

Going Places

Genesis 1-2:4

Matthew 28:16-20

Purpose: To proclaim the Trinity as a dynamic, practical doctrine which nourishes the people of God who are “going places” as a missionary people.

I found the media coverage of the 70th anniversary of D-Day recently particularly poignant. That day, 6th June 1944, Dennis “Ned” Kelly flew two missions as a radio operator in a Lancaster bomber.¹ Just a few weeks later, early one July morning, flying his 30th and final bombing mission over France, his aircraft was attacked and set on fire by a German fighter. The rear gunner, Colin Allen, was killed. As they leaped from the burning plane the pilot, Tom Davis, was strangled by his still attached communication cable. Dennis Kelly’s life was saved by the brave French villagers who hid him.

Watching Kelly at the graves of his comrades, the word that came to mind was the word “mateship”. The Macquarie Dictionary defines mateship as “a code of conduct among men stressing equality and fellowship”.

There was plenty of that on display as Kelly remembered.

“I’m sorry, Tom. I’m sorry you didn’t make it, mate. I’m sure you’re in good hands now. And I honour and remember you and you are being honoured and remembered by the people of this village. I bless all of you for coming here today in memory of my comrade, but also on my plate today is to say, Thank you, thank you, thank you.”

And of course, not just among men! Let’s not let mateship become too much about masculinity! We also learnt about Collette, the French woman who visited “Ned” daily in his hiding place.

“Collette was somebody who used to come into the little room I was hidden in,” Kelly remembered. “We would talk for hours. I didn’t

¹ This story is source from <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2014/s4019804.htm>

understand her, she didn't understand me, but the companionship made me feel wanted ..." That sounds to me like mateship too – that deep sense of intimacy that binds people in ways that nourish and support.

“Mateship” reminds me of another word. This one I learnt at the knee of my own grandfather. “Solidarity!” Pop never went to war. During the First World War, he was a conscious objector. He would have willingly gone to fight the fascists during the Second World War, but by then he was too old. The day he went to the recruiting centre they mocked him “Go home old man,” they told him.

But he taught me about “solidarity”. Another deep abiding relationship, this time arising from a shared vision of the future which allowed men and women to stand shoulder to shoulder, united with a deep sense of shared purpose.

“Mateship” and “solidarity”: They are words of relationship. But, not trifling or trivial relationships. They are profound words that speak to us of depth, loyalty and commitment. The kinds of words that need to be at the front and centre as this Sunday we celebrate one of the great mysteries of the Church, our Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

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Once upon a time, we clergy would dread the prospect of preaching on Trinity Sunday. Trinity Sunday was the day when we were expected to make sense of that impossible mathematical equation which spoke of One God in Three persons. Trinity Sunday was the day when our unfamiliarity with the language and philosophy of the fourth century really showed through. Trinity Sunday was the day we got lost in the confusion of substances and essences which made perfect sense back then as Christians were called by the culture of the day to account for the faith into which they had been baptised.

Don't think I'm knocking it! In fact, I cherish those ancient thinkers who rose to the challenge of discerning the content of the our faith and of explaining the faith within the culture amongst which they lived. I cherish the creeds that ground the Church in its traditions and guide

the Church in its sense of what it means to be a community of faith in the world today.

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In fact, we share with our ancient forbears the responsibility of being able to explain our faith within the communities and cultures of the worlds in which we live. “Go,” Jesus says in the gospel, “Go! Make disciples! Baptise! Teach obedience.”

We are the missionary people of God, just as our ancient Christian forbears were a missionary people of God. Understanding our faith, knowing what we believe and why we believe it is as important for us as it was for them.

In the multicultural, interreligious world in which we live, we need to be able to give an account of our faith to those who do not understand as we understand or believe as we believe.

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... which means that on Trinity Sunday, we cannot avoid facing the reality of this critical doctrine of the Christian faith.

But never fear! That doesn't necessarily mean mathematical gymnastics or philosophical conundrums and I think those words “mateship” and “solidarity” help us explain our Christian understanding of God as Trinity.

“Go,” says Jesus to the disciples, “and I will be with you.” That's relationship. God's relationship with us. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is all about relationship.

God is relationship. God is perfect communion. Togetherness and community lie within the very heart and being of God.

God comes. God comes into the world. In Jesus the Son, God comes. God acts. God acts in relationship. All that the Son does, he does with the Father. All that the Father does, he does with the Son. This is the kind of relationship that we understand through words like “mateship”

and “solidarity”. “God is love,” says John in his first epistle. (1 John 4:8).

The Oneness of God is not an egocentric, self-centred Oneness. The unity of God is not a conceited, self-serving Unity. God’s Oneness and unity is perfect love and communion. It is not the rampant self-serving individualism that dominates and shapes so much in our world today. It is in the very nature of God to share God’s self beyond God’s self.

So Jesus comes. God’s sharing of God’s self in the world. So Jesus acts. The creativity of God enters the world creatively and acts in the world. That’s our Christian doctrine of the Trinity. All for one! One for all. That’s the Spirit that lies at the heart of our Christian doctrine of the Trinity. It’s a dynamic, relational doctrine and words like “mateship” and “solidarity” help us make sense of it.

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And it is a practical doctrine. Not airy, fairy philosophy or abstract mathematics. It is a practical doctrine! “Go,” says Jesus, “and I will be with you.”

The God who is Trinity is not detached from us. God is where God’s people are. God’s people go where God wants them to go. God is going places in this world and we are travelling with him. The missionary people of God are going places in this world and God is travelling with us.

“Go baptise. Go teach. Go make disciples and I will be with you,” says Jesus. Our journey as the missionary people of God is an accompanied journey. We with God; God with us. Trinity in action! Mateship! Solidarity!

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I’ve been trying to imagine the opposite of a tornado. A tornado is that swirling mass of wind and air that wreaks destruction and havoc as it sucks up everything in its path and dumps it unceremoniously into a

mass of twisted metals and splintered timbers. The opposite of a tornado would energetically draw up everything in its path and transform it creatively and purposefully. Instead of destruction it would leave behind it something wonderful.

That's the Trinity as I understand it. It is the energy of love and communion present in the world, present among the people of God, doing things, going places transforming everything it touches as it goes.

Some folk think that when we speak of a relational Trinity we think of God as kind of heavenly board of directors, Father, Son and Holy Spirit gathered around the board room table divvying up the responsibilities of being involved in the world.

But that's not the Trinity as I've been trying to proclaim it today. Instead our doctrine of the Trinity imagines the unity and Oneness of God as everlasting love and communion expressed throughout all eternity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; a mystery with practical implications, understood best with words like "mateship" and "solidarity" as God reaches beyond God's self to embrace the creation and all its creatures: A missionary God who draws together a missionary people; a community of mates, in solidarity with each other and with God's purpose.

Today in the gospel, Jesus says "Go." Form community in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and I will be with you. Solidarity and mateship are at the heart of a dynamic, relational understanding of God as Trinity.