

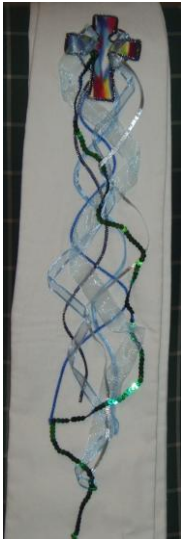
**TRINITY SUNDAY, Year B, 7<sup>th</sup> June, 2009**  
Isaiah 6:1-8; Ps 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

**The Dynamic Trinity**

*Rev'd Robyn Boyd*

**In the name of God the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

**Story**



When I was ordained, as deacon, all of us being ordained turned up with stoles we had each individually designed. We weren't told that's what we had to do – all of us, it seemed, wanted to tell our own stories about God, so onto those stoles we'd woven, stitched and painted images and symbols that helped tell those stories. My own stole has these streams of living water: life-giving, ever-flowing, fresh, and cleansing, an image speaking to me of the overflowing abundance of life in Christ; the cross is a Celtic style, symbolising how creation and heaven and earth connect, as well as it reflecting my Scottish heritage; and this rainbow material the cross is made of reflects the great diversity of peoples that God embraces without distinction. There is a lot packed onto this stole; it's like a book to be read.

And so it was with all our stoles: all of our diverse stoles were like different books, portraying different perspectives of God, telling different stories of God, and of our journeys to ordination and of what we hoped we reflected of God.

For me, that image of living water has grown richer and deeper. As I've grown in faith and understanding, this image of living water has for me broadened from an image which I had initially identified with Christ, to an image that embraces God as Trinity. This is water streaming from the source of a deep wellspring, overflowing in abundance, to be plunged into, in which to swim and to surf and to be carried, to be refreshed and replenished and quenched, and in the end becoming a great ocean and returning to the source in that great cycle of nature. Think of the multitude of biblical images of water: Jesus as "the spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (*John 4:14*); being poured on a thirsty land (*Isaiah 44:3*); the Holy Spirit being poured out; God the Father: the source, the well-spring, from which Jesus is sent into the world.

In this image of God, there's great fluidity, there's a constant or dynamic movement and sweeping grace of flowing water, which draws all into its stream, and in which there's no beginning and no end.

***The Trinity***

And here we come to the great challenge of Trinity Sunday - trying to understand the Trinity. It would be a long and boring sermon if I was to try and tackle a fulsome explanation. I just want to leave with one image or angle on the Trinity. Not an unpacking of the three persons of the Trinity -there's always the danger of the old heresy of Modalism if we try too hard to differentiate and carve up the Trinity into three distinctive

working parts. I want us to catch a sense of what one writer, Killian McDonnell, calls the “Trinitarian dynamic: a movement from a starting place and a returning to the source. God reaches out through the Son in the Spirit to touch and transform the Church and the world and to lead them in the Spirit, through Christ, back to the Father.”<sup>1</sup> There’s a dynamic inter-flowing going on – each person of the Trinity each being involved in each of the mysteries of creation and salvation, in all of God’s activity in creation, according to each own unique personhood.

### ***Rublev’s Icon***

I’ll move you to another image to illustrate this further. See the icon of the Trinity – Rublev’s icon. (on the front of your pewsheets and in front of the altar)

See the space at centre, in front of the cup, at the Here there is an invitation for us to enter into that ourselves. But particularly, notice a sort of fluid movement in the icon; a vitality and dynamism of movement . Each figure is referring to the others in an encircling –we find that in the direction of their eyes, the placement of their hands, and an overall unending circularity in the icon itself. There’s a oneness, a unity community going on here; and it’s invitational – we’re into this dynamic community.



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### ***Nicodemus***

How might today’s Gospel help us to further this sense of God the Trinity? The story of Nicodemus is one of an important, learned, Jewish leader, who creeps through the cover of darkness to come to Jesus, curious, but not willing to openly explore. The conversation between him and Jesus is almost comic opera, the way Nicodemus thinks in literal terms (“How can someone enter his mother’s womb a second time, after they’re old?”) and Jesus responding at another level, with metaphor and mystical wisdom.

