**SERMON FOR TRINITY SUNDAY | 12.06.22**

**Proverbs 8: 1-4, 22-31l Romans 5: 1-5; St John 16: 12-15**

**In a week which has been as busy as any I can remember, I have been trying to read a book. A very unsettling book. It is called ‘That was the Church that was’ and is written by two very impressive commentators who I have referred to in sermons before, Andrew Brown of the Guardian newspaper and Professor Linda Woodhead, Professor in the department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University. These are people our own Professor Ken Thompson are familiar with and they even quote one of his books along the way!**

**The book, actually written in 2016, attempts to trace the causes of the state of the Church today and the subsidiary title is ‘how the Church of England lost the English people’.**

**I am up to page 107 and I quote just this paragraph to give you a flavour of the book as a whole: *as part of an exercise, someone organised a series of professional focus groups which canvassed churchgoers and non- churchgoers across the country to gauge their perception of the Church today. When asked to select images of people who personified the CofE today, the under 25s chose Dame Thora Hird in an armchair, the Queen and Cliff Richard. They also picked out images of 1950s Britain and spoke about ‘perfect families’ with ‘perfect children’, a fantasy world of ‘good people’ who have no problems in life. The Church, they suggested, is constantly telling people what to do, and is ‘scary’. One selected a picture of a lion: ‘It waits until you are just feeling relaxed and comfortable, and then it pounces on you and rips you apart - saying how bad you are!’ On the mood boards, one youth cut out a picture of a table formally laid out for dinner, and stuck across it the caption ‘control yourself’. Another cut out a picture of the Archbishop of Canterbury heading a football alongside a dinosaur, explaining that while the Church liked to think it was trendy, it was only skin deep.***

**As I walked among the bright, vivacious, preoccupied young crowd milling around Bank tube station last night on my way back from Greenwich, I couldn’t get that passage out of my head: what have the messages in any of our services got to do with any of them?**

**As I said, this book isn’t a comfortable read!**

**Today is Trinity Sunday. It asks us to think about what God is like – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons yet entirely and completely One… And that language has already ‘lost’ that young couple walking ahead of me up the escalator. *This is nothing to do with us,* they silently tell me although his Northern Irish accent might suggest that, somewhere, once upon a time, someone has tried to tell him.**

**So do we just abandon our current Church experience? Do we just agree with the person who wrote on their mood board *‘Eternity = services which are boring and go on and on…!’* What I can do to enable them to take a five second break from what they were off to do yesterday evening? How does *‘wisdom call’* as the opening line of our first reading from Proverbs suggests? And, to be honest, is wisdom even calling us?**

**So I looked for some help and a commentator gave me the wisdom of an African bishop: ‘*Your problem is that you have too much of everything. When you have too much, it is easy to forget that you are dependent on God. Here, we do not have enough of anything. Every day, we are reminded that we are utterly dependent on God. This means that we must pray fervently to God every day. We know that we are utterly dependent on God’. The bishop’s point was that comfort breeds complacency; material abundance makes us think we have our important needs met already and we don’t need God any more. We forget that it is God who has provided everything, and we are always dependent on God, whether we can see that or not.’***

**So is that the answer: to have everything taken away from us like some existential Mariupol where a sophisticated Ukrainian city is simply devastated leading its citizens to cry out to God for help before cholera and starvation take over? Of course not: that would be absurd.**

**And yet what does St Paul say in the second reading: *we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God, boasting in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit…***

**Is that what Christianity has to offer? Pain and sacrifice in order to gain some dubious benefits in ‘endurance’ and ‘character’? It doesn’t sound much of an alternative to the high life for our young people does it – free as they are from shame and guilt and the pressures of someone else telling them what to do?**

**So, as the Church of God, what is it that we have to offer – what has our own experience taught us that so burns in our hearts that we can’t but want to share it with other people?**

**And the answer is, strangely, the Trinity!**

**Forget all the clever theological formulas; forget most of the language that tends to get used in here. And start with what people most want: to be deeply known, understood and accepted. Whether it is you or me or the people in front of us on the escalator, what we all want is to be taken seriously and to be loved in such a way that we can be ourselves, able to truly open up to reveal what we are really feeling and thinking: to be ‘as one’ with each other.**

**And where do you find that? In a nightclub, or in a family gathered around the TV? Maybe – but I doubt it. Most social situations are designed to be surface experiences, quick thrills and a series of adrenalin rushes that inevitably last only so long. Even in families or in groups of friends there is a huge amount of play acting, posing, trying to make out that all is well. Who is really listening to what is going on inside? Who really cares especially when time is short, or the worries inconvenient? Who – to go back to the 1st reading from Proverbs - takes ‘delight’ in who you are or in what you are doing: who takes the time and the trouble to see that those deeper thoughts get the chance to be heard?**

**Which is why the Trinity - however you want to dress it up – stands as the experience to aim for: three individuals who are so comfortable with one another that they can say anything, reveal anything, explore and experiment and laugh and cry – knowing that they are held in utter respect, trust and love. No posing, no lying, no putting up a front…**

**If we bagged up 95% of what makes the Christian experience and threw it overboard, the one element – the one saving grace – we would have to keep is this experience: of being accepted and loved, cherished and affirmed. By God. By each other. Three in One and One in Three.**

**That’s what I want that young couple out last night to be able to have. I don’t think they need to give up everything else in their lives to get it but I know that if they had it, it would make everything else so much richer, so much better. How sad they don’t find it in our churches…**

**So forget Thora Hird in her armchair! Let’s resolve to be Trinity people!**