

Sermon Is Jesus like an apple or egg?

Reading: Various

Introduction

Arthur Conan Doyle, writer of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries declared a much often quoted phrase for his fictitious detective who said, 'Once you have discounted the impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth'.

Truth seems to be elusive in our day, we are living in a post truth culture, with a society which has cast truth into the fuzzy areas of feelings and relativism. The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us, 'There is nothing new under the sun' (**Ecc 1:9**), as we also hear Pilate ask Jesus, 'What is truth?' (**Jn 18:38**).

Today's lectionary theme causes preachers to ponder deeply the things of God, as they attempt to write sermons, to explain something so amazing, unique and mind-blowing, however no matter how well we write, we are still left with mystery. This is no bad thing, because when we can't explain something adequately that doesn't mean it is not truth. I can't explain how electricity works, but it makes no less real. Gravity is another fact hard to explain, I know it's real, every time I drop something it falls to the ground. We can't see gravity, we can't put it in a test tube and examine it, yet gravity remains a mystery but we know it is true.

The Holy Trinity, One God existing in Three Persons, The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit is central to the Christian faith and its doctrinal statements. Skeptics argue the word 'Trinity' is not found in the Bible therefore it can't be true! That is like saying I can't see gravity therefore it doesn't exist! Today I hope to explore the Scriptures used to defend the doctrine, and having considered some of the myths and discounting the misunderstandings, we shall see what remains, however improbable, must be the truth!

Context

The Holy Trinity is a way we understand God as taught by Scripture, God in Three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christians do not worship three separate gods, we worship One God in Three Persons.

The Father is not the Son,
The Son is not the Holy Spirit,
The Holy Spirit is not the Father

There is only one God.

One God, monotheism is the great foundation stone on which Judaism and Christianity is built. Scripture is emphatic on this point. Hebrew Prayers begins with these words, 'Shema Yisrae' (Hear O Israel) which goes on to quote from Deuteronomy declaring, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command to you today shall be on your heart' (**Deut 6:4**). This is our starting point, God is One.

What illustration do you use

Over the years I have heard many preachers attempt to define the Holy Trinity using illustrations, but all of them fall short, some can even lead into heresy. To be fair I have even used some of these myself over the years! Whenever we use an illustration to shine light on a complex study, we must be careful not to stretch the illustration too far.

Have you ever heard these illustrations used? The Holy Spirit is like a Mars Bar? Mars bars are filled with nougat, caramel and surrounded by chocolate. This may be three components (modes) of one chocolate bar, but it's a poor illustration; here why! Each component (mode) is very different and if you take one away one mode, we no longer have a Mars bar, it becomes something else, e.g. take away the nougat and it becomes a chocolate éclair or chocolate caramel. We see this error with St. Patrick's illustration using a Shamrock leaf. This works a little better as each segment of leaf is the same and the three are joined together to form one leaf, however the same problem arises, remove or separate one of the leaves you no longer have a Shamrock leaf. This way of thinking led into a heresy called modalism. Modalism teaches that God is a single person who has eternally existed and yet has revealed himself in three modes or forms. Modalism rejects the Trinitarian belief that God exists at all times as three distinct persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Rather, the modalist believes that God is one person made known in three modes. Other illustrations which fall into this error also include an egg with its three component parts and an apple for the same reasons.

The water illustration is a little better as an illustration, but it still fails to adequately describe the Trinity. Liquid, steam, and ice are all forms of water. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not forms of God, each of them is God. Those who say God revealed himself in 3 different ways run into a blind alley with the Scriptures. A common question arises from skeptics is 'Who was Jesus praying to?' (**Matt 27:46**).

What does Trinity mean?

The scriptures say the Three Persons of the Godhead are distinct from each other, yet in complete unity, 'Tri' from the latin word trio meaning 3 and, 'Unity' which simply means united or together. Therefore the Scriptures speak of three Persons Tri who are in complete unity together. Although we don't find the word 'Trinity' in the Scriptures, this does not mean the revelation of God as Trinity is not there.

If we are still looking for an illustration to shed some light on the Holy Trinity for us, maybe a better way to describe the water illustration is to say, water, steam and ice are different and distinct from each other but their essence remains the same. Water is H₂O, ice is H₂O and so is steam H₂O. Each one distinctive and different but in essence they are fully H₂O. They are not different in essence, only in Person. While these illustrations may give us a little light, we must submit to mystery and admit an infinite God cannot be fully described by a finite mind or simple illustration. We are not able as the created beings to pour God who created the heavens and the earth into a test tube and examine Him! Somethings we have to accept and do so with grateful thanks and praise. God has chosen to reveal Himself through the Scriptures in this way, so we read the Scriptures to understand what God reveals, for He inspired them for our edification, joy and learning.

What do the Scriptures say?

The first book in Scripture opens up with these words, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (**Gen 1:1**). John's gospel begins in similar way, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. (**John 1:1-3**). John is declaring, 'In the beginning' the Word was with God. The Greek word used is Logos, which basically means the Word.

When we continue reading Genesis chapter 1, verse 26 we hear God saying, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness....(**Gen 1:26**). Did you notice God speaks of Himself in the plural not singular? God uses the word 'Us' and 'Our'. This only makes sense if God is speaking to someone! We know God is not the angels because no where do the

Scriptures ever say angels are created in God's image, but only mankind is created in God's image and likeness. Angels are never referred to in this way. Furthermore we know John is speaking of Jesus (the Word) for John's gospel tells us in his opening chapter, 'The Word became flesh and made His dwelling amongst us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth' (**John 1:14**).

