

## **How to say our prayers better**

Claude Monet, the French impressionist, painted over 250 paintings of water lilies in his garden in Northern France, being sold today for millions of pounds. Their great leaves and elegant flowers seem to float on the surface of the water creating an impression of tranquillity and harmony. But what is going on beneath the surface? The water lilies are sustained by a complex root system, not seen by the observer.

In his book *landscape of faith* Alister McGrath, Prof of Science and Religion at Oxford University, wrote, "When I was an atheist, I took a rather condescending and smug pleasure in regarding religious people as deluded and irrational souls who believed all sorts of ridiculous nonsense. If I had then being asked to single out what I regarded as the most absurd aspect of Christian belief, I would have pointed to the doctrine to the Trinity. How can God be three and one at the same time? It was incomprehensible nonsense, violating all the categories of human logic"....and yet, it was the doctrine of the Trinity that was to draw him in to engage with the Christian faith and make him one of our most outstanding teachers of the Christian faith today...

He doesn't give trite and easy answers about the trinity, rather he speaks of the trinity as a mystery which is best explained in praise and adoration rather than verbal analysis. In his own words, "The trinity is not something that we can master and subdue intellectually; in the end it is something that masters us."

I can remember my first lecture at Glasgow Uni, and the lecturer said, "the reason that we do theology is so that we can say our prayers better."

There is great truth in these words.

Today is Trinity Sunday and it is the Sunday when we bring out the ancient doctrine of the Trinity and we dust it down and we ask God what on earth does this mean for us today, and perhaps to some of us we may even ask the question has it any relevance for us today?

McGrath writes, "The Trinity is our attempt to put into words – however faltering and inadequate - the full wonder of the Christian God, who created us, knows us, loves us and who enters into history to find and meet us."

At the General Assembly last week, there was discussion about our confession of faith which is the Westminster Confession of Faith dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Work is underway to update it!

Why? Because a creed or confession of faith, is important for us to use as a touch stone, a standard, a benchmark to measure ourselves against and even to ask questions of our own faith...do I believe this?

The creed and the confessions are the root system in our lives, which provide support and nourishment for our faith.

In the oldest creed, the Apostles creed, begins with **“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost.**

Three things that that the creed speaks about in connection with the Trinity.

It begins...**“I believe in God the Father Almighty”**... Jesus brought to humanity the concept that God is our Father, not merely in a paternal sense but a Father who demonstrates intimate love and fellowship. This is where the creed begins and this is where our faith begins in God the Father Almighty.

Stop and ponder this for a moment.

What does it mean for you to call God your Father?

This week, my wife Susan said to me, “John, I have seen a lovely thing today.” I was waiting to hear her speak about something in nature. No, she went on to say, that when she left our youngest grandchild Jack at our daughter's house, there was her son-in-law Kevin on his hands and knees on the floor of their living room, building a track with his son Harry, so that Harry and Kevin might be able to play together. A beautiful sight, a 6 foot 4inch giant of a man down on his hands knees man playing with his 4 year old son. She said Harry looked so happy.

I loved that image because it reminded me of the image that Jesus taught us to call God Father. He wants us to appreciate the image of the Almighty God, on his knees willing to play with us because He is our Father.

In the world in which Jesus was born into, the Jews knew God to be a distant father. He was the father of the Jewish nation who created them and established them but what Jesus brought to his people was the concept that

yes, God was their Father, but he also desired to be their personal Father. He was a God that wanted to get to know them personally and get on his knees and play with them.

In his teachings he taught them to call God Abba and the word Jaba is still used in Aramaic today for how a child addresses their dad.

Nothing shows so well the intimate fellowship of the Christian with God. Here is a God that Jesus is telling us is as near to us as a Father is to a child.

Jesus offers us insights into what this Father is like?

He is a Father who loves us and wants to play with us.

Jesus' parables teach that God is actively seeking the sinner. Jesus is radical in his teaching about this...sinners were outcasts...outside the Jewish law and therefore outside of God's love.

No! said Jesus, God is like a loving father seeking the sinner, like the shepherd who would leave the 99 on the hillside and seek the one lost sheep and when he finds it goes home rejoicing; like the woman searching for the lost coin when she finds it she is full of joy; like the Father searching for the lost son and when he returns he throws a party. For Jesus, sinners were not the subject of condemnation, rather they were subjects of compassion.

This is what makes the Christian faith unique and special, for we have a God who is Almighty in power, creator of heaven and earth, and yet he is a God who is intimately involved in the life of sinful people, like us.

The Apostle's creed calls the Father "Almighty" and rightly so. God is love, but nonetheless God is Almighty; infinite in might, majesty and power. But the good news is that this power and majesty are used in love.

When we say that we believe in God the Father Almighty, we say that we believe in a God whose love for us can never come to an end and whose love for us lasts for all eternity and who comes to play with us.

