

Most of us, when we were at school, found that some subjects were really quite interesting, and others were more of an uphill struggle. For me, the ones I always found hardest to enjoy were Maths and Physics. Whilst I loved talking about characters in literature, found history quite fascinating, and had a natural feeling for languages, mathematical and scientific formulae left me cold and I wasn't very good at them. They just seemed a bit dry and matter of fact.

And that is why for many, I suspect, the whole idea of the Trinity seems at best a bit bizarre, and at worst, something resembling a dry formula. And people like me don't find formulae either easy or interesting.

But that is until we think about how this 'formula' came about. For centuries, the Jews had understood God as the majestic creator of this infinitely complex and beautiful universe. More than that, they understood him as one who wanted his creatures to be in relationship with him, and who cared so passionately about these creatures that he was completely opposed to any actions or injustices that would damage them.

And then, Jesus appeared and during his extraordinary life, his miracles showed that same power evident in creation. The lengths he went to to show love for the outcasts of his time and his anger at misuse of power seemed to mirror this God they had always worshipped. And Jesus stressed that through him, they could know God the Father more closely. And so, by degrees, they came to the remarkable, inescapable conclusion that this Jesus they were with was in some way the same as the God that had been worshipped for centuries.

Finally, 50 days after Easter, when they began to experience the Holy Spirit, they soon realised that this Spirit was the Spirit of Jesus Himself. He had promised that he was shortly to leave them but that he would come back to them - "I will not leave you orphans, I will come back to you" - in the form of the Holy Spirit, and now, the day the Spirit came, they realised that the Holy Spirit was indeed the very spirit of the man they had known, followed and loved.

In other words, they came to the inescapable conclusion that God the Creator, God in the human form of Jesus and now finally the Holy Spirit that Jesus sent were ultimately in essence the same. For them, the Trinity was not something that was hard to make sense of. It was the only thing that DID make sense of their experience.

Scientists will tell you that formulae are exciting because they explain life as it IS. They make sense of the world. A scientist I know said, "A formula may appear to be a dry formula, but it is a dry formula that describes something infinitely colourful". The Trinity is just that. It describes the nature of God's relationship with his creation.

We have probably heard that when Archimedes discovered that the water in his bath was replaced by the exact volume of the part of his body that he had submerged, it is said that he ran through the streets of Syracuse, shouting "Eureka!" - apparently even before he'd put any clothes on. He had suddenly realised the truth and wanted everyone to know why he was so excited. I think it is barely pushing it too far to say that the excitement of the disciples on the day of Pentecost was not entirely dissimilar - they knew the truth, suddenly so much made sense and it was impossible not to want to broadcast it.

Although the Trinity wasn't officially 'formulated' until about 200 AD, it was implicit from very early on. Right at the beginning of creation, we are told that "the Spirit hovered over the waters". And it is almost spelled out in the words that we'll use at the end of this service, originally written by Paul to

one of the young churches: "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all".

But we may still ask how this belief is of practical day to day value. And the answer lies in looking at how people live and show their faith. Judith's mother once said that her generation were brought up to think primarily of God the Father. You prayed to God the Father, you rarely thought about the Holy Spirit at all. It is because of this, to my mind, that her generation of Christians had a great sense of respect for God, they had high moral standards, were wary of any hint of over-familiarity with God, and hesitant sometimes to bother God with their own personal needs.

By contrast, in the 1970s, there was a movement when Christians seemed to focus above all on the Holy Spirit. This movement led to a renewal of the ministry of healing, rather than seeing healing as purely limited to the time of Christ on earth. It led to an openness to some of the more dramatic gifts of the Spirit, and helped people to be aware of God with us now, God communicating now. But at the same time, that movement was less than strong when it came to challenging injustice in society at large, helping the poor and protecting the environment. In both those examples - they are generalisations, I totally admit - something of the balance of the Trinity had been lost, one with the main emphasis on God the Father, and one with the main emphasis on the Holy Spirit.

So, let's look at our own faith: living the Trinity is to have a faith that is both balanced and vibrant. When we gaze in awe at and thank God for a majestic waterfall, we are remembering the Creator. When we are outraged at wanton mistreatment of some groups (the last 2 weeks in the US are an obvious case in point), we are reflecting something of the holiness of God the Father and his opposition to all that destroys. When we are aware of the fact that God understands our personal needs better maybe even than we ourselves do, then we are honouring the fact that Jesus came in human form. When we have a profound sense of gratitude for the fact that we are forgiven and totally accepted by God, then we are showing wonder at Jesus' love in dying for us. When we sense that a passage of Scripture is somehow springing to life and that God is quietly speaking through it to us, then we are aware that the Holy Spirit is at work in us now.

The Trinity keeps us balanced and alive in our faith. The Trinity is not primarily to be analysed and discussed and explained, the Trinity is to be experienced and to be lived.