

‘Shut up and Worship’
A Sermon for Trinity Sunday, at the Opening of the Cathedral Festival
Given at St Davids Cathedral by the Dean on 27 May 2018

May I speak in the name of God, the Holy and Undivided Three in One and One in Three.

Trinity Sunday is one of my favourite festivals of the year. Perhaps it’s because my first degree was in maths, that the deliciously impossible truth of a paradox is such a source of endless delight. So we have this glorious mystery before us today. That said, it took a good couple of centuries for the earliest Christians to conclude that, in finite and fallible human understanding, from our contingent and contextual perspective, God – while beyond time and space and thus actually incomprehensible – nonetheless appears to choose to reveal God’s-self to us in ways that we best apprehend as Three in One, and One in Three.

We encounter Utter Holiness, whose glory fills the whole earth – as Isaiah saw.

This Utter Holiness is overflowing in Utter Love, the Utter Love that gives birth to creation, that gives birth to each of us: the Godhead, the Creator, whom we can yet call Abba, Daddy – as St Paul writes.

This Utter Holiness is overflowing in Utter Love, in the eternal Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, who laid down his life; the Son of Man lifted up on the cross to redeem us all – as St John recorded.

This Utter Holiness is overflowing in Utter Love, the Spirit of God, stirring us like the wind, in ways beyond our expectation or control, in whom we are reborn, called into newness of life, made holy, and finally drawn into the freedom and release of our ultimate destiny and home, finally to share ourselves in that limitless sharing and overflowing of Utter Love.

Three distinct persons, yet always interwoven, inseparable, indivisible: one in substance, purpose, unity. This understanding of Trinity is impossibly beyond our comprehension, yet at the same time, makes total sense of our experience.

The mathematician in me is reminded of the instrumentalist interpretation of quantum theory: its metaphysical truthfulness is unknowable, but nonetheless in practice the maths works in our experience of the world. So, as is often said, ‘Shut up and calculate!’

Calculation also sheds light on how music works in our experience. There is a lot of mathematics involved, for example, in explanations of why certain scales, intervals and harmonies resonate with the human ear and mind as they do. But that’s not why we are here for the Festival. Sure, we can probably analyse why we prefer Bach over Beethoven, or Britten over Bernstein – though I rather suspect that the preference comes first, and then we find a useful justification to slap on top!

But we're don't come to the Festival for the analysis. We come for the experience. Instead of 'Shut up and calculate!' it's a case of 'Shut up and listen!'

We're here to let go, and let the music get to us: to touch us, stir us, transport us, and leave us moved, even changed. We're here to surrender to the experience, and let it take us to places we somehow yearn for, but cannot enunciate; or which we'd never imagined, yet our deep inner selves recognise as something of a homecoming. As we yield ourselves, it can point us to something beyond us, something bigger than us.

And this brings me back to God.

There can be great intellectual delight in pondering doctrines of the Trinity. But there's always the risk is that we get caught up in speculative mental games. For God is beyond our calculations. As the great Orthodox Theologian Kallistos Ware puts it, 'God is not so much an object of our knowledge as a cause of our wonder.'

Trinity Sunday is not a call to bend our brains around various mental images that may, or may not, convey something helpful about the transcendent and ineffable. Instead, we are called to take a different risk – as with music, to let ourselves go, into the eternal arms of this Utter Love that first made us, all of us together, and each one a unique, precious individual, made to know yourself a beloved child of the Creator God.

We are invited to surrender to the Utter Love that spared nothing, not even life itself, so we might know fullness of life: the redeeming, remaking of all that is broken, awry, lost, worn out, wounded ... to surrender and let this Utter Love be our Saviour, whatever form our need of saving might take.

We are bidden to yield to the Utter Love that desires nothing more than to set our hearts on fire with all the fullness of life, and with utter love itself, so we may burn with that holy light and fire.

The English Anglican mystic, Evelyn Underhill, wrote 'If God were small enough to be understood, he wouldn't be big enough to be worshipped.'

Will you worship? Will you let go, and let God get to you? to touch you, stir you, transport you, and leave you moved, even changed. Will you surrender, and let God take you to places you perhaps yearn for, but cannot enunciate; or which you'd never imagined, yet your deep inner self may recognise as a true homecoming? Will you yield yourself, to what is beyond you, bigger than you?

This Festival Week, with all the glorious music before us, may we learn in fuller measure what it is to Shut up and listen! And this Trinity Sunday, and always, may we learn in fuller measure what it is to Shut up and worship!

Isaiah 6. 1-10, Romans 8. 12-17, John 3. 1-17

The Very Revd Dr Sarah Rowland Jones