

Trinity Sermon: Being and doing

Silvia Purdie, Cashmere Presbyterian Church, Sunday 16 June 2019

Readings:

Romans 5:1-5

John 16:5-15

We gather our thoughts into the light of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit asking that God will lead us into all truth. Amen.

I have a question for you this morning – are you more of a ‘do-er’ or a ‘be-er’? If you had to choose, are you a person who gains most of your identity and purpose from the things you do and achieve, or do you gain most of your identity and purpose from who you are, and who you are there for?

Me, I’m more of a ‘do-er’. I have a high need to get things done. I like to know what needs to be done and to achieve things. Cook dinner, check. Write sermon, check. Call my mother, check. Pay Ben’s school bill, check. That’s primarily how I know I’m doing OK. I get things done.

My in-laws are more ‘being’ people. When they come to stay they sit at the dining table and talk. They drink tea and talk. They are wonderful at just being present, being relational. And Chris has made a career out of being present and being relational – absolutely what you need in a chaplain.

And in my marriage I have had to learn to, just sometimes, just sit and be together, even if I’m not getting anything else done at all.

What do you think? Hands up if you definitely identify as a doing person, a need to achieve tasks person? And hands up if you definitely think you’re more of a being-together-with person, more of a ‘take time and enjoy the moment’ kind of person? And how about those of you who value a bit of both?

Doing is about function. Doing is about the roles we play in life, the tasks we do.

Being is about essence, who we are and how we find ourselves in relationship. In fancy high-falootin academic language ‘being’ is called ‘ontology’.

In our Bibles this is in the beginning of John’s Gospel: chapter 1 verses 1-2

And it is here that our theology of the Trinity begins:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

The ‘being-ness’ of all things flows out of the being-ness of God with the Word. Even before the Word is spoken it exists in relationship. John’s gospel begins here, and John’s theology draws us deeper and deeper into being-in-relation, before and after anything is achieved or created.

For those of you who find ‘just being’ easier than for the rest of us, John is your gospel. You can hold these ideas, let them rest with you, even if you don’t rationally understand or interpret or apply them ... this is good. This is actually stepping into the very being of God, the ontology of God. Word with God.

Actually the Trinity is all there: God as ultimate reality, Word as focus of truth, With as connection.

By chapter 16 John has developed this, named these three aspects of divine being as Father, Son and Spirit. But never stand-alone, never named as separate entities, never never any possibility that they were separate gods. One God, one core being, within which identity and energy flow back and forth.

All the Father has is mine. The Spirit takes what I have and gives it to you.

Over and over again in John are movement words – here there is movement: Jesus has come from the Father and is going back to the Father, and will come back again. The Spirit comes from Jesus and flows out to us and returns glory back to the Father.

The very simplicity of John's use of words holds meaning together with meaning ... the words reach out to our hearts and draw us in. "to" "from" and "with" – it's not about trying to make rational sense of it. It's about allowing our rational busy minds to grow bigger so that we can hold these things together at the same time and make room for more truth, so that Jesus can be one and at the same time coming from God, going to God, and with God. All the movements, towards and away, are as true as the intimate relationship of 'being present with' that is there in every verse of John's gospel.

This is the first thing you need to grasp about the Trinity. This is the Christian faith's first and greatest claim about who God is, that the nature and being of ultimate reality beyond and within all of life and time is a God who is three persons in one person, three ways of being within one being.

Our Nicene Creed expresses it this way:

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
God from God, of one being with the Father.*

Paul, well, Paul is more on the 'doing' side of things from John.

When Paul writes about God he generally is talking about what God does, what God has done for us, what God is doing in the church.

So Romans 5 is really saying the same thing at John 16, but Paul puts it differently.

we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²He has brought us by faith into this experience of God's grace and verse 5:

for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us.

Paul's theology is mostly in the verbs. the doing. the putting right, the pouring out, the bringing to faith.

Paul experienced who God is through the action of God at work in his life, and these few wonderful verses from Romans expresses this perfectly.

For Paul, the Trinity is about action, roles, function

God the Father is the initiator, sending Christ Jesus, who died for us and our salvation, and then sending the Holy Spirit who is Christ's dynamic living agent continuing the work and action of Jesus in people's lives.

But what I really love about Paul's writing is that he brings the actions right into the heart, right into the very essence of identity and being. These are such great verses.

We boast of our hope from having experienced for ourselves the glory of God. And we boast because we have suffered, because we have learned the hard way that our trouble and strife works for good in us because it forms endurance in us, stickability, the kind of strength that hangs in there when things are hard ... and endurance forms character in us, the kind of character that doesn't chuck your toys out of the cot, because, you know, we learn the hard way that life's problems aren't actually all about us, and we can actually gently push ourselves out of the way and get on with the job of loving other people and loving God even when we aren't in the mood – we call that character. And character produces hope, because when it's not all about me we can see a bigger picture and our own emotional needs aren't so demanding and we can keep our eyes on what matters in the long run in the big picture and hope is always given no matter how bleak your situation because it does not come from us, it does not belong to us, it is God's action and being poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

So this is where being and doing come together. They need each other. They are expressed through each other, in the experience of our daily lives because the 'who' of God becomes the 'how' of what God is doing. And it is all about being 'with'. God is always Trinity. Always Father, Son and Holy Spirit, of one being, experienced in different ways at different times but always 'with'. Always love. Always gift being given.

The awesome thing is that we get to share in it. We are recipients of gift, freely given from the Almighty Giver. And we get to share it, give it away, and we get to experience the multiplying of the gift of love that grows as it is shared, only because that is the very being of God, right there.

So, whether you are a doing person who wants to get on and get stuff done or whether you are a being person who wants to be with, or just be or maybe you might be a doing person who can't do as much as you used to and maybe God is bringing you into a place where you have to just be, whether you like it or not, so you might as well make the most of it! ...

I have to learn and keep on learning, often the hard way, that it's OK to rest, it's important to take time to be with people, and to just be with God.

I have to learn and keep on learning that my worth and value is not found in what I achieve, but in who I am, and only then because of who God is. My identity, meaning and purpose is not found in my function or my roles, but in the one who made me and loves me and given me everything I am and have and do.

And today, this Trinity Sunday, we name this One as Holy Trinity, sacred mystery of being, God in three persons, everlasting and eternal intimacy of being with, never-ending outpouring within and through and out and in and into our hearts.

This is our faith, beyond our understanding but within our knowing.

Praise and honour, glory and blessing, be to our God. Amen.