

Brancepeth Sermon

Trinity Sunday, 27 May 2018

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Isaiah 6:1–8

Psalms 29

Romans 8:12–17

John 3:1–17

Help us this day, O Lord,
to hear your words
and know your voice
so that we may live our lives for you.

Please, take your seats.

Do you know the One-Bit Word Game?

It's a game where you may not use words that have more than one bit – one part.

Now: I need some help here.

Tom, what do I mean by 'bit'?

(Nice and clear, please)

[Tom calls out: 'Syllable!']

Thanks. I had to ask Tom:

I can't say the word he said.

In this game you are out as soon as you use words of more than one bit, and the word he used is a three-bit word.

And this is a *one-bit* talk.

Let me try to tell you why

This day is the day in the year when
we set our minds on the fact that
God is Three in One.

And the claim that our God is Three-in-One –
that’s a claim that you might think is
hard to get your head round.

You might think it’s the kind of claim that
sits a long way from the life of faith, *your* life of faith.

You might think that you need a big brain
to get it right;
you might think you need lots of long, long words.

And what I want to tell you on this three-in-one day
is that *it’s not like that*.

This is a truth you can grasp;
this is a truth *at home* in your faith;
this is a truth you can feel *in your heart*.

This is a truth that does not need long words –
one-bit words will do.

The first thing to say, though, is that
God *is* more than our minds can grasp.

We heard, in the first text that was read just now,
the tale of a man of God
who stood in God's house
and saw more than he had thought to see.

His mind was blown,
not by long words and hard thoughts,
but by *God* – by his glimpse of all that God is.

God *is* more than our minds can grasp.
We *don't*, we *can't* know *how* God's life works,
and when we say that God is three-in-one
that's not meant to help us tie God down;
it does not tell us how God's life works.

It does not mean we get to say,
'Oh yes, now I get it, now I see what it all means,
now it all makes sense to me'.

No, it is not meant to help us put God in a box.
In fact, it's meant to help us *not* to put God in a box.
It's meant to point us to ways in which
there is more to God than we might have thought –
more to God's life,
more to God's love,
more to the way God shares God's life with us.

To see what I mean,
what I want you to do – *all* that I want you to do –
is to think what it is like when you pray,
what it is like when you come to God and talk to God
– in praise,
or to ask God for help
or to own up for things that you have done wrong.

Think what it is like when you pray.

First of all, we pray to God as the one who made us,
the source from whom all good things flow:

the Lord who sits on the throne of the world,
the one whose voice can make the world shake,
the one who made the world, and holds the world,
and *loves* the world.

We here, in our own small church
or at home, or in the car, or out on a walk –
we pray to this One.

And though a lot of the time
we might not give much thought to what we do,
from time to time, it might get through to us
just what a bold thing we do.

We pray to *God*, we talk to *God*, we ask things of *God*:
the King, the Lord of Hosts,
the one whose life is the fire at the heart of all things.

That on its own should make our minds reel.

But that's not all.

When we pray, *we do not pray on our own.*

There is one by our side who prays *with* us,
the one we call the Son.

We heard in our text from John those
well-known words:

For God so loved the world – God so loved *us* –
that God gave us his Son, his ... one Son

to be by our side,

to pray *with* us,

to pray *for* us.

When we pray, our words join to this man's words,
and wing their way with his,
to the one he called – well –
to the one he called his Dad.

We do not pray on our own.

Don't think that there's you on your own down here,
and God on his throne up there,
and that when you pray
you try to throw your small voice up to God
and hope that it might reach all the way.

No.

You do not pray on your own.

There is one by your side who prays with you,
a man sent by God to *be* with you,
a man filled with God's own life,
a man who is *so* filled with God, that what he does –
well, those are God's deeds,
and what he says – those are God's words,

and so when *he* prays by your side,
that is *God* who prays by your side.
When he joins your words to his
that is *God* who joins your words to his.

