

## Live for the sake of community

**St John 3:10 “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things?”**

Last week I read an article on the Anglican Communion website which helped to put into perspective the celebration of the Holy Trinity today. According to the article,

In a groundbreaking project, the Church of England recently revealed its new Amazon Alexa “skill” which brings the Church of England into people’s homes. Alexa, a cloud-based voice service available on Amazon devices such as the Echo and Echo Dot smart speakers, gives users the ability to access their Amazon accounts, play music, ask about the weather, and much more computer-based information. The technology also allows for integration with third-party device and app developers, like the Church of England, to create specific sets of information and “skills.”<sup>1</sup>

Alexa is an active service which allows access to a specialized skill to receive information and have tasks completed. For example, in a video demonstrating the skill Alexa offers, the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, ask Alexa to say the Lord’s Prayer. Immediately the computerised voice of Alexa began reciting the Lord’s Prayer. Alexa not only can recite the Lord’s Prayer, she can say grace before meal, sing hymns and songs and identify the location of Anglican Churches in

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1 <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2018/05/alexa-ask-the-church-of-england-where-my-nearest-church-is.aspx>

England and provide specific directions on how to find them. This technology opens up numerous opportunities for us to explore the mystery of our own lives and makes possible the exploration of the mystery of God.

On this Trinity Sunday we are invited to explore the mystery of our existence alongside the mystery we call God the Holy Trinity. We are invited to explore this twofold mystery using the theme chosen for today, “Live for the sake of community.” The Trinity is the Church’s teaching on the importance of community in the life of individuals and the wider creation of which we are apart. From the beginning of time human beings have been called to live in community, however, through selfish means and motives we continue to strive after selfish motives which drive us apart from, rather than towards, each other. This week’s focus on God the Holy Trinity is one way to bring us back to what it means to “live for the sake of community.”

John’s Gospel, written in the first century C.E, is a good place to start with our exploration of the mystery of ourselves, the Trinity and what it means to live for the sake of community. Human beings are a mystery. An understanding of who we are as creatures of God is consistent with Jesus’ question to Nichodemus in St

John 3:10, "You are Israel's teacher and do you not understand these things?" To understand ourselves fully requires exploring our relationship with God as mystery. This takes a leap of faith as a mystery is understood as something that is difficult to understand or explain. This leap of faith is similar to the Archbishop of York speaking to Alexa. Having given a command the Archbishop expects Alexa to respond. He has faith that the technology will not fail him in that moment. Similarly, to understand ourselves as creatures of God, as mystery, is to have faith that we are in relationship with God and can respond to God in faith as God's children.

If we accept that we are God's children then we are in a position to accept God as Father/Mother who created us, as the Son who is the life giver, and, the Holy Spirit who gave birth to the Church and is in the world showing forth God's power to transform the world into that which God wants it to be. The Trinity is nothing more or nothing less than the Christian understanding of the revelation of God. It is this understanding of God which Jesus uses to challenge Nichodemus to think differently about his approach to God. Jesus' message to Nichodemus is that God is a mystery. This mystery can be understood if we are prepared to first understand and embrace ourselves as mystery. Alexa is just one example of the

mystery of human reality expressed through technology. Alexa is another frontier in the development of technology and demonstrates that, for example, for the future we may not need a priest to stand at the altar to pray over the elements at communion. We will be able to say Alexa, pray the Eucharistic Prayer and it will be done. That too will be a way to showcase the mystery of both God and humanity and the power of God at work in human beings.

The final thing to note about God and ourselves as mystery, and one which makes the role of the priest still relevant, is located in our theme for today, *living for the sake of community*. In the doctrine of the Trinity we see equal partnership and cooperation with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three persons<sup>2</sup> have together created the Church which is to be a model of what it means to live for the sake of community. The community of the Church is both a model of the creative power of the Trinity in the world and a practical demonstration of the meaning of community.

The writer of John's Gospel had a particular perspective on the kind of community we are to strive to create and maintain in partnership with God. The Christian

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<sup>2</sup> **Perichoresis** (from Greek: περιχώρησις perikhōrēsis, "rotation") is a term referring to the relationship of the three persons of the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) to one another. Circumincession is a Latin-derived term for the same concept.

community must always focus on lifting up the character and name of Jesus. This is what the writer of John's Gospel has to say about the community which lifts up the character and name of Jesus. "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." This means authentic community is made up of individuals who live for others more than they live for self. In St John 3 the writer shows Nicodemus as a man so wrapped up in self he was not able to see what it takes to live for the sake of community. For example, to be born means to focus on others (parents) and not on ourselves. Similarly, to be born again means to focus on God and not ourselves.

In the study on discipleship we have been invited to focus on the seven wonders of John 3:16 as a way of living for the sake of community/others. The seven wonders are:

- i. God – authority
- ii. Love (as the motive to obey God's authority)
- iii. Gift (Jesus)
- iv. Welcome (believers in Jesus are welcomed by God)
- v. Belief in God is an escape from death

vi. Deliverance from evil is the way of life

vii. We possess eternal life

These seven wonders are the ingredients needed to live life for others/for community. These seven wonders must be allowed to permeate every aspect of our lives. Whether it is sending a command to Alexa, dealing with unemployment, a nagging co-worker, a troubled child, a promotion, a new home, going on a long desired trip, whatever the situation, we are called to live the seven wonders of John 3:16. By living these seven wonders of authority, love, gift, welcome, belief, deliverance and eternal life, we will be able to confidently live for others/community. This is one way to understand and appreciate the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and apply it to our daily lives. Welcome to the new frontier of faith in God. In the name...