

Today is Trinity Sunday and I want to reflect on the nature of God and to help us with this I want us to think about “Time”.

Time = A finite extent of continued existence, e.g. the interval between two events or the period during which an action or state continues.

Let us make a short trip, if only in our imagination and go down west to Dorset.

Spectacular cliffs, glorious beaches, rolling hills, lovely towns, apple cake and ice cream – the county of Dorset has it all. But what it also has is a window into the ancient history of Britain. Those spectacular cliffs are odd. In places the rock strata are vertical rather than horizontal. They bear witness to movement in the world’s tectonic plates millions of years ago. And the cliffs are also unstable, and when they split apart treasures are found – not precious metals but fossils. In Dorset’s museums we can stand face to face with creatures that lived in the seas around Britain more than a hundred and fifty million years ago. The dates are mind-boggling. A hundred and fifty years ago seems a vast time. But a hundred and fifty million years? That is impossible even to think about. And yet there they are, these creatures, and they can be picked up on Dorset’s beaches by amateur fossil collectors. They make us think about time, about the vastness of our planet’s story and the smallness of the place of humanity in it. And they make us think of eternity, and the God who is eternal. The God who was there when the earth was created, was there when the dinosaurs walked the planet.

Jesus promises his disciples that he will be with them “always, to the end of the age”. That is clearly not literally physically true. The physical, human Jesus leaves the world. But nevertheless he is with us “to the end of the age”, and he is with us “to the end of the age” because he is with us in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sent to us by God the Father, Jesus speaks of the Spirit, who is sent by God the Father, and is as much God as are the Father and Jesus himself. So it is that we find ourselves today celebrating the only Sunday to be named after a doctrine – Trinity Sunday. Today we are invited to get our minds round the idea that the one God, the only power in the universe, can also be spoken of as three distinct persons. It is as mind-blowing as thinking about life millions of years ago, and rather more illogical. The best theologians down the ages have struggled to find ways of defining the Trinity, and of talking about it in ways that make logical sense. We can

simplify it and think of God as being water, water that we experience as physical water, steam or ice. But these concepts only help us find only an outline of what God is like. The best way is of course just to experience God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit but that is not the easiest thing to do and it can be very confusing. Something happens when we are faced with the length of time our world has been in existence, and especially the length of time it existed without human beings. And this is the same as grappling with the idea of God. We realise that the mysterious creatures fossilised in the Dorset cliffs were part of a whole ecosystem that was there long before the earliest humans. And we begin to feel small and insignificant. And just as we can feel small and insignificant when faced with that great expanse of time so too we can feel the same way when thinking about God who is above all and in all and who has always been. We have not been on our planet long, and we could easily disappear from it. But God, we believe, was there not only before us, but before the dinosaurs, before all life on earth, before earth itself. And this timeless God exists in community – the Trinity. And God who the power beyond all powers is known in an intimate personal relationship first by a particular people; the children of Israel. And then that relationship becomes even more intimate and personal with the coming of Jesus. God is known as a human person, who shares a human life, who leaves teaching and stories, who dies, and who shows us that death is not the end of life. When Jesus goes away, God does not. God is still present in our world and indeed in the rest of the universe.

The doctrine of the Trinity is difficult to get our heads round, which is why I've sort of dodged it this morning. But it tells us something very important. It tells us that God is not encountered in only one way, but is present for us in as many ways as we need. It appeals not to our logical brains, but to our spirits and emotions. This is our God, who is too ancient and vast and fierce and gentle and human and beyond human, and too much everything else, to be spoken of as one person.

Our God is not limited to one time or place or physical/material. God is there in all time and eternity. God is past, present and future. God saw the creatures we know only as fossils when they swam and crawled, lived and died. God was there before

the beginning, and will be there after the end. This is the magnificent, astonishing God that we see in Jesus and know through the Spirit in our daily lives.