

Romans 8.12–17

Lavished and adopted in love

Amington

Sunday 30 May 2021

Trinity

Who am I?

Has anyone read the book, or seen this film? **J**

In *The Bourne Identity* Matt Damon plays Jason Bourne, a CIA super-spy who is shot in the back and suffers from amnesia. The film follows him around Europe as he tries to work out who he is, who he works for, what sort of man he is, even what his name is.

But there is a deeper question about who we are that goes beyond our memory – good or failing – beyond our character, beyond the name our parents gave us: the deeper question of who we are, in God's eyes.

When I was growing up my parents used to tell me that I can be anyone I wanted. Nowadays the police call that identity theft.

What do you call a cat who steals someone's identity? An impawster.

What do you call a nine-sided shape that won't tell you its name? Anon-ogon.

That's quite enough of that.

Analogia entis

I love preaching – however, it does rather change how you view the world. After a while, everything becomes a sermon illustration. You get used to seeing or hearing something and thinking, 'Aha! I could use that in a sermon one day!'

The idea is to use an everyday thing to illustrate a spiritual truth. Jesus did it all the time in his parables, using analogies from the farm, the temple, family life, to illustrate his points.

When it comes to the Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the three-in-one and one-in-three, there are some famous illustrations or analogies that supposedly help us understand what God is like.

First we have ¶ St Patrick's shamrock, with three leaves standing for the three persons of the Trinity, together making one God. Easy to understand, but, sadly ¶ wrong. It suggests 'God' is made up of three parts: one third Father, one third Son, and one third Holy Spirit. But no: the Father is 100% God, the Son is 100% God and the Spirit is 100% God – not a third each.

How about ¶ ice, water and steam? Again, easy to understand, but again, sadly ¶ wrong. It suggests God is *sometimes* 'the Father' (ice), *sometimes* 'the Son' (water) and *sometimes* 'the Spirit' (steam). But no: God is *always* 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'.

Surely this one, though: I am ¶ my parents' son, ¶ Jess's husband, and ¶ a vicar. You might be a wife, a daughter and a mother. Nice and easy to understand, but again, sadly ¶ wrong. This suggests that God has three *roles*: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But that can't be right, because then they are all actually the same person, just with different titles. The son in that picture, is the same as the husband in that picture, is the same as the vicar in that picture. But the Father is *not* the Son, who is *not* the Spirit.

It turns out that in some ways it's much easier to say what the Holy Trinity is *not*, than what it *is*!

Confused?

┌ This is often what Christians look like when they try to think about the Trinity. But that's ok. There is nothing – *nothing* – we can see, hear, smell, taste, touch or even think of, that is *like* God. There is no handy illustration that helps it all make perfect sense. God is so totally different, he is so much greater than us, that we cannot ever understand what it means for God to be God.

‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,’
declares the Lord.

Isaiah 55.8 (NIV)

And you know what, I think that's a good thing! Because if I *could* get my head around what it means for God to be God, *he wouldn't be much of a god at all.*

As much as the world and the Bible teach us truths about God, they also keep him hidden, because we simply cannot comprehend his power, his majesty, his wisdom, his eternity, his glory.

But that doesn't mean he is hidden and distant.

Adopted

§ When I was at school, I needed a miracle. I was taking GCSE French, and I was fine with reading and writing, but struggled with listening and speaking. In the end I decided I would work out how to say one thing perfectly. So I learned the word for ‘egg’ and decided that was *un oeuf*.

I have to say that there are a lot of miracles I’ve wanted in my life that God hasn’t granted, from speaking fluent French before an exam to more serious things, and many he has. One miracle he has performed in my life is the greatest of them all: adoption.

§ Adoption is the highest privilege the gospel offers... In adoption, God takes us into his family and fellowship, and establishes us as his children and heirs. Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship. **To be right with God the judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the father is greater.**

J.I. Packer, Knowing God, 232–232

Repentance and forgiveness is key – it’s *the* key that opens the door – and what’s inside, is *adoption*; what’s inside, is a *family*, *God’s* family, into which we are established as children and heirs.

§ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘*Abba, Father.*’

Romans 8.15 (NIV)

Forget the shamrock, forget the ice, water, and steam – *this is who God is*. God the Holy Spirit sets us free from fear and adopts us into a new family, gives us the rights of God the Son, so we can know and worship God as our Father.

This is a sermon illustration from Roman law: only sons could inherit property; when Paul says **adoption to sonship**, the point isn’t the gender, the point is the inheritance: he goes on to say in verse 17: **if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ**.

This verse tells us, not simply who *God is*, but who *we are*. By the Spirit Christians are no longer slaves but children and heirs with Jesus. This is who God is. This is who we are. And it’s why the prayer Jesus taught us doesn’t begin ‘Dear God,’ but ‘Our Father’.

And all this is a gift – notice that Paul says twice § **the Spirit you received**. This is not something we earn by working hard or achieve by being wonderful. It is a *gift*, something we *receive*.

┌ An American couple adopted a Japanese baby.

Shortly afterwards, they signed up for Japanese lessons and explained that they had just adopted a baby.

‘How wonderful!’ said the teacher.

‘Yes,’ they agreed. ‘We need to learn because she’ll be talking in a couple of years and we want to be able to understand her!’

Lavished

Have you ever been out walking in the rain – I mean *proper* rain, not the pathetic mizzle that’s the norm in England? Have you ever stood and turned your face up to the rain ┌ like this?

Friends, this is a picture of how God treats his children.

God’s love has been **poured out** into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Romans 5.5 (NIV)

God [the Father] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he **poured out on us generously** through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Titus 3.7-8 (NIV)

See what great love the Father has **lavished** on us, that we should be called children of God!

1 John 3.1 (NIV)

God is no English mizzle, his love for us is like the pouring rain, drenching us with his Spirit. If you find yourself feeling unloved by God, close your eyes and imagine you are like this guy, face upturned and arms outstretched, being totally and completely soaked by the Spirit and lavished with the love of God.

Receiving

So today, on Trinity Sunday, I would like you to remember two words rather than three: **lavished**, and **adopted**.

God is super-generous: he **lavishes** his endless love and Spirit on his children like the pouring rain.

We are **adopted**: established in God's family and loved, cared-for, cherished, co-heirs with Jesus himself.

All that is a gift we *receive*. This is why I like to pray with my hands open **like this** – it reminds me that prayer is not (supposed to be!) demanding that God does what I want, but receiving his Spirit and his care and his love, which he lavishes on his children.