

*Let us pray:*

Today's worship centres on the Trinity, the great mystery of how God reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and invites us into a relationship with him as our Father in Heaven, His Son who lives among us, and his Spirit who dwells within us.

And if I open with that statement, it sounds like permission to instantly switch off, give up, and go into sleep mode: what has the Doctrine of the Trinity to do with us in everyday real life?

Lots, I think: we are told we are made in the image of God, and I think we, too, are trinitarian beings.

Just as God is made up of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we know ourselves to be made up of Mind, Body and Spirit.

We are rational, physical, spiritual beings.

Those three aspects make up who we are, and to some extent, they can be isolated from each other:

- The body can be brain-dead but kept alive on a life-support machine.
- The power of the intellect does not rely on the mobility of the body: think of Stephen Hawkins.
- The spiritual may be most evident when the body and intellect are compromised: think of the person silenced by a wonderful view, or work of art, the person approaching death, the child asleep: the time when body and mind are temporarily suspended.

I'm not saying the three components of which we consist are the same as the components of the Holy Trinity but they bear resemblance, there are parallels and implications for how we live, how we worship, and how we understand God.

- Jesus came as Body, sharing our physical needs and limitations, bringing our bodies into the realm of holiness: our bodies matter, we are to honour and respect each others' bodies.
- The Father's works have formed the written records of the scriptures and inspired the thinking of all theologians seeking to articulate their knowledge of God.
- The Spirit is the particular gift of Jesus at his parting, a re-birthed form of the Spirit that has moved creatures to worship since the beginning, the foundation of creation.

We are Body, Mind, and Spirit, and it is the whole of us that responds in worship to the God that is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- We worship in a bodily way when we are Christians in action, doing the practical work of caring, building, providing.
- We worship in an intellectual way when we read, think, and talk about God.
- We worship in a spirit-led way when we leave words behind and simply behold his glory.

Of these three ways, the last is the most difficult to describe or immediately recognise, and it is this that I want to bring this morning since the readings focus on the gift of the Spirit, in the wake of the Pentacost season. Also, because it ties in with some things I have been reading and hearing recently about the links between psychology and spirituality. (Brains are not my area of expertise, so forgive me for what may be a clumsy but I hope not too inaccurate telling:)

Scientists may never know how the mind and brain relate but they do know the brain is made up of two unequal sized lobes, the left-side being the area in which self-conscious, rational, linear thinking happens, and the right-side in which a lot of things are happening but not consciously.

The intellectual, self-conscious left-side cannot control or wilfully access the dreamy, unconscious right-side.

The unconscious right-side will impart impressions, its own form of knowledge to the left-side but only when the self-conscious left-side switches off.

At night, we go to sleep and switch off our conscious, thinking bit of our brain, and the unconscious bit takes over with dreams that we may or may not find we recall on waking: the conscious bit may get a glimpse of the unconscious bit as we wake, and, we may even be semi-aware of being in the dream if we don't fully wake up.

What we are much less aware of is the amount of switching between conscious and unconscious that happens naturally during the day.

For example, when we can't remember a word or name and we give up trying to remember and 'forget it', when later it drops into our minds, it has been supplied from the unconscious, switching in.

What has fascinated me, is that the unconscious part of our mind is also a *thinking* part, that operates without language and in its own imagery to feed its own sort of knowledge to our conscious self.

What also fascinates me is that the discoveries of the ancient and medieval spiritual writers – people like Julian of Norwich, and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* - who explored the workings of their own minds discovered the same things.

They discovered they could suspend their attention to their thoughts, letting the thoughts dwindle to minimal, with their attention solely on the expectation of the presence of God in that vast, silent space of their quietened minds.

They found, in this silence, that they were opened to new insights, new understanding and knowledge of God; they found spiritual wisdom revealed to them.

They were practising a technique that was effectively switching the self-conscious left-side of their brains to minimum activity in order that the unconscious right-side could open up and impart its images and knowledge into the left-side, to be captured and organised into new thinking that transfigured them.

Those spiritual writers point us to the idea that if self-consciousness makes us human, then its suspension opens the door to what was once called divinity. If we can get beyond our thinking we open ourselves to the deepest parts of our minds where we seem to have knowledge we have never self-consciously learned that gives us insights and opens us to change, to transfiguration.

In today's gospel from John, Jesus tells his disciples "*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth... he will take what is mine and declare it to you*".

Where is that Spirit?

How do we engage with it?

Might silencing ourselves be key?

Might the right-side of our brains be a lot more able to communicate with God than our busy, conscious side?

Might the right-side be integral to the action of the Spirit?

Last week we heard the words of Jesus that immediately precede today's, where he says of the Spirit of truth, "*You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you....he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.*"

Silence, or lack of it, affects the quality of our daily living.

We are overwhelmed with information, and ceaseless stimulation: we are drip fed through our attachment to computers and phones, an endless backdrop of noise from machinery and devices; a continuous chatter in our heads as we

interpret and re-orientate, checking we know still who we are: what do we think, feel, do, in the assault of so much other.

Our rational part of the brain is continually trying to work out and make sense of the information that comes pouring in from all around us.

Switching off is essential for deep mind, and for the Spirit of truth, to open to us. That is the traditional place for silence and meditation in our lives.

However, it does not come without its own pain: it is not only the Spirit of truth we can find in the deep mind but also, all the suppressed fears and rubbish of our lives.

We must enter it with care, and deeply knowing the love of God and the safety of friends to help us make sense of what we encounter.

That may be an echo of Paul's experience, telling us in his letter to the Romans, that what we are given as a package is the boast of sharing the glory of God, and sufferings that ultimately

lead us to hope because God's love has been poured into us as the Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit alongside, and transforming, the rubbish of our lives.

We are made in the trinitarian image of God, and we need Body, Mind and Spirit to be in balance and in tune with God.

We learn to worship God through Body, Mind and Spirit as we grow in our discipleship and faith.

We do that naturally, as we get increasingly tuned in to the particular relationship that God has with each one of us. However, we also benefit from intentionally paying more attention to developing our spiritual muscles, particularly those we may not use so often.

The amount of mental noise and many demands on our attention, blocks out deep mind – the Spirit of truth – from communicating with us.

Perhaps we would all benefit from more external and internal silence?

For finding time to sit and be; to try what was traditionally known as 'beholding', that we may grow in Spirit, mind and body into the likeness of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*Amen*