



‘The Lord of the Dance’

By Rev Mandy Young



‘It has been presumed that the fundamental problem of human existence is mortality’,

So says Sam Wells in his book, *The Nazareth Manifesto*. He goes on to say that the great strivings of modern life have been about overcoming physical limitations and pushing back the boundaries of mortality. But what if the focus of all this human endeavour has been misconceived? What, he says, if the real challenge and striving of our existence should not be about extending life but about overcoming isolation, Therefore, the answers to human existence would lie not in ‘pushing back the frontiers of human knowledge, but in what we already have – each other’.

The *Nazareth Manifesto* is for me one of those books that you can be so glad someone pointed you towards. Wells develops his argument by asking us to think about how we might answer the question – what’s so great about heaven? Our answer, he says, might well go like this:

Heaven is the state of being with God and being with one another and being with the renewed creation.

He goes on:

That is to say heaven is not simply a matter of continued being; what matters is that that continued being is being with. In other words a heaven that is simply and only about overcoming mortality is an eternal life that is not worth having. ...being alone forever is not a description of heaven. It is a description of hell.

Why am I quoting such a book today? Because today is Trinity Sunday. Today Christians reflect most fully and self-consciously on the nature of the God we love and worship. But what exactly is that nature? Though words can’t do it justice, God’s nature is I believe divine community, a community created in the image of God the Father, reimagined in the life of Jesus and inviting us in through the loving power of the Holy Spirit of God. We are called to be part of this community, to reflect and honour it as much as we can in our churches, and lives and relationships. In Jesus we see God is Love and love is always about relationship.

It is I know very presumptuous to speak so categorically of the nature of God. If God is not bigger than the human mind can fathom, then God is not God. And truth be told, there would have been far less blood (not to mention, ink) spilled down the centuries of the Christian story if all had humbly accepted that. God is God and we are not. The nature of God must be a mystery. And many of us think the best way to make sure God stays a mystery is to speak about the Trinity! It seems so complicated.

By Trinity we mean God exists in relationship and as relationship: God is Father, God is Son and God is the Holy Spirit – God is a Communion of Three Persons, distinct and yet one. One God. Three parts. There are many analogies to help explain this though they all seem so dry and fall short of the beauty of The Trinity. But here we go, a triangle has three distinct sides, but it remains one triangle. Take away any aspect of a triangle and it ceases to be what it is. For Christians God is the source of all life (the Father) who came to be with us in the person of Jesus (the Son) and who is at work in the world today (the Holy Spirit). One God, in relationship, in divine community, and longing for the world he created to be drawn into that dance of community with her Lord. I am the Lord of the dance, said he.

It has often been said that, during this ‘lockdown’, we have rediscovered what it means to be a community. From the thousands and thousands of NHS volunteers, to the weekly clap for carers; from the numerous phone calls and offers of support made and received, as well as chats over the metaphorical or literal garden fence, we have reconnected with our communities. We have become more aware of each other, and, even in isolation, our lives are ironically less self-centred. This is how community used to be. Once upon a time, when most people lived in the same village or small town from the cradle to the grave; when everyone went to the same local school, and extended families all lived under the same roof or just up the road; when the local bobby knew the name of the children he reprimanded (it was always a ‘he’) and could threaten to tell mum and dad, because he knew them, and maybe even went to school with them. Everyone looked out for everyone else, and probably knew each other’s business. For better or for worse, community was about geography – community was about where you lived.

I don’t know how true to life this nostalgic, ‘call the midwife’ view of community really ever was. It has a certain appeal, and there is probably plenty of validity to it as many will testify. Nowadays community is barely a geographical concept at all. Of course there are parks, and homes and shops, and people live there, and may even work there if they don’t commute. People tend to live in communities but they live their lives in networks. By that I mean they may have an address, but on the whole their relationships are focused on networks – their work life for example is one network, their social life another, their friendships may transcend the globe via social media, and so on. That has huge implications for our care of the vulnerable. The more community is about networks and the less it is about physical space, the less we see the need around us. Some people do not have the luxury of networks – the homeless person, the single mum, the aged, the sick - but they depend still on community, and this is something we have learned during these past few months.

The beautiful Trinity that is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit reminds us that our faith may be personal, but it can never be private because it is rooted in divine community. I am my brother’s keeper, and I must love God and love my neighbour so that he or she might be freed from the burden of isolation and be part of God’s dance.

At the end of every church service there is a blessing. Below is my favourite one. If The Trinity seems complicated the blessing it promises is simple and are for all our trouble world:

Go forth into the world in peace; Be of good courage;
hold fast that which is good;
render to no one evil for evil;
strengthen the fainthearted;
support the weak;
help the afflicted; honour everyone;

love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;
*and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and all those you love and pray for, today and every day.*

AMEN