**Then the creed says, "And in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord"**

**What does it mean to call Jesu the Son of God?**

In this one statement, we see Jesus in four different relationships.

**Firstly**, he is called Jesus. This was a common Jewish name of his time and so the creed recognizes Jesus as a man of his time and as a human being, flesh and blood like us. He understands us, he has experienced our pain and so he knows us.

**Secondly**, He is called Christ. Christ is the Greek word for Messiah and is the Hebrew word for the anointed. So, when we say Jesus Christ, we are saying Jesus the anointed One, the King. The Jews waited for the Messiah, the anointed one, who would bring in the KOG and Jesus comes proclaiming his Messiahship as the anointed King of God.

There was a lovely photo this week taken of Prince William at the General Assembly week. He was photographed amongst ordinary folks watching the Scottish Cup Final in a public house in Edinburgh. He was at the centre of the photo and round about him was his subjects and he was laughing and enjoying himself. A future King being amongst his people, enjoying their company.

In Christ, God came to be with his people. He came to be one with us, to understand us, to listen to us, to enjoy our company. The trinity tells us that in the face of Jesus Christ, we see none other than the living God Himself.

**Thirdly**, he is called God's only Son, notice the uniqueness of this title...the only Son of God. So, this title is not granted to him but belongs to him. We don't choose our biological parents...They are our parents. No one can be closer to a Father than a Son. The Jews were enraged that Jesus called himself Son and God his Father, for he claimed a special relationship. The Son has special knowledge of the Father.

He knows the Father intimately and gives special revelation to Jesus. In return Jesus gives obedience to the Father. Willie Barklay writes, "Jesus Christ is the Son of God because he is the Love Of God incarnated in a human person and because between him and God there is the perfect bond of love which is at one and the same time the bond of perfect unity and the dynamic of perfect obedience."

**Fourthly**, the title Lord became the universal title for Jesus. He is called Lord over 600 times in the NT. When used it is saying that Jesus has absolute authority on people's lives.

The Christian knows that they are not their own for they have been bought by a price – we owe everything to Jesus.

Willie Barklay writes, “To affirm Jesus as Lord is to affirm that he is our absolute King and to confess that we must give him absolute loyalty. To confirm Jesus as Lord is to affirm his absolute deity and to confess that we must give him absolute reverence.”

So, we are saying in the creed, Jesus is fully human; Jesus has a unique relationship with his Father as Son, Jesus is supreme Lord of life, to whom we must render our submission our loyalty and reverence.

On the Trinity Sunday, we have considered the Father and Son, finally let us for a moment consider the Holy Spirit.

**I believe in the Holy Ghost goes the creed.**

**What does it mean to call the Holy Spirit God?**

Willie Barklay writes, “in the scheme of salvation there is no more important person than the Holy spirit.”

This takes us to another foundational point on the creed. The Holy Spirit. I spoke about this last week on Pentecost Sunday.

The Spirit was with God in the beginning.

The bible begins with the words, “The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters...It was God's agent in creation. The spirit is creative. The word spirit in the bible can also be translated breath. The Spirit is God breathing order into chaos and breathing life into that which has no life. The spirit of God is the person and the power who gives order and reliability to the universe and who puts mind and reason and life and vital breath into man.

But the spirit of God is also in the business of recreation. Recreation of this broken world and sinful humanity. The Spirit again is God's agent in making all things new.

So, when we confess that I believe in the Holy Ghost, we are professing a deep and wonderful mystery that at the heart of God is his Spirit and his Spirit is in our lives and in our church bringing new life.

I like to think that the Holy Spirit is at the heart of the environmental movement, bringing healing to our hurt world.

The Spirit came to the church at Pentecost but the spirit was already in the world and has been here since its beginning. However, we are not always open to the work of the Spirit or welcoming to the Holy Spirit. When we

begin to open up our lives to the spirit, then God works and moves and creates and recreates, things begin to happen.

God works in the unlikeliest ways often through the unlikeliest people.

Alistair McGrath writes that the trinity is like an iceberg, in that so much of it is hidden under water. So much cannot be explained but is a mystery but the Trinity gives us building blocks in which to rest our faith in God.

So, on this Trinity Sunday as we affirm that God is three in One and One in three. We do not need to know everything about the Trinity, for no one does!

All we to know is that we have a loving Father who holds us in his heart and gets down on his knees to play with us; we have a compassionate Son who came into our world to mix with us and to go to the cross to redeem our sin; we have a healing spirit who continually breathes new life into our broken world and hearts.

That's the God of the Trinity.

It's not some cold doctrine that needs to be aired each year, it is a living truth and so we are called as Christians, to make room for God the loving Father, for God the Redeeming Son and for God the healing Holy Spirit, when we do expect great things in our lives, churches and community.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen.