

## SERMON 31<sup>st</sup> May 2026

*God, our Father, you made us; Christ, our High Priest, you made us holy; Spirit of holiness, you make us one holy body, the Church. Triune God, thank you for your living Word of Scripture. May it deepen our faith, comfort us and challenge us. Amen.*

When you were at school, which subject did you prefer, Geography or History? In my day, you had to make a choice; you could do either Higher Geography or you could do Higher History, but you couldn't do both. I was a geographer, not a very good one, it must be said, but a better geographer than an historian, or so my exam results told me, which has since surprised me because as I grew older, I learned to love history.

The problem was, I think, as I found out when I studied Theology at University where Church History was a required subject, I have always had a kind of free-style attitude towards history. Because I can never remember exactly what happened in the past, I tend to fill in the blanks with my own imagination. I thought I had done brilliantly in my first Church History exam at university when I answered questions on British missionary journeys in Continental Europe in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. But, the low mark I received meant that the examiner was more entertained by my muddled imagination than impressed by my command of the facts.

I wonder how I would survive at school today. Looking at my son's timetable, I see that neither History nor Geography feature. Instead, there is a subject called Social Subjects, which includes not only both Geography and History, but a few others as well, like Modern Studies, which seems to be politics, for all intents and purposes. How would I survive that subject, Social Studies, if I was at school today if I couldn't ditch those parts of it that I wasn't very good at?

I've been wondering this recently – how I would survive a Social Subjects exam – not just about myself, but about the American Government, of all things. Three months ago, if you had been asked, would you have been able to find on a map that part of the world called The Straights of Hormuz? And if so, would you have been able to give us a history lesson about it, or would you have been able to tell us about its political importance in relation to its geography?

Three months ago, I'm not sure I could have, and, it turns out, three months ago I'm not very sure that the American Government would have been able to say anything convincingly about the integrated historical, political and geographical significance of that small waterway called The Straights of Hormuz.

Three months on, and it wouldn't be hard for any of us to say something that approximated sense about that region of the world because it turns out that schools are right to teach a subject called Social Subjects; politics, history and geography are all interconnected in ways that it is very difficult to separate.

If you don't understand that, especially if you are a world leader, then not only are you likely to struggle at school, but there's a good chance you might end up leading your nation into a war that not only you, but the rest of the world regrets deeply. It turns out that a great deal about our world is deeply connected; it's geography, history, politics, economics and so much more. By doing one thing, it's is easy to upset everything.

Everything is connected, that might be the truth, but sadly, it isn't very convenient. We imagine, too often, that our lives, the world around us, our relationships are discreet and

unconnected. That gives us a feeling of freedom to do as we please, and a sense of control and agency as if we can determine who we are and what happens in our lives if only we can find a way to make the right choices and undertake the correct actions.

But the truth is, what happens to us in our lives is often determined by things we have very little control over. The advance of technology, the changing climate, the decisions of governments all play a far greater part in our daily lives than we often appreciate. We are all deeply connected to the world around us, the people around us, and the events of the past, almost overwhelmingly so.

That has been the case for ever. Even away back at the beginning of Christian history, hundreds of years before Christian missionaries set off to evangelise the European continent in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, monks would try to disconnect themselves from the world and take themselves off into the desert to commune with God without the distractions of worldly matters and other people. It didn't last. That monastic tradition wasn't the route that mainstream Christianity took. Rather than standing alone in a desert, Christianity instead became the religion of empire, and spread across the whole geography of the world immersing in politics, and shaping our understanding of Western history.

In the sixteenth century, John Donne, a poet and a priest in the Church of England, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, put it succinctly in an essay. He wrote,

*No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less ... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

There's something about John Donne's expression of interconnectedness – No man is an island – which, while true, nevertheless frames this interconnected world in a negative way, as if the fact that everything is connected makes life more difficult, more tragic, diminished in some way. He writes, *If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less ... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind ... never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.* They are hardly sentiments that raise our hearts in hope for the future. It's as if our interconnected world and interconnected lives do nothing but bring us down.

But, that is not true, or at least that is not what Christians are called to believe. We are called to believe that the deep connection between the universe, the past, our relationships, and much else is not a reason to lament, but the very source of our salvation.

In the Christian Calender, this Sunday is called Trinity Sunday. Every Sunday we worship God as Trinity, but following our extended celebration of Christ's resurrection during Eastertide, and our celebration of the giving of the Holy Spirit last Sunday, this is an opportunity to remind ourselves of the significance of the Christian understanding of the interconnectedness of God; God as three persons in one substance, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Trinity is what marks Christianity out as a distinctive religion, and when we try to live as Christians in the world, the Trinity ensures that we do so immersed in an interconnected world and universe. We do not worship a god who created the world, but who is remote from it, existing somewhere beyond the clouds. We do not follow a prophet who is little different to us apart from a few good ideas. We do not live within a moral community of

relationships that is pieced together from nothing more than our own experience and reason, or that has been laid down to us from on high.

Our belief in God as Trinity asserts that if we are to experience salvation in this world then we cannot separate the created universe from our experience of life, or from the choices that we make and the relationships that we form. The Trinity asserts that there is nothing about the world and the universe that we live in that we are not a part of. There is nothing about the people that we are that is inconsequential in this universe. There is nothing about the moral choices that we make and the relationships we form that do not have consequences that affect much more than just ourselves and other people.

That is why, in our reading from the Gospel of Matthew this morning, Jesus commanded his disciples, to call others to follow him by baptising them into the relationship of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Belief in God as Trinity asserts that while it is true that we did not create ourselves, but are people created by God, nevertheless God who created us also lived our lives as a person through Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit continues to direct us to form spiritually holy communities of relationships made up of people making spiritually holy, moral decisions.

In this way, while we wonder at our place in this vast universe as we heard the psalmist so wonder this morning, 'When I look up at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars set in their place by thee, what is man that thou shouldst remember him?'<sup>1</sup> nevertheless, we also assert that we who are so small and fragile in this universe, nevertheless are significant and important, as the psalmist said, 'Yet thou hast made man little less than a god, crowning him with glory and honour.'<sup>2</sup>

Through the person of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, God incarnate as a human being, we know that life is not just fleeting and inconsequential, but is a statement of the universe, a way by which God is known by His creation.

Even more than this, even more than the God's creation knowing and understanding itself through life, and our lives in particular, in the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, we know that when we form spiritually holy relationships and make spiritually holy, moral choices then we can help ensure that the created order and all life flourishes and finds salvation.

The universe created by God, human life as we experience it, the choices that we make are all connected. If we live in the power of the Holy Spirit, through the example of Jesus Christ, and under the rule and majesty of God the Father then we help ensure that our lives, the life of the created world around us, and even the nature of the universe will flourish.

*Now to the one who can keep you from falling and set you in the presence of his glory, jubilant and above reproach, to the only God our saviour, be glory and majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now, and for evermore. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 8: 3

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 8: 5