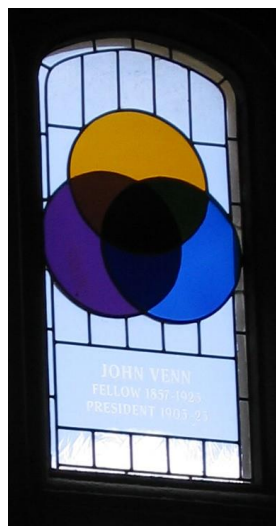


Some thoughts on the Lectionary Readings for Year B – Trinity Sunday (2nd Service)

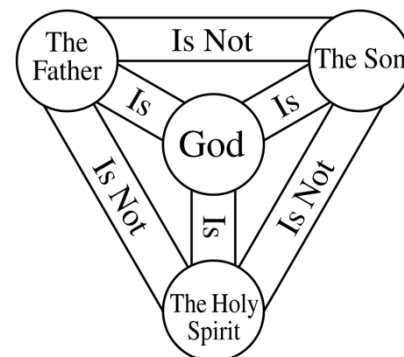
Lectionary Readings: Ezekiel 1: 4-10, 22-28a
Psalm 104: 1-9
Revelation 4: 1-11
Mark 1: 1-13

Trinity Sunday – the day of the year when we think specifically of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; a difficult concept of One Being with three separate entities.

In my school days I never came across Venn diagrams although they had been described by the British mathematician, John Venn, as early as 1880. His university education was at Cambridge and there is a stained glass window in his college, Gonville and Caius, depicting one of these diagrams:



A slight variation, not shown directly as circles with the 'God' overlap in the middle, is shown in a second diagram. This emphasises that Father, Son and Spirit are separate but each is God:



We are familiar with the traditional benediction -
The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,

The Love of God the Father,
The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Hustler, Secretary of the Conference, was preaching at the 11am Pentecost Sunday streamed service from Westminster Central Hall. He was invited to deliver a blessing at the conclusion of the service; his words were:

“Now may the Spirit of truth lead you into all truth, give you grace to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and to proclaim the Word and Works of God.

And the Blessing of God – SPIRIT, SON and FATHER – remain with you always. Amen.

It was appropriate, that on Pentecost Sunday the Spirit was given first place.

Returning to the ‘mystery of One in Three and Three in One’, and looking for another example - did you know that there is one temperature and pressure where ice, liquid water and water vapour can happily coexist? The equilibrium between the three phases of water, the so called Triple Point, only exists at a temperature of 273.19 Kelvin (0.01 °C) and a pressure of 6.1166 mbar (0.0060366 atmosphere), not your every day conditions!

For final thoughts on illustrating ‘One in Three and Three in One’ we turn to the tripod – a single item used to attach, for example, a camera, but only stable when the three separate legs are in operation. Monopods, useful as they are, require support, as would a ‘Bipod’ but a ‘Tripod’ stands secure on its own.



We turn then to the Lectionary readings and once again, this week, commence with the Gospel. At the beginning of the first chapter Mark speaks of “*the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.*” A footnote to the NIV text tells us that *Messiah* (Hebrew) and *Christ* (Greek) both mean *Anointed One*. We are also told that some manuscripts of Mark’s Gospel do not have *the Son of God*.

Moving on to verse 7 we find John the Baptist (Yochanaan the Immerser in the Jewish New Testament) living up to his name by the river Jordan and proclaiming:

‘After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

⁸¹ baptise you with (or in) water, but he will baptise you with (or in) the Holy Spirit.’

John had been called to preach a specific message: (Luke 3)

² during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: (40: 3-5)

‘A voice of one calling in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.

⁶ And all people will see God’s salvation.”

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

The crowds came to hear his message; were transformed by it and went through the process of baptism in water.

One on-line commentator says of him:

What was John's message? It was simply, **Repent**. This is no mere academic change of mind, nor mere regret or remorse. John the Baptist spoke of repentance as a radical turning from sin that inevitably became manifest in the fruit of righteousness. The symbolism of John's baptism likely had its roots in OT purification rituals (Leviticus 15:13). Baptism had also long been administered to Gentile proselytes coming into Judaism.

John was also preparing the way for the coming of Messiah – the one who would baptise with (*in*) the Holy Spirit.

We remember that Matthew's account tells us that John tried to dissuade Jesus from being baptised – for very good reasons:

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?'

¹⁵ Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.' Then John consented.

We see the three elements of the Trinity in this account – John called by God (called by the **Father**); baptising Jesus (the **Son**) in the Jordan. As Jesus comes up out of the water a voice confirms Him as the Son and the **Spirit** descends on and fills Him.

Reading the account of Jesus' baptism in Matthew, Mark and Luke it would appear that Jesus "*saw heaven torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove*" and "*a voice came from heaven*" – was it only Jesus who saw the Spirit descending? Was the voice heard generally or just by Jesus?

Similar questions can be asked of Saul/Paul's conversion on the Damascus road:

³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'

⁵ 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked.

'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. ⁶ 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'

⁷ The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.

What was seen, what was heard by those accompanying Saul?

Our readings give accounts of two visions, separated by a considerable period of time (600-700 years) but sharing some remarkable similarities.

Ezekiel can remember the time and place of his vision – not surprising really as it was God's call to him to a life of prophecy which lasted for 22 years. The NIV Study Bible comments, in its introduction to the book, that Ezekiel contains more dates than any other of the prophets. Modern archaeology has been able to cross reference many of these with equivalent dates on Babylonian cuneiform tablets or with modern astronomical calculations (reference to eclipses etc.) so the period in which the prophet worked is probably better placed in the history of Israel than that for any other prophet.

