

Mathew 28:16-20

FORMULA OF LOVE

In our confirmation class last week we came upon a quote from Christian author C.S. Lewis which says, ‘Pythagorean Theorem was just as true the day before it was discovered’. In other words, a theory, formula, or law of nature is just as true and relevant in our world whether we humans have yet worked it out or not. For those of you who are scratching your heads a bit by now, remember that Pythagorean Theorem (or Pythagoras’ Theory as many of us learnt it) says that; the square of the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares of its parts. It’s used to work out the length of the hypotenuse of a triangle when we know the length of the other two sides. When I told my son who is an aeronautical engineer that I was going to use mathematic and scientific theories and formulas in my Address this week, he laughed at me. So, to prove I know a bit what I am talking about, there are many formulas to be found in the natural world, such as the Fibonacci sequence which can be seen in the patterns on pinecones, pineapples, sunflowers, etc. And again, these theories, and the formulas which explain many of them, have been true right from the time of Creation, even though it’s taken our human brains longer to put them all together.

This applies very much to the core teaching of the Christian faith, which can also be seen as a formula, which we celebrate today, the Trinity; one God, three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The acceptance or rejection of this teaching is what defines a Christian. Among Christians it is strongly accepted, but by those religions which seem close to us, perhaps even using the same Bible in some form, it is the belief which separates them from the Christian Church. Their contention, and it’s true, is that ‘Trinity’ is nowhere mentioned straight up in the Bible. As a teaching, it wasn’t a big deal in the first couple of hundred years after Jesus’ life on earth, until some people began saying that Jesus wasn’t really God, and that the Holy Spirit is just a mystical presence.

It was then that the Church really started to look through the Bible at the nature and character of God, and just like Pythagoras discovering his theory already at work in mathematics, Fibonacci his sequence already existing in nature, they found the nature of God being expressed in the Trinity coming

through in the Bible. Some parts of the Bible we often use to support this are the ‘Spirit of God moving over the water’ at Creation in Genesis 1. John 1:1 ‘In the beginning was the Word (‘logos’ – Jesus), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’. Jesus in John 10:30, ‘I and the Father are One’. There are others also, in both the Old and New Testament, but in some ways they are all brought together in our reading for today when Jesus tells the Church to go and baptise, ‘in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit’. One name. One God. Three persons. A truth, a formula, however you want to describe it, which has been true right from the beginning even though it took us as people a while to work it out.

God comes to us, reveals Himself to us, works in our lives, even sends us out to work in His Kingdom, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is how God comes to us in love and works in our world and our lives. When I told my son the other night that I was going to talk about the Trinity as a Formula of Love, the next morning he sent me a collection of numbers, letters and symbols with their explanations, saying, ‘I couldn’t help myself’. Even though I couldn’t understand a lot of what he had written down, I was impressed that he had taken in what I had said and was able to then explain it in his way. I sent him back the formula I had come up with, and we had both come to the same result, just in different ways. So, let’s look at the Trinity, the Formula of Love, to think about God’s love for us.

We start with the Love and Care of the Father. ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth’ we say in the Creed. The Father is the One who Created the whole universe, right down to each of us as just one of the billions and billions of people who have been part of His creation. In the Small Catechism Martin Luther writes; ‘I believe that God has created me and all that exists’, and, ‘God also gives me everything I need from day to day’. Not only has God created our world, He continues to care for us and provide for us. And, when our sin caused our relationship with Him to be broken, God came up with a plan to restore that relationship, which saw Him willing to sacrifice that which is most special to Him, His Son, so that we can be saved.

The second part of this formula is the obedience and sacrifice of the Son, Jesus. Again, in the Creed we confess, ‘I believe in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord’. And to go back to Luther’s explanation of this in the Catechism; ‘At great cost He has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person.’ The Son as part of the Trinity was always there, right from the beginning, but 2,000 years ago in humility He

came down, in obedience to be born as one of us, live as one of us, and to die the death and suffer the separation from God which is the punishment for our sins, but then to rise again so we can have new life with Him. The Son who, having achieved all He was sent to do, now once again sits in heaven to intercede for us and to welcome us to the new life to come.

