviour. Let's have a look...

Childhood: As children we begin our lives completely dependent on our parents or guardians. They are our source of food, shelter and comfort. But it doesn't take long for our independence to break through. Two year old tantrums, doing things your own way- running away from home, sleep-overs at friend's houses; all point to the desire for independence. The need to develop oneself as apart from the apron strings. The need to be "me" in the midst of a world of "us".

Adolescence: This whole process reaches a climax at adolescence. Here the need to be “me” is of great importance. Sloppy kisses from mum at the school gate are *the* most embarrassing thing in the world. There is a great desire to break away from old bonds and form new ones. Yet curiously, at the same time as wanting to be “me”, a new sense of “us” evolves. Fear of standing out from the crowd develops as well as a desire to follow the latest trends of the group. Independence and dependence grow in a new way.

Adulthood: The dependence/independence struggle continues on in the adult world. Many marriages seem to struggle at this point – not knowing how much dependence and independence is healthy for each member of the couple. And at work people often struggle with being “team players” as against working alone:

“It’s hard to soar like an eagle when you work with turkeys!”

Parents get anxious over how much space to give their children – and guilt over not visiting the aged parents often enough is not far from the surface.

Old Age: Independence seems to be a great desire once old age catches up with us.

Dependence on family, public transport, hearing aids, medical treatments and the like seems to offend us. Perhaps the fear of losing independence is the fear of losing oneself. I wonder too, if the gaining of community – or new community (having to make new friends etc) may also be a fearful thing. “I might be happy with ‘me’ but can I be happy with ‘us’”.

* * *

Well, such are some of the tensions between dependence and independence in our lives. We struggle, trying to find the balance, and we don’t always get it right. We fight for our own individual rights at the neglect of the community; and we go along with the crowd when we know it is better to make a stand.

The Trinity, however, puts an ideal before us. Perhaps God struggles to get it right as well. Perhaps God wonders when to act as community and when to “go it alone”. Perhaps God’s inner being of three persons is as dynamic as any child learning to live; as active as any adolescent leaning to find oneself; as bewildered as any adult; and as dependent as any old person. Perhaps God struggles with all of this but gets it right every time. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit know each other so well that when its time to “go it alone” they get it right, and when its time to act together they also get it right.

This, I think, is worth contemplating. We worship a God of dynamic community that we might be a dynamic community. We contemplate- that we might have the wisdom to know when to “go it alone” and when to act together.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.