He was thirty years old and some Jews, including the king, were in their fifth year of exile in Babylon: (Ezekiel 1)

¹ In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the River Kebar, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

² On the fifth of the month – it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin – ³ the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the River Kebar in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was on him.

John similarly remembers where he was and the day of the week when he received his vision: (Revelation 1)

⁹ I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

¹⁰ On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹ which said: 'Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.'

¹² I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man,^[a] dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest. ¹⁴ The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.

¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

Footnotes

a. [Revelation 1:13](#) See Daniel 7:13.

What are the similarities?

In both visions there are four heavenly creatures. For Ezekiel, these creatures were in the centre of the violent storm that was coming out of the north. They had human form but each had four faces and four wings – each had a **human face** (in front?), a **lion's face** to the right and the **face of an ox** to the left. The final face, presumably looking backwards, was that of an **eagle**.

In verses 15-18 (not part of our reading) we learn beside each creature was a 'wheel' that moved with it in any direction. The rims of the wheel were **"full of eyes all round"**.

Above the four creatures Ezekiel saw something which looked like a vault and then, on hearing a voice from above the vault he perceived a throne and a person seated on it: (Ezekiel 1)

²⁶ Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man.

²⁷ I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him.

²⁸ Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell face down, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

In John's vision there is also an occupied throne: (Revelation 4)

² At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

³ And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.

⁴ Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.

⁶ Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the centre, round the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and behind.

⁷ The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.

⁸ Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all round, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty," (Isaiah 6: 3) **who was, and is, and is to come.'**

Earlier in Revelation –John seeing the vision of one **"like a son of man"** has the same reaction as Ezekiel:

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.

¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

¹⁹ Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. ²⁰ The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: the seven stars are the angels (or messengers) of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

We have shared, in previous weeks, the messages given to John for six of the seven churches mentioned at this point in Revelation.

If we read on in Ezekiel we find detail of **his** calling: (Ezekiel 2)

¹ He said to me, 'Son of man, ^[a] stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.'

² As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

³ He said: 'Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day.

⁴ The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says."

⁵ And whether they listen or fail to listen – for they are a rebellious people – they will know that a prophet has been among them.

Footnotes

- a. [Ezekiel 2:1](#) The Hebrew phrase *ben adam* means *human being*. The phrase *son of man* is retained as a form of address here and throughout Ezekiel because of its possible association with 'Son of Man' in the New Testament.

Both Ezekiel and John make reference to the SPIRIT OF GOD as an active part of their visions; both have a 'picture' of GOD seated on the throne and John additionally has the vision of one like A SON OF MAN, a description we know from the Gospels as referring to JESUS the SON.

A question - On this Trinity Sunday are we waiting patiently for God to speak to us through His Spirit or do we, perhaps, limit this activity to historical Biblical times?

Psalms 104 has 35 verses in total – only verses 1 to 9 have been selected for our Lectionary reading.

There is an introduction to this psalm in the NIV Study Bible:

A hymn to the Creator. Obviously influenced by Genesis 1, the pre-exilic author has adapted that account to his different purpose and has subordinated its sequence somewhat to his own design. Whereas Genesis 1 recounts creation as God's first work at the beginning, the poet views the creation displayed before his eyes and sings the glory of its Maker and Sustainer. Surprisingly, he only hints at the angelic world (v.4) and mentions man only in

passing (vv. 14,23); his theme is the visible creation around him, which he sees as the radiant and stately robe with which the invisible Creator has clothed himself to display his glory.

The nine verses of our reading are:

¹ Praise the LORD, my soul.

LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendour and majesty.

² The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent

³ and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind.

⁴ He makes winds his messengers, (or angels) flames of fire his servants.

⁵ He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.

⁶ You covered it with the watery depths as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.

⁷ But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight; ⁸ they flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them.

⁹ You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth.

In the final verse we appear to have a reference to God's covenant with Noah after the flood (Genesis 9:15). We do not know the extent of the 'Biblical Flood' but as a historical event it is described in the writings of a number of civilisations present at that time and there is also archaeological evidence, discovered much more recently, of a flood deposit over an extensive area.

The latter part of the psalm reads:

²⁴ How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵ There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number – living things both large and small.

²⁶ There the ships go to and fro, and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.

²⁷ All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time.

²⁸ When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.

²⁹ When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.

³⁰ **When you send your Spirit**, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure for ever; may the LORD rejoice in his works –

³² he who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke.

³³ I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD.

³⁵ But may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more.

Praise the LORD, my soul.

Praise the LORD (HALLELU YAH)

Father of heaven, whose love profound
A ransom for our souls hath found,
Before Thy throne we sinners bend;
To us Thy pardoning love extend.

Almighty Son, incarnate Word,
Our Prophet, Priest, Redeemer, Lord,
Before Thy throne we sinners bend;
To us Thy saving grace extend.

Eternal Spirit, by whose breath
The soul is raised from sin and death,
Before Thy throne we sinners bend;
To us Thy quickening power extend.

Thrice holy: Father, Spirit, Son;
Mysterious Godhead, Three in One,
Before Thy throne we sinners bend;
Grace, pardon, life to us extend. Amen.

Edward Cooper

Father, we love You, we worship and adore You:
Glorify Your name in all the earth.
Glorify Your name, glorify Your name,
Glorify Your name in all the earth.

Jesus, we love You, we worship and adore You:
Glorify Your name in all the earth.
Glorify Your name, glorify Your name,
Glorify Your name in all the earth.

Spirit, we love You, we worship and adore You:
Glorify Your name in all the earth.
Glorify Your name, glorify Your name,
Glorify Your name in all the earth.