

Isaiah 6: 1-8, Psalm 29, Romans 8: 12-17, John 3: 1-17

It's Trinity Sunday, so this is normally when you get illustrations trying to explain the Trinity - like the Sun giving light, heat and radiation, 3 aspects but one Sun. Or H₂O existing in 3 states: ice, water and steam but all H₂O.

I'm not an astronomer or a chemist so let's instead take a look at today's readings and see what they say about God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and how we should respond.

So, John 3: 16. I guess most of us could recite it? **For GOD so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.** William Temple said this is “the verse at the heart of the Gospel”

It must be up amongst the most well-known pieces of scripture, alongside **In the beginning GOD created the heavens and the earth** and **Because the Lord is my Shepherd...**

But in recent years there's an important word that has been dropped in most translations. That word is Begotten. Begotten has got up and gone... and instead you get 'one and only son' or just 'only son'.

My grandfather was the Rev F .R. Banks. The F stood for Frederick, which he disliked intensely and he preferred to be known as Reg, short for Reginald. He was a minister in the Evangelical Free Church. Not too dissimilar from the Salvation Army but with fewer tambourines and no uniform. I'm fortunate enough to have a couple of his bibles – one with his notes written in Hebrew, Greek and English. The other with his typed-out sermons sellotaped into the relevant part of the Bible.

I was only young but I remember him getting really upset in the late 1960's when the Good News bible came out and it didn't have the word *begotten* in John 3:16. Consequently, he wouldn't have anything to do with that translation.

So what? Why should *begotten* be important to my grandfather back then and to us today?

To get technical, the New Testament was written in Greek. What we translate as 'only begotten' comes from the Greek word 'monogenes'. Monogenes has 2 meanings.

One we see in Hebrew 11 where it refers to Isaac. Isaac wasn't Abraham's one and only son. But he was the only son of Abraham and Sarah under the covenant that God had made with them both. So the word *begotten* here means that Isaac was one of a kind within a special relationship.

The other meaning is here in John 3:16 where it means utterly *unique in kind*. Jesus was utterly uniquely God's son, uniquely sharing God's divine nature. 'Only son' just doesn't cut it as a translation. In the same way, saying 'God is love' is true, but it doesn't go nearly far in enough in conveying what God did as a result of that love.

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So, *begotten* is important to us because it means God so loved the world (not just good people or church people but *everyone*) that he took the initiative and did something - he gave himself in the form of his Son.

And why would he do that? So that we could have everlasting life and be in permanent relationship with him.

That everlasting life starts now. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every week. It's not some future state.

As Augustine had it "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love"

We're all familiar with the word Emmanuel. We normally translate that as *God with us*. But it isn't. It's made up of 2 parts: Emmanu and El. Emmanu means *with us*, El means *GOD*.

So not *God with us* but *With us, God*. Even in the name Emmanuel, chosen for Jesus, he puts us before himself. Isn't that amazing? Whether at church, at work or at home. With us, God.

It gets better. In the passage that we read from Romans 8 it talks about us being adopted as brothers and sisters of Jesus. We're not *begotten*, we don't have Jesus divine nature, but we still get to call God, Abba – Dad.

So we have everlasting life in relationship with God, Dad, because *he* made it happen. Because God gave himself for us through his begotten Son, Jesus.

So how do we respond to that? What would you do if someone gave you a new heart or kidney so that you could carry on living longer? Would you treat each day as special? As a gift? Should we react to God any the less??

Our readings started with Isaiah 6 and here we have a contrasting but evocative vision of a Holy, *seemingly* unapproachable, God Almighty sitting on a throne and so large that even just the hem of his robe fills the temple. Isaiah is totally terrified and felt completely unworthy.

But someone once said that the whole of Scripture is about **God in search of man**. And we see that here. That same Holy awesome God, cared enough on a personal level to blot out Isaiah's sin, take away his guilt – and in the process also took away Isaiah's excuse not to act.

My grandfather wrote against these verses: ***God - Infinitely high but intimately nigh.***

Old Testament, New Testament and now, we have an infinite God who is intimately interested in us. He needs us to be his hands and his feet and his heart. To care for righteousness and justice, to clothe those who need it, to feed those who are hungry. To make a difference.

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And God said “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” On Trinity Sunday we get a hint of the Trinity in that question. “Who will go for us?” ... And Isaiah says “Here am I, Send me”.

That’s not always an easy ride. Isaiah gets a really tough job to do. It comes after where our reading finished today. He has to tell his people about the consequence of indifference and lack of sensitivity, of being callous and having hard hearts. What God asks of you and of me may be difficult too.

But in giving of himself through his Son, God took away our excuse not to act, just as he did with Isaiah.

Apparently one of the favourite sayings of Bishop Curry, who preached so vividly at the Royal Wedding last week, is “If you’re breathing, you’re called”

That same Triune God says to us now, here, today: “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” Is our response: “Send me”? What are you being called to do?

And it is in that calling and sending that the Spirit is spread around and every act of love, kindness and self-sacrifice are acts of the Spirit working in the world to make God both real and with us.

Now, as then, on Trinity Sunday I don’t think we can beat “Here I am, send me” as a response to the Triune God who makes our guilt go away, who blots out our sin; the Father God who adopted us into his family; who gave of himself in the form of his only begotten Son so that we might be in everlasting relationship with him - and so that we in our words and in our actions can channel his Spirit to reach the world around us, to make a difference. Amen