The Incarnation is so important, Jesus did not cease to be God when He took on flesh (becoming Incarnate) and neither did He cease to be human when He ascended back in glory. Karl Barth explains, 'The Son of God, our humanity to all eternity. It is a clothing which He does not put off. It is His temple which He does not leave. It is the form which He does not lose'. The dust of the earth, now sits on the eternal throne of heaven! This is a remarkable concept, Jesus is still the God/Man and that has enormous practical consequences for us. We will see God face to face, the very face of Jesus we will behold in glory.

Some argue a copyists error for the plural use in Genesis as the writer uses the Hebrew word Elohim (plural) rather than the singular El. But this is no mistake in fact it is consistent through Scripture. We see the same words used in Genesis chapter 3 and in other books of scripture. It was, 'In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne' (**Isa 6:1**). When we read of Isaiah's encounter we hear God asking the question, 'Whom shall I send, who will go for us?' (**Isa 6:8**). Once again God speaking with someone He calls 'Us'.

Is Jesus God

Jesus is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, fully human, fully Divine. We actually capture a glimpse of the Trinity together at Jesus baptism. When Jesus came to the River Jordan to be baptised, the Scriptures say, 'As soon as Jesus was baptised, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighted on Him' (**Matt 3:16**). Here we have the Holy Spirit along with Jesus and from heaven we hear the voice of the Father saying, 'This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased' (**Matt 3:17**). The Father is present speaking and affirming Jesus as His Son, The Holy Spirit affirming Jesus as He descends and alights upon Him. The Holy Trinity all three persons different and present, One God.

John is not the only one to affirm Jesus identity as Divine. Mark opens up his gospel with these words, 'The beginning of the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God' (**Mark 1:1**).

St. Paul writes in his letter to the Christians in Colossi saying,
The Son is the image of the invisible God (**Col 1:15**)

For in Him all things were created (**Col 1:16**)

He is before all things (**Col 1:17**)

Skeptics argue Jesus never declared Himself to be God. Although we don't hear the exact words, I am God worship me, this does not mean Jesus was not Divine. If Jesus affirms His Divinity then this should settle the skeptics objections. Consider then, when Jesus was interrogated before Pilate about being the Messiah, Jesus replied, 'If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God' (**Luke 22:68**). They replied are you then the Son of God? To which Jesus replied, 'You say that I am' (**Luke 22:70**). This self

declaration referring to Himself as the Great I Am, was enough to sentence Jesus to death for blasphemy. (**Luke 22:71**).

If further evidence was needed, consider the authority and power Jesus displayed in His ministry. He drove out demons. He could heal fevers and sicknesses. He cured those with leprosy. The lame leapt for joy. The blind could see and the mute sang Jesus praises. Then we have feeding multitudes, walking on water and stilling waves and storms. All of these miracles displaying authority over illnesses, diseases and even nature. When Thomas the doubter, refused to believe Jesus was resurrected, until he could see with his own eyes and touch with his hands even he fell to his knees when Jesus appears to Thomas and declares, 'My Lord and my God' (**John 20:28**). Jesus does not stop Thomas from worshipping and declaring Jesus as God, Jesus accepts the worship.

Jesus spoke of Himself in the great I AM statements, which refer to the divine identification God used of Himself at the burning bush declaring, 'I Am who I Am'. Jesus used the same divine identification of Himself along with these statements saying, I Am the Light of the world; I Am the Resurrection and the Life; I Am Way, the Truth and the Life; I Am the gate for the sheep etc. These are remarkable statements in themselves to say about yourself, unless they are true!

One of Jesus disciples called Philip asked Jesus to reveal the Father to them. Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Jesus goes on to say, 'Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing His work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves' (**John 14**).

Summary

The individual members of the Trinity have different tasks. The Father is the ultimate source or cause of the universe (**1 Corinthians 8:6; Revelation 4:11**); divine revelation (**Revelation 1:1**); Salvation (**John 3:16-17**); and Jesus' human works (**John 5:17; 14:10**). The Father initiates all of these things.

The Son is the agent through whom the Father does the following works: the creation and maintenance of the universe (**1 Corinthians 8:6; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17**); Divine revelation (**John 1:1, 16:12-15; Matthew 11:27; Revelation 1:1**); and salvation (**2 Corinthians 5:19; Matthew 1:21; John 4:42**). The Father does all these things through the Son, who functions as His agent.

The Holy Spirit is the means by whom the Father does the following works: creation and maintenance of the universe (**Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13; Psalm 104:30**); Divine revelation (**John 16:12-15; Ephesians 3:5; 2 Peter 1:21**); Salvation (**John 3:6; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:2**); and Jesus' works (**Isaiah 61:1; Acts 10:38**). Thus, the Father does all these things by the power of the Holy Spirit.

My favourite passages for Jesus Divinity and authority of Jesus is found in Revelation chapter 5 when the angels fill the throne room of heaven and worship the Lamb singing, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength, honour and glory and praise, then every creature in the world praises and the living creatures say, Amen (**Rev 5:12-14**). The Scriptures say, Every knee will one day bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. **Amen**