

Introduction

- Ali and I went to the shops in Bedford on the Monday after Trinity Sunday to get milk and came home with a kitten! And a box of Weetabix because the pet shop owner said she had some Weetabix with warm milk at bedtime. We duly prepared it and she promptly turned her nose up at it. That pretty much set the scene for the rest of the nearly 20 years that she was with us. We called her Trinity because of the day we got her and because Trinity can be a girl's name.
- Trinity was a very vocal cat who could communicate what she wanted or didn't want in any number of very clear ways. At the same time there was also an element of mystery and the unknown about her. T. S. Eliot describes the mystery of cats very well in his poem *Macavity the Mystery Cat*. Here are the first couple of verses—you can find the rest online easily:

Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw—
For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.
He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair:
For when they reach the scene of crime—*Macavity's not there!*

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
He's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity.
His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare,
And when you reach the scene of crime—*Macavity's not there!*
You may seek him in the basement, you may look up in the air—
But I tell you once and once again, *Macavity's not there!*
- Her name was therefore very appropriate because the Trinity is a concept that is hard for us to grasp. There are elements of the known about the Trinity: we can know the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in very clear and distinct ways different according to each person. But how God can be one and three persons at the same time is hard for us to grasp.
- *Two of our readings make an explicit mention of the three persons of God and will focus on them*
 - at the end of Matthew's Gospel, Matt 28:18-20, baptism is in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit—that's how the Christian life begins
 - at the end of 2 Corinthians, 2 Cor 13:13, Paul prays the prayer we now call 'the grace' for his readers, and prays for blessing from each of the three persons
 - let's look at these in turn

The Trinity at the start of the Christian life Matt 28:18-20

- *threefold language for baptism*
 - Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 - ‘in’ the name NRSV; perhaps better ‘into’—baptism is the entry point of the Christian life, whether as adult or infant
 - will look at how each of the persons of the Godhead is involved in entering the Christian life
- *baptism in the name of the Father*
 - the Father works to draw people to himself: Jesus says, ‘No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me’ John 6:44
 - it needs God to reveal God to humans—we will not find God by looking for him; we need him to look for us
 - first words spoken by God to humans in the Bible after Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the tree of life: ‘Where are you?’ Gen 3:9
 - God’s first words in this situation are not to condemn, but to look for the humans, and that’s the Father’s characteristic activity—he wants to draw humanity back to himself
 - in water baptism, we join the Father’s family by answering his call to us: ‘Where are you?’
- *baptism in the name of the Son*
 - how does the Father accomplish his purpose of drawing humanity back to himself? He sends his Son. Jesus speaks of ‘the Father who sent me’ John 12:49—the God of the New Testament is not three gods who act independently of each other, but one God active in three persons; here, Father and Son work together to draw people back to God
 - Jesus’ purpose in coming into the world is to bring people back to life from the death they are in through living without God: ‘I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly’ John 10:10
 - and, of course, Jesus in his death opens the way to God, but more of that later
 - not only that, but notice two things about Jesus in the context here
 - v 18 ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’—Jesus possesses universal authority, not just over the physical universe, but the entirety of reality, including the invisible parts which are God’s realm, heaven
 - v 20 ‘I am with you always’—Jesus will be present with his followers wherever they are in the world and whenever they are in history

- these two characteristics, universal authority and universal presence, show that Jesus is much more than human: in him we see the God who created the world in human flesh—that's why the disciples' response in Matt 28:17 is appropriate: 'they worshipped him'—they bow before Jesus in the same way they bow before Yahweh, the God they know in their Jewish faith; Jesus now stands alongside Yahweh as God
- in baptism, Jesus brings us into the presence of the Father and makes us at home
- *baptism in the name of the Holy Spirit*
 - this all sounds great for the disciples, who were with Jesus when he lived on earth in the first century, but what about after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven? How do we experience God *today*, and relate to God today? The answer is by the Holy Spirit, who brings what Jesus does for us into effect: as Jesus says, we need to be 'born of the Spirit' John 3:5
 - it is through the Holy Spirit living in us that we know our sins are forgiven, for the Spirit brings us assurance that we truly are God's children, adopted into his family: 'By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit' 1 John 4:13—the Spirit of God is the one who provides our Christian confidence that we belong to God through Jesus
 - so it's not arrogance to say that we're confident of being with Christ when we die; if it depended on us, on what we do, it certainly would be arrogance—but our confidence comes from God the Holy Spirit living in us
 - in baptism, we receive the promise of God, as Peter says at Pentecost: 'Repent and be baptised, and you will receive the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit' Acts 2:38
- *without God acting, we will never get started in the Christian life*
 - we need the Father to draw and seek us
 - we need Jesus, the Son, to come to earth and live and die for us
 - we need the Holy Spirit to live within us to make what Jesus has done real in our experience
 - and so when we are baptised, whether as adults or infants, we don't baptise ourselves—someone else baptises us, because it's from outside ourselves that we're drawn back to God, not from our own resources

- *so remember your baptism*
 - Martin Luther used to say that when he was tempted to doubt his faith, he would write on the table in front of him, 'I have been baptised'—his assurance was that God had acted, objectively, to draw him back to himself through Jesus
 - remember what happens to you through your baptism—you are marked as belonging to Father, Son and Holy Spirit for all eternity. You are secure in God's love and welcome—so live your baptism out as God's adopted child!

