

Trinity Sunday

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By Janet Foggie

Introduction

Jesus speaks in this passage of the relationship between one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit as a relationship of sharing. 'All that the Father has is mine'. As we read the passage can we challenge our idea of sharing, for many of us sharing is something that stops when we leave the playground. We might find loved ones, or family with whom to share some things, but the idea of sharing all we have might not come so easily to us. Can we share our country with those not welcome or safe in the land they left?

If we think of the refugee arriving in our country, what new relationships do we build? What do we do to share, to listen and to proclaim?

Text

John 16:12-15

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Comment

'As the family lay sleeping, soldiers kicked down the door of the house and entered, waving their rifles around erratically and shouting at the top of their voices.'

This is the opening sentence of Benjamin Zephaniah's novel for young adults called 'Refugee Boy'. It is the story of Alem, a child from a marriage across Eritrean-Ethiopian cultural and political divides who comes to England with his father

believing it to be a holiday, only to find that he is to be abandoned there as a refugee, 'for his own good.'

The novel, like many true refugee stories, starts with a relationship across boundaries. A relationship which in some way challenges the social norms, or crosses cultural divides. Humanity often seeks companionship and builds relationships across the lines that we also draw to delineate ourselves from others. When we welcome refugees we do this both in the sense of admitting that person into our community, and also accepting their decision to leave the conflict area and come to see refuge from us is a secondary relationship speaking what the spirit hears into the conflict itself.

This, though, is not sufficient to reflect in our work and world the eternal relationship which is expressed as the Trinity. Concepts like the Trinity may often lead church-people to discuss the minutiae of the relationships of the divine and the status and form of those holy relationships instead of understanding Jesus' radical statements about the Spirit of truth and the need to listen to God's spirit 'speak whatever he hears' and to truly hear the truth God is speaking to us. Theological discourse on the Trinity is not the intention, I believe, of Jesus' words about the Father and the Spirit of truth. However, radically reflecting God's truth in our world is a calling for every Christian.

For refugees one of the few things they can bring with them is their story and yet it can be a very hard thing to tell. Alem, in the novel, has great difficulty expressing himself, firstly because he has to learn English, and secondly because of the traumas of his life experience.

To hear a refugee's story involves patience and trust. If we are to reflect the Trinity in the world, then we have an obligation to hear and speak the truth with regard to refugees' stories. Equality in the stories of refugees quickly becomes a matter of justice. As we, in the spirit of truth, hear their stories, what can we do to bring the justice of a triune God to their lives? Instead of being an abstract exercise, how can our knowledge of the relational Trinity lead us to act as well as to think?

There is also a growing awareness of the racism and prejudice still at large in our society. Recent political events have revealed that much of the work done in the 1980s and 1990s to remove racism from schools, workplaces and public debate has not been as successful as we had hoped. If understanding the Trinity is about understanding the balanced and equal God in eternal relationship, then understanding people is about a radical equality and inclusion which brings each of us into relationship with the other.

Response

In his introduction Benjamin Zephaniah asks two questions of his readers as he writes about how he created his story. He blended together real stories in his fictional one to write a novel that was credible. In so doing he challenges the reader to engage with the real struggles of refugees in our world today. Perhaps you might like to answer his questions for yourself?

For 'Refugee Boy I borrowed from the many stories that I have heard and created a story that I believe many refugees would recognise. I would hope that anyone who reads this book would think before they accuse refugees of looking for a free ride. We all want to live in peace, we all want the best for our families. The Celts, the Angles, the Saxons, the Jamaicans are all refugees of one sort or another.

What kind of refugee are you?

And what are you scared of?

Prayer

Triune god, who dwells in the mystery of relationship
Some days I don't like mystery;
fear things I don't know.
I don't want to take a risk;
worry if I start caring it will never stop.
I feel I have enough troubles looking after my own family.
I am concerned there isn't enough money for my needs
and find it hard to give some away.
Forgive me:
forgive me and help me trust;
forgive me and help me mend.
That I may be able to welcome the stranger,
and open my heart to equal relationships,
with those refugees on my doorstep.
AMEN