

Trinity Sunday, 15 June 2025

Romans 5: 1-5/John 16:12-15

"Reimagining the Church: Embracing Diversity and Community"

God beyond naming,  
Christ in the margins,  
Spirit in the stillness-  
draw us now into your mystery.  
Not to explain,  
but to behold.  
Amen.

To say "the world feels fractured" is beginning to sound like a cliché. We drift through life, apps, and even our own thoughts as if we're housemates who never quite meet: strangers to nature, wary of each other, and tourists inside our own identities. But if we want to understand why this fragmentation affects us so deeply, Trinity Sunday offers a counterpoint worth considering.

I believe this Principal Feast Day invites us to ask not just "Who is God?" but "Who are we?" and "What does it mean to human and live well together?"

The deep divisions and fractures in the church and in our world did not simply appear from *nowhere*. It's the offspring of a modern story that prizes contracts over kinship and mistrusts any hint of interdependence. John Locke describes humanity as a scatter of self-contained units-"all equal and independent"-careful never to bump too hard into one another's life, health, or liberty. Reason keeps the peace; freedom means steering clear. Yet the more we orbit alone, the more we sense the gravity we've lost.

The mystery of the Trinity is approached with trepidation by most preachers, myself included. That's why traditionally the sermon on this Sunday is reserved for the curate, but in the absence of one- the principle of "last man in" prevails.

How do we speak meaningfully about one God in three persons, this dance of divine love that is the very heart of our faith, in a church and in a world that is so fractured?

Yet perhaps what makes the Trinity so challenging is precisely what makes it so revolutionary: it defies our human categories and systems.

Trinity Sunday reminds us that God is not solitary. From eternity, God exists as a community of love:

- The Father loves the Son,
- The Son responds in love to the Father,
- And the Holy Spirit is the bond of love between them.

This is not a functional arrangement but a relational essence. God doesn't become loving when creation appears- God is love (1 John 4:8), because relationship and communion exist within God's own being.

God is therefore eternally relational, God refuses to be alone- communion is not something God does; it's who God is.

If God is perfect in God's own community, why create at all?

Because love seeks to share itself. Creation is not born out of God's loneliness but out of God's fullness. The Trinity overflows in generous love- creating, redeeming, and sustaining the world. This means that:

- God doesn't need us, but **wants us**.
- We are made not to be alone, but to **participate in God's communal life**.

Moral of the story- You and I were created not for isolation but for **relationship - with God and with others**.

What would it mean for the Church to embody this Trinitarian reality? It would mean creating spaces where difference is not merely tolerated but celebrated and learning to live with difference as essential to the fullness of community.

Here at Coventry Cathedral, it's the second of our three priorities within the Community of the Cross of Nails- our international network of churches and organisations who share our passion and vision around reconciliation.

This is also why our infamous welcome sign outside the West Screen is of vital importance (I promise, we are working on its flimsy presentation), but it's an important part of who we are- in fact it's the reason why I am standing here today. Not because it's a heartwarming welcome sign, but because it is both an invitation and a challenge, certainly to me, to participate in God's communal life- not because God needs me, but I know he wants me here.

The early Christian community described in Acts faced its own challenges of difference—between Jewish and Gentile believers, between cultural practices and theological understandings. Yet they discovered, often painfully, that the Spirit of God was at work precisely in and through these differences. Today, our churches struggle with differences around sexuality, gender identity, theological interpretation, and political affiliation.

We are tempted to take one of two approaches: either demanding conformity to preserve unity or separating ourselves from those with whom we disagree. Neither approach reflects the Trinitarian God we worship. The Trinity shows us that true communion does not require uniformity. The Father, Son, and Spirit maintain their distinctiveness while remaining in perfect relationship. This divine model calls us to a more difficult but more faithful path: remaining in communion across our differences, listening deeply to those with whom we disagree, and recognizing that no single person or group possesses the fullness of truth.

*What we seeing happening in Ballymena is because we have forgotten whose image we are created in.*

*What we see playing out in the USA- on the streets of Los Angeles, is a response to the fact that we have forgotten in whose image we are created.*

*What we see unfolding before our very eye in Gaza, Israel, Iran, is a direct result of us losing sight of who we are, whose we are and in whose image we are created.*

We have forgotten that we will never look into the eyes of someone that God doesn't deeply love.

