

SERMON – 26/5/24

Trinity Sunday

'The Creator Spirit'

Genesis 1:1-5 and John 3:1-8

"Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.'" (John 3:5)

In the Church's calendar today is celebrated as Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost, when we simply gasp before the mystery of the One whom the Bible can speak of as Three Persons - distinctively Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Creator, Redeemer and Comforter) - without in any way denying the absolute Oneness of God. Now I don't propose to try and expound the doctrine of the Trinity from the pulpit this morning – that is far better done face to face by question and answer (and I am more than happy to do that with you as individuals or in groups any time you like) – but as we explore the theme of the Creator Spirit this morning I just want to highlight that the work of creation belongs not only to the Father but also to God's Son, Jesus, and also to the Holy Spirit.

Although we read of the Holy Spirit being poured out in power on the first disciples on the Day of Pentecost, seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus, we also read of Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit on them in the Upper Room on the first Easter evening, and as we read just last week the Holy Spirit was also there anointing Jesus as He began His ministry, and before that at His baptism and before that at His conception. And if you want to know where the Holy Spirit first appears in the Bible, we read it this morning from verse 2 of Genesis chapter 1 -

רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֵף עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם:

'The Spirit of God was moving (or hovered) over the face of the deep.' (Gen.1:2)

And what I really want to bring home to you this morning is that it is the same Holy Spirit who who was at work in the very beginning of all things who moves among us and hovers over us and over the deep places of our lives today wherever there is the same תְּהוֹמוֹת וְצִבְרוֹן - formless desolation - that there was in the waters of chaos before God spoke in eternity. And it is the same

Creator Spirit of God who brings light to our darkness and life to our dust and opens the way for us to enter the Kingdom of God.

We all rejoice in the wonder of the physical creation all around us – isn't it just wonderful to hear those words: "God said 'Let there be light' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good." And isn't it truly amazing to see the Creator's hand at work in everything from the vastness of the galaxies and the laws of physics to the splendour of the ocean and the majesty of towering mountains and the minute attention to detail in the colours of summer flowers or the camouflage of a new-born fawn. But, in the words of the Nicene Creed (whose 1700th anniversary we will mark next year), we believe in 'the Maker of all things visible and invisible.'

Jesus says to Nicodemus that 'Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.' (John 3:6) and what He is alluding to is that just as there are marvels to behold in the physical realm of God's Creation so there is another whole dimension of creation to be opened to our sight by the Holy Spirit if we are willing to allow the fulfilment of the purposes of God. Let me lay this morning's two Bible passages side by side for you to understand what I am trying to explain.

In the beginning of the physical creation, we read in Genesis that 'the earth was formless and empty and darkness was over the surface of the deep.' (Gen.1:1) In the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus we are told that this searching Pharisee came to the Lord 'at night' (John 3:2). Just as in the beginning of the physical creation there was emptiness and darkness before God spoke, so in the beginning of the new creation that God wants to accomplish in people there is a similar emptiness and darkness. And it is into that spiritual emptiness that Nicodemus was experiencing (despite all his religious learning) that Jesus speaks: "I am telling you the truth: no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again." (John 3:3)

Of course He is not speaking about some kind of physical rebirth (as Nicodemus seems to think – a person entering a second time into their mother's womb to be born) but about being born anew (or born from above) by water and the Spirit. 'Let there be light,' God is saying to Nicodemus through Jesus and although we are not told precisely how this Pharisee's responds to his encounter with Jesus or how his spiritual journey unfolds, the

fact that we find him (in chapter 7) standing up for Jesus' right to be heard before He is judged and (in chapter 19) helping Joseph of Arimathea to bury the body of the crucified One, means that we may justifiably conclude that as Nicodemus allows the Holy Spirit to enlighten him, he enters the Kingdom of God, having stepped over from darkness to light in the spiritual realm.

My friends, the same Creator Spirit is moving among us and hovering over us even now as we gather in the name of Jesus to worship the eternal God. Whatever chaos or formless desolation there may be within us, whatever spiritual darkness there may be in us or among us, God says אֵרְאִי אֹר - let there be light - אֵרְאִי אֹר - and there is light, there is a new beginning, a new creation, a new birth, and like so many in the Gospels - the fishermen on the shores of Galilee, the many whose physical ailments Jesus healed during His ministry, the repentant thief on cross by Jesus' side, and Saul on the road to Damascus – who could not compare the new in their lives with what had gone before, we are invited to step out of the shadows into the new day that is fellowship with God in Christ.

Like so much in the realm of the Spirit (like the although God is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit yet God is utterly One) this completely defies human logic or explanation yet makes perfect sense when we receive it. Faith involves being willing to go where the Spirit of God may take us, not knowing where the wind has come from or where God's breath may prompt us to go, and in so doing entering into the perfect freedom of the children of God.

Are you willing to put yourself completely in God's hands this morning and allow the Creator of the Universe to fill you with new life? In our encounter with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we meet both unspeakable power and gentle tenderness and as at the beginning of all things we find the formless taking shape, we experience the filling of our emptiness, darkness is turned to light and night to glorious day. And in our yielding to God by faith a whole new life is born in us, a life that unleashes such a transformation that we are rescued from the inevitability of death that is part of the physical creation and given the assurance of eternal life, a place in the Kingdom of God.

No end of words from me will adequately explain the way of salvation or lead anyone from death to life for it is the Holy Spirit, the Creator Spirit, alone who can perform that greatest of miracles.

And so as we close in prayer, I want to use the words of the 9th century Latin hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* – Come, Creator Spirit – which is often sung at a service of ordination.

Let's pray together:

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
and lighten with celestial fire.
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.

Thy blessed unction from above
is comfort, life, and fire of love.
Enable with perpetual light
the dullness of our blinded sight.

Anoint and cheer our soiled face
with the abundance of thy grace.
Keep far our foes, give peace at home:
where thou art guide, no ill can come.

Teach us to know the Father, Son,
and thee, of both, to be but One,
that through the ages all along,
this may be our endless song:

Praise to thine eternal merit,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.