Nicodemus has come to Jesus with a particular image of Jesus. He’s rather taken with the miracles that Jesus is becoming known for. He’s seeing these as a sign that Jesus is tied up with God: “rabbi – teacher, come from God” is his acknowledgement to Jesus. Jesus’ response is to invite Nicodemus to see further than this limited understanding. But all those images of birthing, being born from above, being born of the Spirit and water into a new heavenly family, don’t open Nicodemus’ eyes. He can only see the world and its possibilities by what he sees physically in front of him, and what he can intellectually assent to. It seems he’s open to expanding his head knowledge of God, rather than taking the plunge into relationship and experience of God through Christ. He can neither see nor hear what Jesus is offering in new birth; he’s unable to receive Jesus’ testimony to the truth of God, and to believe (vv 11,12).

### ***The Invitation of the Trinity***

There’s a lot in this story to teach us about relationship with God through Christ, but what about the Trinity? Certainly Father, Son and Spirit all get a run on the field – there’s a

great sense of Father, Son and Spirit all working together in this business or this offer of new birth.

But there's more than this – again like those stoles, there's a great diversity in imagery to try to capture something of this triune God. And there's also that circularity – the unending, circularity of self giving love. Jesus, sent by God into the world, God the Father giving his only son; Jesus descending from heaven, then to be lifted, ascended to heaven. And through it all, the Spirit, the presence of God, the wind blowing; and the invitation to Nicodemus and to us, to enter into this mutual community or communality of God.

Jesus' life in relationship with the world reveals to us God as Trinity: the self-giving love of Jesus is the reflection of the life within the Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit interacting with each other in generous and self-giving love, moving and flowing and drawing life from one another, and in turn interacting with creation with that same love. God loving the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son, sending the Son into the world... As our Gospel passages of these last weeks of the Easter season kept reminding us, filled and enabled by the Spirit, we are sent by Christ into the world; we are called to extend that same generous and hospitable and self-giving love to others. And caught up into this cycle of Trinitarian love, we become more Christ-like and so we reflect this Trinitarian life – even more than that, we live that Trinitarian life.

What, then, does the Nicodemus story call out to us? What does the icon of the Trinity call to us, and the image on my stole?

In short, with all these, there's an invitation to step into the community of the Trinity.

To do otherwise would be like standing in front of the icon, looking at it, just seeing a picture. To step into the icon, as the iconic Trinity invites, is to become part of that unending eternal circularity of the dynamism of God, Father, Son and Spirit. Or it could be like standing beside the river of abundant flowing waters of life and keeping out of it, at the most just dabbling a finger or toe in it. A bit like just coming to church, attending but holding off from saying that “yes” to Christ, with whole heart, mind and voice and actions. It's that “yes”, that then draws us into the very life of this dynamic Three-in-one God; or to use the image from our Romans passage this morning, we become children of God, joint heirs with Christ.

### ***Conclusion***

What about for us, as a church here at Ascension? This Trinitarian community of Father, Son and Spirit models for us what we're called to as church. Or to put it the other way round –we as church are called to reflect the Trinitarian life of mutual and ongoing self-giving. How are we being that here, and is it something that all are included in?

If we were weaving a stole or banner to describe who and what we are as church, what would be the images or symbols we'd weave into it? Or, given that we'll be doing this in Open Church Week soon, what would we put on display to show who God is to us? What

would be the story we'd tell about who God is in the current life of this church? Think seriously about it: it's a question of how we corporately or communally reflect the life of God. And that is a critical question as we seek this year to freshly connect with the community outside our church and to play our part in connecting people into the very life and personal community of God.

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<sup>i</sup> Killian McDonnell OSB 'Theological Presuppositions in our Preaching about the Spirit', *Theological Studies* 59 (1998) 219-235