

St James Church Alderholt
10.30 Parish Communion 15th June 2025

Sermon for Trinity Sunday & Father's Day

May the Holy Spirit guide me to speak the words that you, Father God, want spoken; may the words we hear be those you want heard; may we always live to your praise and glory through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today the Church glorifies God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; three diverse Persons in one God; working together in perfect unity. That is a text-book definition of the Holy Trinity. It is one of the most difficult topics on which to preach, but I am sure that it is NOT why Simon has asked me to preach today.

An analogy sometimes used to explain the Trinity is that a person can at the same time be a daughter, a sister, and a mother; three very different identities, but all just the one person. For the more scientific among us, another analogy is to water with the chemical formula H²O. We all realise that water can be seen in three different forms, as ice, liquid, or steam-vapour – but regardless of its appearance, it is still H²O.

However, the Holy Trinity is more complicated than these analogies, so I am not going to dwell on this issue right now. As I said at the start of this service, today is also Father's Day – so I am going to take the easier option of focusing on fathers.

For most people, Mother's Day and Father's Day are happy times when we give thanks for our parents, whatever form they come in – biological parents, adoptive, foster or step parents, God parents, honorary parents – they come in many different sizes and flavours. But for some people this may not be a happy day; for some, today will evoke very mixed emotions. Some of you will have heard me talk about my childhood that, by any standards, was not a normal one. You may be relieved to hear that I am not going to repeat my full childhood history now – but here is a summary.

I was one of seven children, all born shortly before, during, or after WW2, and like many other families, life was very tough. My parents divorced some time after the end of the war so I have just a vague recollection of my father during my childhood. When I was 6 years old my mother was very ill in hospital, so my two younger brothers and I were taken into care

and lived in a children's home where we were well cared for. Our house mother had a strong Christian faith and ensured that we had a good grounding in Christianity. We were all baptised, our house mother being one of our God parents. That was my first experience of the Trinity – God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I did not really know what it all meant, but I was content in my childhood faith.

My time in the Barnardos home was the best years of my childhood, but when I was 12 my brothers and I were returned to our mother's care. A few years later my mother remarried, so I then had a step-father – but sadly he was more 'interested' in us boys than our mother. A simple fact is that today he would be labelled a paedophile and would be on a sex-offenders register. During that time, I had no contact with my biological father or older siblings, there was no-one who I could turn to for help. My accusations were ignored and I was seen as a troublesome teenager who had a grudge to bear. Sadly, there are still many children who have faced or are in a similar situation, but I am glad to say that their stories are now more likely to be taken seriously by 'the authorities'.

You may be wondering why I am telling you all this personal detail! Well, it is to highlight that this is not a happy day for all children – whatever their age. Some may have very bad memories of their father and do not want to be reminded every year. As a result, they may feel that if God is anything like the father they had, or perhaps never knew, they want nothing to do with the image of God the Father.

While my siblings and I loved our mum, my early recollection of my 'father' was someone that lied and cheated. Someone that punished us when we did not understand why. Someone that was rarely around, and who abandoned us when we most needed him. *Pause* So, from my mid-teens, I ceased to identify God as my Father and I had very little to do with the Church.

The expression 'time heals' is a very powerful one. Gradually, Linda and I established contact with my father, then 30 years ago, the week before our daughter was getting married – in this church, we invited my father to stay with us and to attend the wedding. It was the first time I had any opportunity to talk at length with him, and at first, he was very reluctant to engage with me, but when he realised that I already knew most of our story he started to open-up, and from that point on, our relationship improved. What had happened in the past could not be changed, but the future certainly could. It is no coincidence that this was the point where I

re-established regular contact with the church and God was once again my 'Father God'. *Pause*

Parenthood is a role that can be an overwhelming responsibility. The main roles of any parent are to provide for their children, to raise them well, and set them a good example on how life should be lived – whether-or-not they follow a particular faith.

As Christian parents, we have the responsibility to show our children what God is truly like, so the Holy Trinity is an attempt by the Church to help explain the mysterious Triune nature of God:

- The Father is the Creator of everything, who sustains the world with his 'unconditional love' for his creation.
- The Son offers sinners forgiveness if they truly repent, and he opens the gate to his Father's eternal kingdom of love and peace.
- The Holy Spirit gives Christ's followers unlimited resources to live our lives bearing witness to God's kingdom on earth.

I am talking here about the Christian image of God as loving and caring for his creation. But so often we read in the Old Testament about a jealous, angry, and vengeful god who repeatedly and brutally punishes his chosen people when they fail to stand by their covenant agreement with him. It seems to me that any obedience on their part was mostly through fear of the consequences of disobedience.

This is not the loving, caring God that Christians believe in – but let us be clear here, I am not saying that God changed between Old Testament and New Testament times. God is the same as he was then, is now, and always will be – he is unchanging. It is our perception of God that has changed through him sending us his Son who is the living image of his Father. Jesus reveals to us the true nature of God as our loving caring Father; who loved the world so much that he sent his only Son to show us the way to repentance, forgiveness, and the promise of eternal life in his father's kingdom of love and peace. And for that we must be eternally thankful. Amen.