God the Holy Spirit, who, as we said last week when we celebrated Pentecost, is the hardest part of the Trinity to explain. I personally love and find very helpful Luther's explanation on the work of the Holy Spirit in the third part of the Creed; 'I believe that on my own I can never come to Jesus Christ my Lord, or believe in Him, no matter how hard I try. But the Holy Spirit has called me to Jesus by the good news about Him. The Spirit has led me to know and trust Jesus, made me holy, and kept me in the Christian faith.' The Spirit who brings us to faith, the Spirit who keeps us in our faith and helps us to grow. The Spirit who Jesus promised would come after Him to be with us always. The Holy Spirit who speaks to us through God's Word, whether it is read, spoken, heard, or lived out. The Holy Spirit who comes to us in our Baptism to remind us of God's love and forgiveness for us each day. The Holy Spirit who joins us to Jesus' death and resurrection as we receive the body and blood of Jesus' sacrifice with the bread and wine in Holy Communion. The Holy Spirit who through all these things lives in us, works in us, encourages us, sends us out.

When we look at the Trinity as a Formula of Love, then the Love and care of the Father, plus the Obedience and Sacrifice of the Son, plus the Constant Presence and Indwelling of the Holy Spirit, now equals God's love for us at all times and in all ways. In seeing God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we see the depth and breadth of God's love for us, and how He is at work in our world and our lives. That's what the Trinity shows to us. This is how God's love comes out in our lives. In this way God is with us in all ways and in everything we do and go through.

And this Loving Formula is not just here for our benefit, but it's something we are called to go out and share. Jesus gives the teaching of the Trinity we have in our reading just before He leaves the disciples to return to heaven, and He does it as He tells them to go, make disciples, baptise, and teach. They are commands to share this love of God, the Triune God, in all that we say and do. In our words and in our actions. In how we treat people. In how we accept people. In where we put the priorities in our lives. In

how we show witness by serving God both in the Church and outside of it. And if you think you're not perfect at that, that's probably true. But look that the disciples; despite the fact that here they are with Jesus who they have seen die and rise again, we are told that as they worshipped Him, 'some of them still doubted' (17). But, thank God, this work of bringing others to know Jesus doesn't rely on us, it is the work of God, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And for our strength and encouragement it is supported by Jesus' final words here, 'I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.' (20b) It's the promise that makes this formula as strong as it is for us all.

While there are many formulas in nature, in maths, in engineering, which explain how and why things happen the way they do, even when most of us don't understand or even know them they still work the same way. The Trinity is a teaching, even a formula, which even though we don't fully understand it, shows us the how the love of God has come and continues to come to us. Maybe it's best if we don't overcomplicate it too much, but just remember that we can now live in the love and care of the Father, receive life and forgiveness through the sacrifice of the Son, and be led, encouraged, and sent out in our faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Formula of Love, the love of the Triune God which guides and shapes our lives both now and in the life to come. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- How do you go with formulas? Do you like them and try to work them out, or does the thought of them give you a 'headache'? Is there a formula which you particularly remember or find especially relevant and helpful in your life?

Take some time to reflect on the three persons of the Trinity:

- God the Father: Creator, Carer, Provider. How do you experience the love of the Father in your life? Are you always thankful for this?
- God the Son: Saviour, Friend, Interceder. How do you experience the love of the Son in your life? Are you always thankful for this?
- God the Holy Spirit: encourager, counsellor, bringer of faith, constant in our lives. How do you experience the love of the Holy Spirit in your life? Are you always thankful for this?
- The Trinity as a Formula of Love: how do you see and experience God's love as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in your life and in the world?

Pray: thank God for coming to us in love as the Trinity. Ask Him to help us to know, live in, and share this love even though we may not always fully understand it.

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