

Sermon for Trinity Sunday: "Of one substance" Purdie

Silvia

Have you ever told a child that God made everything, only to be asked "So who made God?"

Have you ever talked to someone who does not believe in God, and discovered that you don't believe, either, in the God that they don't believe in!

Have you ever tried to figure out for yourself what God actually is?

If a child asked you what God is made of, how might you have a go at answering the question?

... go on, give it a go. What is God? What is God made of?

I'm going to have a go this morning. In 10 minutes. Wish me luck.

The first thing I would say about God is that God exists outside of space and time. God is.

Much of the debates going on within science, and between science and religion relate to the fundamental nature of the universe. As we explore deeper inside the atom and further towards the edges of the universe it is entirely possible that scientists and mathematicians will prove that the universe could not possibly exist at all unless there was an intelligence and power greater than the universe. In fact, this is what a great many very clever people do believe.

The three 4 words of our Bible declare this to be the case: "In the beginning God". The idea of God starts with the idea that there is a reality that goes beyond all we can see and touch, all we can measure and manipulate.

So the first answer to the question 'what is God made of?' is that God is made of stuff that is different from the stuff that you and I are made of, or rocks, stars or atoms.

The word that is used in the Bible for this different kind of reality is 'Spirit'.

As we heard in our scripture reading last week, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well that "God is spirit and truth"

One of the key words we use about God is 'holy', which means simply 'different'. Other. Outside of space and time. Beyond us. Our God is so big! Bigger than human ability to define. Beyond metaphor, abstractions or definitions.

So that is the first big idea, that God is the reason why the universe is.

The second thing about God is that God chose to be known. God could have set our universe up and running then left us to it. God who is Spirit-beyond decided to be Spirit-with. God got involved. So what is God made of? Communication. Revelation. Truth. God is spirit and truth.

All that I've said so far would be more-or-less agreed with by all three world religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism all are founded on the belief in one creator God who is holy and beyond but who chooses to participate in the world he has made. Where we part company is the next bit: we have different understandings of how God has revealed himself, and who God has revealed himself to be. I'm no expert on other faiths, so I'll stick to my own.

I believe that this holy creator God revealed himself in one particular way at one particular time in human history, and that was 2000 years ago through a man called Jesus. And, I believe that this revealing of God's-self didn't stop when Jesus died, but that it went on happening, and the way it went on happening was through ordinary people experiencing something we call the Holy Spirit.

So this is the 2nd big idea about what God is: that the God who made the universe is also a God who engages with ordinary people in extraordinary ways that keeps alive the work and teaching of Jesus. One God, expressed in human history in three ways. One God with one being, holy, wholly different to us, who reveals himself to us in three forms of communication. One person with three personas. One substance with three forms. But still indivisibly one Spirit, one Truth.

I suspect that in the church these days we tend to slide towards polytheism. Are you sure we don't actually have 3 gods? We tend to relate to God as either Father, or Holy Spirit, or Jesus Christ. We tend to prefer one face of God to the others, and dodge other faces of God. We project our values of goodness onto God, and relate to God best when he fits our idea of who God should be: nice, kindly, evenhanded, protecting the innocent. And we struggle when we read parts of the Bible where God doesn't seem that likeable, and we struggle when bad things happen to good people in our world and we wonder if maybe God could have done a better job at creating us so that we humans didn't make such a mess of things. Jesus seems more approachable,

especially when he's blond and gently holding a little lamb or a little child. As for the Spirit, that's all well and good as a pretty dove but lets not get too carried away!

The Christian conviction that God is Trinity is always an uncomfortable one. Not so much because it's a mathematical conundrum – how can you have 3 but still be one? Which is it, 3 or 1 make up your mind! ... To me, that's not the issue. The claim that God is Trinity sits awkwardly for us because it is the claim that God is God. The Trinity will always evade us and confuse us because God is so much bigger than us, so much more real than us, so much more alive than we are. The Great I AM simply is, and is free to be whoever he chooses to be.

"I am what I am. I will be what I will be."

When God appeared to Moses, Moses saw the bush burning though it burned with life not destruction, Moses felt the heat, he heard the voice, he knew with every fibre of his body that this was the Lord God. Moses met the Trinity that day. Word, Spirit, Creator.

When God appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, he met the Trinity that day: Word, Spirit, Creator, but Paul knew in that moment that a name had been added to the Trinity, the living Word had gained a name and it was **Jesus**.

When we meet God here in our worship, we meet the Trinity: Word, Spirit, Creator, together Lord of all, who forms us as his body as we share this bread, whose life blood flows within us as we share this cup. And we baptize in the name of God the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as new Christians have been baptized for 2 millenia.

And in this meeting with God we ourselves become part of the answer to the question: What is God made of? We know this is true, for we feel it, we know it, it's obvious to us – God is love. God is relationship. God is belonging, knowing and being known, for in this Trinity God we share in divine community, communion, oneness.

I don't often quote from the Westminster Confession, but it is one of our standards for faith in the Presbyterian Church, and it does have a grandeur of phrase, so I'll finish with this. The Westminster Confession, part 2:

I. There is but one only living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, etc etc

III. In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Playdough