When we reject immigrants, demonize those of different gender expressions, turn a blind-eye to injustice or retreat into ideological bunkers, we betray both our baptismal identity and the Trinitarian God who created humanity in divine image- diverse yet called to communion.

Our fixation with control, strategy, and growth reveals how deeply we have absorbed the values of our surrounding culture rather than the values of the Kingdom of God. We speak of church growth strategies, of measurable outcomes and key performance indicators. These are not inherently wrong, but they reveal an anxiety about the Church's future that is fundamentally at odds with faith in the Triune God who has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church.

The Trinity offers us a different vision of the Church's purpose and identity. We exist not primarily to grow in numbers or influence but to participate in the life and love of God- and to invite others into that communion.

This means the Church's primary role in today's world is not to secure its institutional future but to bear **with-ness** to a different way of being human together.

In a world of borders and walls, we are called to model boundary-crossing love ("with-ness"). In a society marked by loneliness and isolation, we are called to create genuine community. In a political atmosphere defined by fear of the other, we are called to hold fast to our radical hospitality.

At our Annual General Meeting last week, Simon, our COO shared with us the fact that our Cathedral electoral role has dropped significantly and we now have just over 100 people on our electoral role. Much to the anxiety of the leadership and those who attended. But we forget (again) that just before this announcement, we explored all the ways in which our work in reconciliation continues to impact the world- the CCN, our ICONS program, through our building, through our partnerships. Coventry Cathedral is in the business of going against the grain- we are countercultural.

These countercultural ways of being together are not strategies for church growth but expressions of the Trinitarian life in which we participate through baptism and Eucharist.

The challenges facing the Church are significant. Attendance continues to decline across the Western world. Young people increasingly see religious institutions as irrelevant or even harmful. Public scandals have damaged trust. Political polarization threatens to divide congregations. The temptation is to respond with anxiety and retrenchment- to circle the wagons, blame cultural forces, or compromise our witness to gain popularity. But what if these challenges are actually opportunities for the Church to rediscover our Trinitarian identity?

What if declining numbers free us from the burden of maintaining institutional power and allow us to rediscover what it means to be a minority community bearing witness to an alternative way of life? What if engaging thoughtfully with diversity helps us recover the fullness of being created in God's image? What if welcoming immigrants, refugees and those of Global Majority Heritage allows us to experience the stranger as Christ among us?

What if political tension within our communities creates space for practicing the difficult art of courageous storytelling?

The early church flourished not because it wielded political power or cultural influence but because it embodied a way of being together that the world found both strange and compelling. Christians were known for their love across social boundaries, their care for the vulnerable, their peculiar politics of peace and reconciliation. Today's challenges invite us to rediscover this distinctive way of being church- not as a strategy for institutional survival but as a faithful "with-ness" to the Triune God.

It would be a missed opportunity if I preached on the Trinity and said nothing about power in relation to Safeguarding. Perhaps nowhere is our failure to embody Trinitarian community more painfully evident than in the Church's safeguarding failures. Repentance for these failures must go beyond policy changes or public apologies. A fundamental reorientation of our understanding of power and authority and a culture-change within the Church is needed. In the Trinity, we see authority exercised not as control over others but as empowerment and mutual submission. What would it mean for the Church to restructure its life around this Trinitarian understanding of power? It would mean centering the voices of the marginalized and abused. It would mean creating transparent systems of accountability. It would mean leaders who serve rather than dominate. And it would mean a community where the vulnerable are not just protected but valued as full members of the body of Christ.

On this Trinity Sunday, I offer no answers to the world's challenges- because who am I? but I offer a lens through which we are to look at and engage with each other, God and the world. And the nice thing about this place is that we have been living into our Trinitarian identity since the early days of this Cathedral Church, and we have had prophets- the Howard's, Poole's, Wright's, Oestreicher's, Welby's, Witcombe's, Gregory's and latterly, the Massey's- who would periodically call us back to what Walter Brueggemann calls "Prophetic Imagination". In a world of borders and fears, of abuse and exclusion, the Church is called to be a living icon of the Trinity- a community where difference is celebrated, where power is shared rather than hoarded, where the vulnerable are protected and valued, and where love crosses every boundary.

This is not a strategic plan for church growth or KPI's, but something far more revolutionary: **participation in the very life of God**. And as we participate in the very life of God in the Eucharist today, may we have the courage to reimagine the Church not according to the anxious metrics of institutional survival but according to the perfect communion of the Trinity.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever. **Amen**