

Rt Rev Rosie Frew, Moderator of the General Assembly, chose 'Extravagant love' as the theme for her modatorial year. Which means that over the last week attending the General Assembly, I have lost count of how often I have heard that quote from Ephesians 3 about how "wide and long and high and deep" is the love of God. Yet, that is not a sentiment that ever wears thin!

As we heard in our reading last week, it is love that characterises Christian community. We are surrounded by the "wide, long, high, and deep" love of God. It permeates us, it is **the** attribute which announces to the world that we are Jesus' disciples. When the church can represent the love of God, it is fulfilling its calling. And so it is significant, that for the first time, the royal representative to the General Assembly, Lady Elish Angiolini, is the first practicing Roman Catholic to hold the position of Lord High Commissioner. A move that inspired the Catholic Archbishop, Leo Cushley, to share in Holy Communion with the General Assembly this year, something he has previously politely declined. Through the appointment of Lady Elish, the king gave the Church of Scotland an opportunity to demonstrate that love, and not sectarianism, is its defining characteristic; an opportunity that the Church of Scotland has embraced over the course of the General Assembly.

We can celebrate that the new commandment we heard of last week is present within the Christian community here in Scotland. And I hope our discussion of love languages last week has sparked your imagination for how we too can show this love effectively within our own lives and parish.

Today's passage, in its preparation for Pentecost, continues to unpack this love, drawing upon the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and the Body of Christ; the Trinity and the church. For it is the reciprocity of love between Father and Son, which is made present in our lives by the Spirit, that in turn inspires us to lives of love. It is being wrapped up within the Divine embrace that enables us to live out Christ's new commandment, to love one another as Jesus has loved us.

The Trinity is not completely spelt out for us in the Bible, which does make people uncomfortable, but in the lead up to the verses we read this morning, we get pretty exalted language from Jesus about his standing with God the Father. During this discourse, Jesus has constantly affirmed his unity with the Father: "Believe in God, believe also in me...If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him...I am in the Father and the Father is in me." These are significant claims, put more boldly that we would be willing to make for ourselves, about the closeness between God the Father and Jesus, who is God's son.

And yet, Jesus opens this relationship to us by uniting himself not just with the Father but with his disciples within this same speech. Jesus says, "I go and prepare a place for you, I will

come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.” In this Chapter of John from which we take our reading today, we have a litany of intimate coexistence. Jesus is united with the Father but also united with us. Jesus says his teaching and power come from the Father, but by extension that connects us with that same teaching and that same power through the Spirit.

We are then invited into this mix. By joining in with this divine community, we too become people who exist in a space radiant with love. We act according to that metric of love, following Jesus’ commandment to love one another. It becomes a chicken and egg situation, or perhaps more accurately a positive feedback loop, in which God's love brings us into community with God-self, which is a relational existence between Father, Son, and Spirit. Existing within this dynamic allows us to abound in love, drawing us closer to the God of love, and so we go round and round this loop, consistently orientated towards, and expressive of, God's love.

We become known, as we discussed last week, as a people of love; but that love, in turn, reflects the hospitality of God, forever spilling outwards, and this is what we call mission. For just as we have been loved, so too do we love. Participation in this divine community is not just the origin of renewal and forgiveness and virtue but also of mission, our call to go out into the world in the name of God, Father, Son, and Spirit.

Jesus then says that this is made possible because the Helper, the Spirit, will come to live among them just as Jesus has. The Spirit will teach them, helping them to understand all that Jesus had taught them. Later in the discourse, Jesus affirms to the disciples that it is better for him to leave them that the Spirit may come to them, for the Spirit will empower them to speak to this relational divine reality. And so with the way to the Father opened by Jesus’ relationship with him, the Spirit comes to unite us to them both, enabling us to love one another with the love of Christ. Enabling us to love the world with the heart of its creator.

So through the work of God in Father, Son, and Spirit, we are brought into the relational existence of God; ushered into the divine family home as a welcome guest and having experienced this divine hospitality we too become hospitable, part of the outpouring of love into the world. After all, we know how “wide, long, high, and deep” is the love of God. In this, we obey the teaching of Jesus, in part because of discipline but mostly because we are wrapped up in this divine existence shaped by love.

I really cannot express how much this relational Trinitarian theology excites me. It speaks to the reality of our lives as social creatures, for it is our relationship to others that most defines our existence. This relational trinitarian way of understanding God is a vision which connects with what can be the very best of humanity, a vision that speaks into our

governments, our businesses, our marriages, our friendships, and our communities. Each of them relationships which have the potential to foster human flourishing, just as the divine life continues to make space for creation. These aspects of our lives have the capacity to reflect God, they are the arenas in which God is made tangible for us, places where Jesus' commandment to love one another receives an opportunity to be exercised.

However, these are vulnerable spaces, at risk of distortion by sin, avenues for pain as well as love. For what can hurt us more than our closest relationships? Our governments, businesses, marriages, friendships, and communities can become the very worst of humanity. Yet, when our relationships break down, it is the divine life which can help us re-enter into community once again; it is the divine love which can bring us back to a place of flourishing. For the origin of love and human flourishing is not ourselves but it is an outpouring of the love of Father, Son, and Spirit which existed in the beginning, exists now, and will exist forever.

If you have never considered why it matters that God is Trinity, then I hope you feel inspired to investigate it for yourself, though no doubt you will have felt its significance in many different contexts. If the Trinity is your bread-and-butter, then I know you will share my joy in reflecting on it this morning. For Jesus, in living in unity with the Father, has opened the way for us to rekindle that relationship with God through the indwelling of the Spirit. And in that place, we will discover how wide, and long, and high, and deep is the love of God.