

# Sermon for 15.06.25

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of the themes that run through the Old Testament is the question of how human beings can stand in the presence of God. In the Garden of Eden, it seems, God was accustomed to take a stroll in the home he had made for his human creatures. But after Adam and Eve's failure, humanity's fall from grace, it becomes an issue. How can we, finite and often failing human beings, stand in the presence of the infinite and perfect God? Moses hid his face at the burning bush and was later told that he could not see God's face and live; prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel are overwhelmed as they glimpse God's presence. In an extraordinary passage about the Temple in the First Book of Kings, we are told that 'when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.'

Related to this question is another one: who is at home with God, or who has peace with God? Psalm 85 says that God will speak peace to his people, but who counts as God's people? Do you have to be an Israelite? Do you have to participate in certain forms of worship? Do you have to obey God's laws, the *torah*, in a particular kind of way?

Both of these questions caused a lot of anxiety in Jesus' day. Not only was it not clear how to stand safely in the presence of God's glory, it wasn't actually clear where to find it. Most Judaeans would have assumed that the Temple would be the place to look, but ever since its rebuilding about 500 years before, God's glory had not yet come to fill it as it had done with the original Temple built under Solomon.

Similarly, there were many different factions with different claims about how to be at home with God. Some views were based on ethnicity, some were based on obedience to law. Some groups, like the Qumran community who left us the Dead Sea Scrolls, felt that the Judaeans establishment had become so corrupt, so compromised by its relationship with superpowers of the day, that you had to separate yourself off from the mainstream and set up a truer, holier community elsewhere.

We all want to feel that we can be in God's presence and that we can be counted among his people. But how do we actually do that?

A lot of people seem to think that Jesus' answer to these questions was basically telling people to relax. "Sure, I'm having dinner with tax collectors and hanging out with prostitutes, but relax, they're people too!" "Sure, my disciples don't observe all the laws about the Sabbath or food purity, but lighten up! Who need all those old laws anyway? Just be a nice person!"

The problem is, it's very hard to square this attitude with a lot of the other things Jesus says. At times, Jesus' sayings feel incredibly demanding. I imagine all of us have been in that position where you sit in church or read your Bible and you hear something that Jesus has demanded of his followers and you squirm in your seat. I find myself thinking, how on earth can I live up to that?

So we have these two completely different senses of Jesus. The Jesus who says don't be afraid, don't worry about the Sabbath or food purity or whatever it might be; and then the Jesus who seems to demand of us the impossible. It's a very confusing picture.

But let's come back to the original questions that I started with. Who gets to be in the presence of God and to belong to God? Depending on which sayings of Jesus you choose to focus on, you might expect his answer to be 'everyone' or you might expect it to be 'almost no one'.

But in fact, Jesus' main answer to this question is more surprising. The answer is: Jesus himself. Who has ever seen the Father? Jesus says: only the Son. Who is 'in the bosom of the Father'? The only person of whom Jesus says this is himself, the Son. Jesus, in his day, is the only person in the world who has intimacy with God, who can call God 'father', because he and the father are one.

Jesus never says, "Oh lighten up about intimacy with the Father. Just pray a bit more or visit the Temple more often and I'm sure you'll get there eventually." No. Intimacy with the Father means standing where Jesus stands: 'where I am, there will my servant be also'. Paul also makes this very clear in our first reading this morning: who has peace with God? Well, we do, but it's *through our lord Jesus Christ*. It's through Jesus Christ that we 'obtained access to this grace in which we stand'. 'Obtained access'. That's interesting language. It's actually Temple language. The Temple had been where you go to meet God; from now on, the Gospel suggests, where you go to meet God is Jesus. You trust that by standing where Jesus stood, addressing the Father with his words, you belong to God, and even, amazingly, hope to share the glory of God, as Paul puts it.

There's one last problem though: just because I sit on a throne in Buckingham Palace, that doesn't make me the King of England. Just because I enter 10 Downing Street, that doesn't make me the prime minister. We know that the life of Jesus is where we find our belonging with the Father. But it's not enough for me to just be there and say Lord, I trust you on this. I can't make myself like Jesus. And that's where the Holy Spirit comes in. The Holy Spirit can and does knit us into the life and pattern of Jesus, or, to use more biblical imagery, graft us into the vine of Jesus.

So we pray, as always, in the name of a triune God, but hopefully we can use Trinity Sunday as a time to think about what we mean when we pray in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That we can wonder at that glimpse of the divine life that the doctrine of the Trinity gives us. And that we can give thanks that through this threefold activity of God we are drawn, mysteriously, amazingly, into his own glory.

And I will close this morning with a prayer, adapted by a former bishop of Durham for the worship of God as Trinity:

*Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth:  
Set up your kingdom in our midst.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God:  
Have mercy on us sinners.*

*Holy Spirit, breath of the living God:  
Renew us and all the world.*

Amen.