



# Sunday Reflection

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 26 May 2024

## Trinity Sunday

**The Curate will preach at St John's**

On this Trinity Sunday, we ask what difference it makes to be born of the Spirit and live as children of God and joint heirs with Christ

***What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 17.6)***

### **An illustration to set the scene**

A famous study looked at the act of giving blood as an example of altruistic behaviour<sup>1</sup>. A 'gift relationship' was how Richard Titmuss characterised the willingness to give part of one's own body to someone unknown, with no expectation of reward. Today we might also think of organ donation in the same way.

This week I read a moving article by a doctor about how he had cared for someone who was brain-dead, while they were being prepared for their organs to be retrieved to save another life or lives. The doctor was an anaesthetist, and his skills were required to ensure the person's organs

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Titmuss, *The Gift Relationship: from human blood to social policy*, (George Allen and Unwin: 1970)

remained healthy. He wondered about the donor and the life she had lived. He stayed with her. He writes, *'She lived in my mind during the organ retrieval and continues to live in my memory because I do not want to forget her, and because I cannot forget her...our connection satisfies some deep law of harmony underlying all life, in which every person must enter into communion with another person in order fully to live. By that standard, my patient lived past her official time of death.'*<sup>2</sup>

His article is a meditation on life and death and what it is to be human and so in relationship with others.

### **Today's Gospel teaching**

Jesus responds with irony and humour to the Pharisee Nicodemus' interest in who he is and his relationship with God. But he confronts Nicodemus with the paradox of what it is to be human, to be body and spirit, to come from earth and heaven.

These two parts of our nature are not separate. They are who we are, baptised by water and the spirit, the water the material sign of an identity that is eternal as well as physical.

Jesus, the Christ, is the bridge between these identities. Indeed, he is the person who makes our imperishable nature, possible.

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 13.16)*

And after Jesus left his earthly life behind, God's Spirit continued to bind us into relationship with God. As Paul explains in the Letter to the Romans which we heard, not only are we dependant on God as a child is on their parents, but we can share in the intimacy of Jesus with God the Father.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ronald W Dworkin, *Last hours of an organ donor*, Aeon.co reprinted as The Long Read, The Guardian 23 May 2024

*...you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8 15.b-17a.)*

The wholeness of our being comes from God. What makes us more than a collection of cells, what gives us access to a realm beyond ourselves and creates us as spiritual as well as physical beings, is our relationship with God.

That is a completely mind-blowing thought. God, the creator and source of all life is accessible to us through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The readings we didn't read aloud from Isaiah and Psalm 29 remind us of the utter awesomeness, glory and holiness of God.

*The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.*

*The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness*

sings the Psalmist, as he seeks to express God's glory in poetry (Psalm 29.7-8a).

*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts, sing the seraphim (Isaiah 6.3).*

This isn't a primitive understanding of God. In a few moments we will sing the same words. Our God has many dimensions - the creator of all life who yet took on our human nature in Christ Jesus and holds us in relationship and life through the Spirit.

## **What are the implications for our lives?**

The doctor I quoted earlier reflects on our connectedness as human beings. He says people need more than a whole human body but also to 'feel that they occupy space in the thoughts and feelings of others'. He points out how much would be lost if in future this human work of caring for another is replaced by AI machines. 'You don't satisfy people's urge to feel human', he comments, 'by making the bridge to the next world a totally inhuman one'.

Ironically, the best way to understand the unfathomable doctrine of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is through our human experience. There is more to life than the here and now or rather, the here and now is sacred because God is in it. We have a longing for connection with each other and a sense of hope, justice, and truth and of a life that is beyond what we can create ourselves. Children sense this. Here is a poem by a Palestinian child, Fatema Saidam aged 9.

*Eyes are for looking  
and seeing sun  
Tongues are for greeting  
And saying fun  
Legs are for walking slowly  
And also run  
Hands are for shaking with friends  
not for shooting gun.*

And from Obadu Mohammad Abu Oda aged 14, also from Palestine.

*I always dream of a life clear as the serenity of the sky,  
A heart beating with love and optimism...  
Why our smiles do not bloom like the flowers?!  
Let us fly freely as those butterflies –  
satisfied, colourful and flapping sky-high,  
Away from worries, anxieties and sorrows.*

Obadu, like Fatema and her family, was killed last October in an Israeli airstrike. It matters that they lived and died. It matters that we should care because we recognise their humanity. And it matters that we never, ever, imagine that life is expendable, that the interests of this world trump the sanctity of life. We believe in God, creator of heaven and earth, of all that is seen, and unseen and in Jesus Christ his

only Son our Lord who suffered and died for all, and, in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life. We know that we are not the source of our own life or of our own salvation. We need God and we need each other, and we are called to defend any life that is threatened with destruction or devaluation in this world because all are God's children.

In this place people have subscribed to these truths for the last 150 years. They are the 'manifesto' that will bring living hope and salvation to the world.

***What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 17.6)***

**& Bishop Kevin at St Margaret's for the Confirmations**

**[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)**