

Trinity Sunday Home Group Study

Notes

St Paul's Dorking, Romans 8:12-17

Q0. [Optional Icebreaker] If you could take just one chapter of the Bible with you to a desert island which would it be and why?

Q1. What is the Trinity? How would you explain it?

After this question you could watch this short video. [Note it's quite satirical humour so leaders do please watch in advance to check whether it is appropriate for your group.]

<https://lutheransatire.org/media/st-patricks-bad-analogies/>

Q2. Do you think the Trinity is important for our everyday faith?

Q3. Does God being Father, Son and Holy Spirit make a difference to prayer? What did you think about what Oli had to say on prayer?

First prayer. The theologian Sarah Coakley argues that it was the experience of Christian prayer that drove the early church fathers to reflect on the Trinity and develop the doctrine that we have in the creeds. Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, "Our Father." He also told us to pray in his name and Hebrews tells us that Jesus is forever interceding to the Father for us. And Paul tells us to pray in the Spirit. We pray to the Father, with the Son, in the Spirit. Prayer, our most important practical activity as Christians, is fundamentally trinitarian.

The way I was taught to pray, and my default way of praying is to sit down and talk to God and tell him what I'm thankful for, what I'm sorry about, and what I'd like him to do. But I meet some people and their default experience of prayer is different. They talk more about hearing from God in words and pictures. They talk about tangible experiences of God's presence as they pray and sometimes being lost for words and deeply aware that the Spirit is praying in them. Wonderfully there are many of those people here at St Paul's. For those of us not like that, it's easy to think of those people as odd (not sure I want to be like them) or special (I'd like to pray like that, but I can't), but what they're really embracing is simply the true nature of Christian prayer. Because God is not just over there somewhere when we pray. God the Spirit is in us, God the Son is with us. And we pray not to a distant abstract God, but to "our Father." We get involved in the conversation happening between the Father, Son and Spirit. It makes sense to listen as well as speak. It makes the sense to invite and allow the Spirit to work in us as we pray. And this is for all of us.

Q4. If a non-Christian friend or colleague asked you to explain why Christians believe God is Trinity what would you say? [Did you find what Oli said about the connection between the Trinity and the gospel story helpful?]

The second reason the Trinity isn't pointless theory is to do with the gospel, the good news about Jesus. Because the story of the gospel, the story of Jesus is the story of Father, Son and Spirit. The Father who sends the Son, and the Spirit who anoints him power. You see it really clearly at Jesus baptism, where the Spirit descends like a dove and the voice of the Father says this is my Son with whom I am well pleased, listen to him. The doctrine of the Trinity is all about how this story of salvation is the story of the one God we worship.

If you have the privilege of being friends with a Muslim or Jew who is serious about their faith they will probably want to ask you about the Trinity, because they don't believe in the Trinity. If that opportunity comes I want you to be in a place where you don't think panic, whatever am I going to say, but instead see it's an opportunity to talk about the gospel. How you believe God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit because of what happened at Christmas, at Jesus' baptism, at Good Friday, at Easter and Pentecost and how you have encountered Father, Son and Holy Spirit in your life.

Q5. Read Romans 8:12-17. What does this passage tell us about our identity as Christians?

Q6. Where is the Father mentioned in this passage? Where is the Son mentioned? Where is the Spirit mentioned?

It is because God is Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit that we can enjoy this identity of being children of God. Loved, free, chosen, precious. I love how Simon Ponsonby puts it: "we have been welcomed into the very home life of the Trinity."

Q7. What's your reaction to that Simon Ponsonby quote?

Q8. Read verse 15 again. "The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.^[4] And by him we cry, "Abba,^[5] Father."" Read Romans 8:1-13. What do you think Paul means by the first half of verse 15 where he talks about being slaves and living in fear?

Q9a. Do you ever experience fear of that sort? Fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of condemnation by God, fear of death?

Q9b. How might the assurance that we are children of God and co-heirs with Christ help address those fears?

Pray for one another that you would experience more and more the freedom and joy that comes from knowing we are children of God.

Q10. As children of God, we also face temptation and suffering (see verses 13 and 17).

Now our identity as children of God doesn't mean a cushy life. The Spirit leads us into holiness, and we see in verse 13 that entails a very real daily battle to leave behind sin and resist temptation, to choose God's way. It's also an identity that can lead us into suffering. If Jesus, God's Son, suffered, so as his children we might be called to share in that suffering. But it's an identity that gives life, freedom and leads ultimately to glory.

Take this opportunity to invite people to share anything in the area of holiness that they would like prayer for or to share if they're suffering in any way because of their faith. Then pray for one another.