The Trinity throughout the Christian life 2 Cor 13:13

- *Paul generally ends his letters with a prayer for his readers*
 - this was common in letters in the first century: the standard prayers were such phrases as 'I pray you may be well'—and Paul fills this ancient literary convention with Christian content
 - here, we get the fullest of his closing prayers, and it's one we use today: 'the grace' as we call it, and in it Paul prays for the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father God, and the Holy Spirit on the Corinthian believers
- *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*
 - Paul starts with Jesus, who is the way we first encounter God, for Jesus is the human face of God, and he is the one through whom we come to know God
 - that's especially through Jesus' grace: a very rich word which can mean 'gift', 'generosity', 'kindness'
 - Paul has explained this earlier in this letter: 'You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich' 2 Cor 8:9
 - Jesus' generosity is most fully expressed in giving up his position of power and authority in heaven and becoming human, as a tiny baby, and living among us—becoming poor
 - the result of Jesus' generosity is that we receive riches beyond our dreams, for we are restored to the relationship with God which we were made to have
 - Jesus come and lives as one of us so that through his death for us, we can share in his eternal life: without Jesus' death for us, we would be as lost as Adam and Eve after they ate from the tree which God forbade them to eat, with God saying, 'Where are you?'

- ‘grace’ also means ‘free gift’, a gift which we receive through Jesus Christ; Jesus’ death opens the door so that we can go back to God—and this is sheer gift, it’s free, as we simply hold out our hand to receive what God gives through Jesus
 - cf. opening a Christmas present—it’s no use unless you open it
- Paul prays that the Corinthian Christians will know Jesus’ grace in their lives
 - this will bring them forgiveness when they fail God, as they—and we—do; and that’s why we need to keep experiencing the grace of our Lord Jesus
 - we are sustained in the Christian life by Jesus’ grace, by the generosity he shows in going to the cross for us, and that’s why we continue taking bread and wine to remember what he did for us—to keep it at the forefront of our minds, hearts and lives
- so the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ calls for our thanks—we bow humbly in thanksgiving for what Jesus has done in dying for us, for he has done what we could not do for ourselves; he has brought us to God
- *the love of God*
 - when we meet with Christ, we experience God’s love for us, and Paul himself says, ‘God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us’ Rom 5:8—God was willing to give his Son for us, and that shows us the full extent of God’s love for us
 - Madeleine McCann’s story is back in the headlines this week, as the German police think they have found the man who abducted her all those years ago; that must be incredibly painful for her parents as the wound of losing her is opened again
 - and yet God did not simply lose, but actively gave up his Son for us; surely he would not have done that if there were any other way to bring the world back to himself—in the death of Jesus we see the depth of God’s love
 - and God’s love for us is love for sinners, says Paul: it was ‘while we were still sinners Christ died for us’—God’s love is not love for loveable people, but love for rebels who refuse to live in God’s world in God’s way and damage themselves, other people, and their environment as a result

- God's love for us sustains us in the Christian life, for it's our reference point, our true north that we keep going back to
 - beware thinking that God hates you: he loves you, and that's why he doesn't want to leave you alone, but to transform you through his love, to make you the person you were born to be
 - people today speak a lot about finding themselves, or identifying their true selves: as Christians, the primary identity we have is that we are loved by God—that's bedrock for us, and something we need to return to again and again and again when we think otherwise
 - we don't need to find out security or identity in anything or anyone or anywhere else: we are loved by God, and we know this through the cross
- the love of God calls for worship from us, which is how we express our love for God in return—we bask in his love and celebrate it as we sing, as we pray, as we worship
 - particularly at present, when we can't meet together to worship, make it your habit to celebrate God's love day by day—sing hymns and songs with YouTube videos, join in the songs on our weekly services online, read aloud some of the Psalms which rejoice in God's love
- *the communion/fellowship of the Holy Spirit*
 - the Holy Spirit, as we noticed earlier, is the one who brings us into experience of God through Jesus, and Paul expresses that clearly again: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' Rom 5:5
 - the Holy Spirit is the one who makes our experience of God real—and that's why Paul prays for the Corinthian believers to experience the fellowship or communion of the Spirit—the sense and experience of sharing in the Spirit's life
 - and that's a corporate thing, and not just individual: collectively, we are 'the temple of the living God' 2 Cor 6:16—the Spirit lives in the church, the believing community, and brings us into fellowship with one another, drawing very different people together as we draw near to God by the Spirit
 - Paul says that by the Spirit we cry 'Abba Father'—as we address God as our Father, the Spirit bears witness within us that we truly are God's children Rom 8:15-16
 - this is meant to be a *felt* thing, and I hope that describes your experience at least some times—we know the love of God, and the grace of Jesus by the Spirit living in us

- the fellowship of the Spirit calls for our obedience to God, for the Spirit is the one who gives us power in the Christian life to resist sin, to focus on Christ, to turn back to Christ when we fail, to enable us to pray. If there's a power deficit in your Christian life, your walk with God, ask God the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh
- *So the Trinity is not just the key to entering the Christian life at baptism, but also the key to living the Christian life*
 - reflect on this: where do I need to experience more of God?
 - have I fallen into the trap of thinking God keeps score against me and is just waiting for me to fail? do I need to know more of the grace of Jesus, his forgiveness and generosity to me?
 - have I forgotten that God really, really loves me and his world, and wants his love to be known by others? do I need to renew my understanding of God's love by looking afresh at the cross?
 - have I neglected the experiential work of the Spirit, bringing me into personal engagement with God, and into fellowship with other Christians? do I need to open my life afresh to the Holy Spirit?