

In the Name...

Isaiah 40:27-31; Matthew 28:16-20

What is your image of God? The Father, saintly old man with the long flowing beard sitting distantly on a cloud? The Mother, like a brooding hen looking after her chicks. The many-imagined Jesus the shepherd, the living water, the bread of life, the door? The Holy Spirit – fire, wind, water, comforter?

We have many different ways of thinking about God, primarily because our God is so big, though we often try to make God too small. This is Trinity Sunday, but few will think much about it. It doesn't hold a candle to Christmas or Easter or Pentecost. Trying to give names to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit can often feel like grasping at smoke – the reality of God being just a little beyond our reach. Even St Augustine, one of the early theologians of the Church reduced the idea of the Trinity to a very simple illustration. He used the example of a tree. The root is wood; the trunk is wood; the branches are wood: one wood, one substance, but three different entities. Last year in the Autumn lectures Professor Jeremy Begbie explained the Trinity in musical terms. He played one note on the piano, then two notes together, then three notes together. In the chord we heard the three notes, distinct, but one, and in the music we found the Trinity.

The names we give God tell us something about ourselves too. Thinking of God as the good parent reminds us of how good parents will love until it hurts, allow us freedom, even if we walk away, and suffer with us when that relationship with us is damaged.

Thinking of God as Son helps us realise that we are so deeply loved, for whom nothing is too much.

Thinking of God as Spirit reminds us of our need to breathe, and to be part of a community. You on your own is not being Christian. We are a gift, and we are meant to be a gift to others, together, breathing faith, breathing hope, breathing love.

And today, in bread and wine, here are other ways for us to give names to God that help us understand in yet more ways Who God is, and what God does. Sacrifice. Nourish. Share.

The whole image of God is complex, made up of many parts, many colours, many textures, many ideas. Not one-dimensional but many faceted. We are meant to think; we are meant to question; we are meant to wonder. We never get the whole picture all at once.

With God, there is always more to find out and to experience. And, as the end of Matthew's gospel tells us, we are to remember, good for a communion Sunday, that God is with us always. With our many-named God, we are not alone.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen