

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It's Trinity Sunday, and the heart of the preacher sinks because it's a very, very difficult day to preach on. How can we dare to speak? What can we say about the Holy Trinity? After a rather unsuccessful attempt a few years ago to talk about the Trinity, a friend of mine said, "You know, Mark, the problem is that you imagine the Trinity to be a problem to be solved and analyzed, rather than something to be worshiped and glorified," and those words struck home, so I've put to one side any philosophizing or theorizing that I might have embarked on, and I'm going to stay with that invitation which my friend gave me. It was good advice. So I'm going to speak from the psalm set for today, which is a psalm of praise. It begins with a great note of praise. "I will exalt you, oh God, my king, and bless your name forever and ever."

That's the tone I'm going to stay with in this sermon. And you'll also notice that the psalm doesn't just begin on a note of praise. It maintains that theme throughout the psalm, right through to the end, the last verse, which we haven't included, is this, "My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord." And there's a certain inclusiveness and fittingness to that which is amplified by the fact that this psalm's what's called an acrostic psalm, so every verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which is obviously something which lost in our translation, but it runs the equivalent from ... I almost said, "A to zed," then, but I better say A to Z, right throughout the psalm, so there's an inclusiveness to this whole psalm.

And what the psalm is trying to do is to emphasize that our life is in every part to be filled with praise. Our triune God is worthy of praise in the beginning, the middle, and the end. Before he is to be analyzed and studied and argued about, he's to be worshiped. So praise is the context from which I'm speaking. The God of whom I speak is three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. He, and I used that word because of the absence of a better pronoun, is a holy God far beyond our understanding, a majestic God worthy of all praise. Trinity Sunday is a reminder that our language is limited.

We can't speak of God directly, which came very forcefully to mind when I was on Iona once, beautiful island in Scotland, and there was a patch of quicksand. We don't have much quicksand in England, but there was some, and there was a notice saying "Beware: Quicksand", and it made me realize that you can't actually put that sign where you need it to be. You can't put the "Beware of Quicksand" sign in the middle of the quicksand, or presumably it would disappear. All you can do is mark off the edge where there is no quicksand to say, "Beware of the quicksand," and there's something about that about how we can speak of God. Our words are limited, so there needs to be a certain humility in our language. We need to make sure our language is well balanced. Often if we say something about God, we have to say something different to counterbalance it. God is one. God is three. God is three. God is one. And I want to speak about two such balances that we see in this psalm which hold our talk of God together.

The first balance is the contrast in the psalm between silence and speech. So in verse three, "There is no end to His greatness," or a different translation is, "His greatness no one can fathom." God is always a mystery beyond our understanding about which we can't speak directly. St. Augustine said, "If you could understand it, it isn't God." And the psalm says in verse five, "I will ponder the splendor of your majesty." In other words, the psalm is just saying, "He'll sit silently, quietly, and ponder the mystery, the unfathomability of God." And this stillness before God is a common biblical experience.

In the Book of Job, which is a fantastic book in the Old Testament, it's very, very long, we only ever have snippets read in church, but you'll know it's about a man who suffers much, and it's full of terrible chapters where his friends, so-called, comfort him, and they try to offer words of explanation of what's happening to him, what God is doing, and this goes on for an interminable 37 chapters. Then finally, in chapter 38, God finally bursts on the scene. He's been spoken about for all this time, and then we hear the voice of God, and God asks, "Who is it that darkens my counsel with

words without knowledge? Where were you when I laid the Earth's foundations? Where is the abode of light? Do you know where darkness resides?"

And this questioning goes on for two chapters, and Job is overwhelmed, and it's as if God is moving towards him and finally has him pinned against the wall, and the tirade ends when God demands, "Let him who accuses God answer him." And what can Job say in response? Very little. And these two chapters of questioning get a two-verse reply where Job says, "I am unworthy. How can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer. Twice, but I will say no more." Job, like the psalmist, recognized the majesty, the mystery, the wonder of God, which renders us silent before him. The first requirement isn't that we understand God. It's that we worship him. We don't understand God, and then come to worship him. We worship him in the hope of one day, our understanding increasing. Faith seeks understanding.

This was the lesson that Job had to learn. He, like us, had lots of questions that he wanted God to answer that he didn't understand. But when he finally encountered God, his words ran out, and he simply worshiped. He didn't question God. Worship, as I say, comes before understanding. One day, the veil will be lifted from our eyes. Until then, we'll always be wrestling with questions, but we're not to stop worshiping. We mustn't domesticate God, to bring him down to our frail level of understanding. We can't have an answer to everything. We can't package truth. We, like Job and the psalmist, must be prepared to sit in silence and meditate on God's wonderful and fearful works.

So there's silence. But on the other hand, there's speech. Look at verse six. "I will tell of your greatness," says the psalmist. Here we have side by side meditation and proclamation. Silence and speech. And I was interested to note that although the psalm begins with the psalmist saying that God is unfathomable, he nevertheless records in this psalm 16 of God's attributes, including his righteousness, compassion, goodness, faithfulness, the richness of his love, and this is significant

because although we worship a God who is unfathomable and mysterious, triune, he is also a God who reveals himself, and there are many apparent contradictions at the heart of the Christian faith, and this is one of them, which is why we need maintain a balance in our talk about God. God is beyond our understanding, and yet he has made himself known to us.

And there's an example of that here. The mystery of our God reduces us to silence, and yet He reveals Himself to us supremely in Christ Jesus, and we are called to proclaim His goodness. We can know something of this God who is beyond our understanding. And as in so much of our faith, we need to maintain both aspects. We need to hold things in tension. Proclamation without the humility engendered by contemplation simply becomes the propagation of dogma, and meditation without proclamation runs the risk of becoming self-absorbed and irrelevant. God is a mystery, but God has made himself known in Christ, as St. Paul says. God is a secret, but it's an open secret.

And the second balance I'll draw out more briefly is in the first verse. I love the way it begins. "I will exalt you, oh God, my King." And our God is often described as King. He rules over the world that He has created. He exercises a universal rule. He is high over all and His splendor is awesome. Our God is what's called a transcendent god, beyond our understanding, beyond our world. He is over and above the world that He has created, and yet the psalmist knows the King to be my God. The creator God he praises as King can also be spoken of in intimate, personal terms. He is near to all those who call on Him. He hears people's cries. He watches over those who love Him. My God, the King.

And Christians continue to speak of God in such apparently contradictory terms, and we do that because of the Trinity. God exists in three persons. He is both the Creator, Father, the brooding spirit, who anoints each one of us, and He's made manifest in Christ Jesus, and it's this belief in the Trinity which sets us apart as Christians. It is the defining element in our beliefs.

There are religions which worship the creator god who lives beyond the heavens, and there are others that worship the god that is within us, or within creation. But only God, only Christianity has this sense of God as both transcendent and within us, eminent. It is only because of the Trinity that we can speak of the Father who created us, the Son who redeems us, the Spirit which indwells us, and here again, we must learn to live and celebrate the balance.

It is easy to go off on a tangent and become focused on one particular member of the Trinity, and just as an exercise this week, you might just pause to think, "Which person of the Trinity am I praying to?" We might just recognize that and perhaps make a point of trying to pray to a different member of the Trinity.

So let us seek to live a balanced life. One, which like the psalmist, is a life lived in the context of worship. Let us dare to sit in silence before God, to be humbled by His majesty, and yet be able to speak of His glory. Let us learn more of the God who is behind us, before us, and alongside us, my God, the King. Amen.