We don't just pray *to* God,
we pray *with* God;
God prays with us.

Do I know how this works,
how it can be that this is God too?

No, I don't, and no long words can help me there.

Why should I think that my words, my mind
would give me that kind of grasp on *God*?

All I can say is that,
in some way too deep for words,
God lives in this man who walks by my side.

I don't need to know *how* it works
I just need to trust that it's true —
to know it, to feel it, to rest in it.

This is God by my side, and *I do not pray on my own*.
This is God by *our* side,
and *we* do not pray on our own.

So: when we pray, we know God on the throne,
the one *to* whom we pray,
and we know *God once more*, God by our side
the one *with* whom we pray.

And that's not all.

When I pray –
let's say, when I pray for a friend who is sick,
when I cry out, 'Oh God, Oh God,
please help my friend!'

it's not that I bring this friend's pain
to a God who might not have heard of it,
who might not have cared,
if I had not thought to pray.

No. My love, my care for my friend –
that's what I feel when I dip my toe
in the stream of *God's* love for my friend,
when for a while I flow in that stream
or it flows through me –

when *God's* care, God's love,
God's life flows through *me*.

And so, when we pray,
when we *yearn*, when we *long* to see God work,
when we, in our own small, weak ways,
feel love and care flow through us –
that is God's life too.

That is God in our hearts,
God in our guts,
God's life in *our* lives:
the stream that bears us up.

We heard this in our text from Paul.
We know that we can call out to God and say,
with Christ, 'Dad! Dad! Please help!'

And when we do that –
when we know with at least a small part of our minds
that each one of us is a child of God –
that is the breath of God in our minds,
the fire of God in our hearts,
the stream of God's life in our veins.

So, when we pray
we do not pray on our own.
Yes, we have God the Son, God by our side
who joins our words to his,

But, more than that, we have God *in us*,
God in our hearts, God in our guts.

This stream that flows from God
and flows through us –
that too is who God is; that is a side of God's life.
That stream is God *one more time*.

And so we say –
though we don't know how this is true,
we don't and can't know how it works –
that God is not just the source,
the one from whom all good things come,
and God is not just the Son,
the one who stands by our side and will not let us go,
but that God is the stream, the flow,
the one in whom we are caught up,
the one in whom we rest,
the one in whom we find our life
And we can know *that*, too, when we pray.

So there is God, the one *to whom* we pray,
the one to whom we look, to whom we call out,
the one who made the world and
who loves all that has been made.

And then there is God by our side, *God once more*
the one *with whom* we pray;
God in the life of this man who shares our life,
this man who lives the life of God by our side,
and who pours out his life in love for us.

And then there is God in our hearts, God in our guts,
God one more time,
the stream in which we dip our toes,
the stream in which we long to swim,
the stream which filled the Son and can fill us too,
and bear us in love back to our source.

The life of the one God meets us in all these
three ways,
and all that we meet in these three ways,
has its roots deep, deep down in God's life –
all the way down in God's life –

in ways that our minds are not fit to grasp
in ways that break our words to bits.

One life, one love, one will,
works through these three
to meet us when we pray,
to catch hold of us, to bear us up –
and to take us home.

And that's why our words for God need to stretch;
one-bit words, it turns out, will not do on their own.

We call the source,
the one *to* whom we pray, God the *Father*.

And we call the one by our side,
the one *with* whom we pray, God once more, *Jesus*.

And we call the one in our hearts,
the one *in* whom we pray, God one more time,
the *Spirit*.

And *that* is why we call this God –
the God we meet when we pray,
the God we *know* when we pray
– *that* is why we call this God ‘three in one’;
that is why we call our God
Trinity.

O Lord our God,
help us to know you when we pray.
Help us to know you as the one *to* whom we pray;
help us to know you as the one *with* whom we pray;
help us to know you as the one *in* whom we pray.
Help us to know you, and to love you,
and to live our lives for you,
one God in three,

Holy Trinity.

Amen.