

## **Week 5: The Trinity and Headship**

### **TRINITY SUNDAY**

Isaiah 6.1-8; Ps 29; Romans 8.12-17; John 3.1-17



### **PRAYER FOR DFV PREVENTION MONTH**

God who brings new shoots from old stumps  
flesh and breath from dry bones  
and goodness from chaos:  
we pray for members of our community  
whose lives are limited by the effects of family violence and abuse.  
Make us people of deep listening, of courageous conflict  
and commitment to the ways of healing and reconciliation,  
that our communities might be places  
where love and peace prevail  
and even the least of us belong.  
We pray this through Jesus who journeyed through death to life  
that we might do the same. Amen.

## STORY TELLING

Scripture was and is so important to me, but it was twisted and used against me.

I internalised all the warped interpretations and meanings given to particular parts of scripture — for example, Ephesians 5:22-33 ("Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour") and Colossians 3:18-19 ("Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord").

The call to "submit to one another" was skimmed over, as was the call for husbands to love their wives.

So I learnt that to be spiritual, to be godly, to be obedient to God, I was to submit to my husband.

He had the final say in decisions; I was to give myself to him and uphold my responsibility to submit regardless of whether or not he upheld his duty to love.

Nobody else knew what was happening — they saw my then-husband as a bright, bubbly, kind and helpful person.

Driving to church he could be yelling at me or the kids, but as soon as he stepped out of the car, he would be charming, pleasant and happy, talking to people he met on the way into church.

...And although I knew my marriage was 'sick', I blamed myself. Divorce, meanwhile, was an absolute 'no-no'; I saw it as my responsibility to make things better.

I found it hard to come to terms with the fact that what was happening to me was in fact domestic violence.

As the workshop hosts listed the various forms of domestic violence — verbal abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, spiritual abuse etc.

I sat there, stunned. I could tick every box except physical abuse: I was never hit.

That's one of the things about the ongoing discussion of and commentary on domestic violence that frustrates me — the emphasis is usually on the more extreme forms of physical violence.

The deaths and injuries from domestic violence are heartbreaking. However, they often come at the end of years of non-physical abuse.

I could never go to the police because I believed there was nothing illegal to report.

During counselling sessions after I had left, my psychologist commented that my ex-husband was such a "violent man". I stopped her and said: "But he never hit me!"

She went on to point out all the ways I was violated; how I had been destroyed from the inside out.

Today, I can look back and smile. Instead of bagging myself, I can acknowledge the strength and courage it took to be able to make it through.

(excerpt from [\*Shattering the Silence: Australians tell their stories of surviving domestic violence in the church\*](#))

### **PAUSE FOR REFLECTION:**

What stands out to you from these stories? Did any new idea or images emerge? What responses do you notice in yourself as you read or hear the story and reflection?

## READING THE SCRIPTURES

## ROMANS 8.12-17

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

### After Rublev's Trinity

Each face turned toward  
a face at table leaving  
always a space for

one more. An open  
door to run through when someone  
can't quite make it home

on their own. Though the  
wings work, humans haven't got  
them, and it's hard to

converse from heights so,  
in one hand a staff to lean  
on. The other hand  
ever reaches down.

— Carrie Purcell Kahler

## REFLECTION

Love, Paul is saying in his letter to the Romans, has to do with mutuality. It is about opening ourselves to the Spirit and aligning our desires with the loving action and interaction of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit; a God who is ever reaching down to draw us into divine communion.

The ancient creeds of the Church point to this constant life of mutuality, where no person is greater than another, within the very nature of God. The Athanasian Creed, states;

*The deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, coeternal in majesty....*

*And in this Trinity, no one is before or after, greater or less than the other; but all three persons are in themselves, coeternal and coequal; and so we must worship the Trinity in unity and the one God in three persons.*

Such theological language of equality in unity may seem too esoteric to have anything to say to the misery of marriages such as Lynette experienced. Rather than an experience of the mutuality of love, this most intimate of human relationships is for some defined instead by power and control. Unequal gendered relationships which enforce the submission of woman to man are justified by texts such as Ephesians 5:22-33 and Colossians 3:18-19 along with a sweeping interpretation of male headship.

For many, the image of God is the absolute essence of power- and is therefore to be feared. It seems natural that our human relationships fall into that same pattern where love and attention must be earned and appropriate submission cultivated to avoid punishment. Perhaps

this is why so often verses in the Bible that actually speak of submission to one another are twisted into the more easily understood shape of power over instead of power mutually surrendered. With this kind of god in charge, there is no 'open door' to run through to escape beyond the harsh confines of control. As in slavery, the freedom of the self is colonised by the dominant party whose ownership extends to the whole person: emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual. For some who are trapped, this god offers no safe way home.

Yet clearly in Romans we are pointed to a view of God that leaves no room for fear because God has shifted the equation of power and come in vulnerability and self-offering. St Paul affirms, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption." As adopted children, there is none who has power over another. There is no hierarchy in our relationships because there is no hierarchy in the Holy Trinity into which we are invited to participate as the new family of God. (This applies to marriage as it does to all other relationships. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul expects both parties to respect the needs of the other.)

To align relationships of love with the same patterns of power and fear the world has always known is to miss the revolutionary nature of the good news brought by Jesus and proclaimed here by Paul. We are led by the Spirit towards a renewed humanity, participating together in the new life of Christ where there is interdependence and mutuality based on love and freedom. This is a higher goodness that requires our transformation, not merely an adherence to rules. Only when we accept the unconditional grace of our adoption may we begin to understand the abundant generosity of the God whose very being is relational, making us heirs of a kingdom where all can flourish and where there is no room for fear.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Where do you experience hierarchies in your relationships (social, spiritual, economic)? Who usually gets to be in charge? How is that decided?
2. How do you imagine God? Does this imagining affect how you relate to others? How?
3. How do you think our understanding of God as Trinity might help us to reach for 'a higher goodness' in our human relationships?

## FURTHER RESOURCES

[Trinity: Shared Power by Fr Richard Rohr OFM](#)

On the Way podcast: [Jess Hill on Power, Control and Domestic Abuse](#)

In the second of the series of recordings from the Byron Writers Festival, Jess Hill joins Sue and Dom to talk about domestic abuse and the systems that enable perpetrators. The conversation explores the frightening realities behind the statistics and how our communities can confront the fear and violence that is present in so many relationships. Jess Hill is an investigative journalist who has been writing about domestic violence since 2014. Prior to this, she was a producer for ABC Radio, a Middle East correspondent and is listed in *Foreign Policy's* top 100 women to follow. Her reporting on domestic violence has won two Walkley awards, an Amnesty International award and three Our Watch awards.

Content warning: This conversation covers topics of domestic abuse and family violence.

If you are affected by domestic abuse help is available. The following site provides further information on where to find support both for

victims and those who use family violence and are seeking counselling.

[Help lines White Ribbon](#)

[Doctrine of headship a distortion of the gospel message of mutual love and respect](#) by Julia Baird

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Enfolding God,  
Trinity of love,  
You are our source, our goal, our life:  
May we be born again in you  
No more to live  
Alone and unconnected,  
but sharing in the Spirit's breath  
And carried to your heart;  
Through Jesus Christ who lifts us up.  
**Amen.**

Steven Shakespeare, *Prayers for an Inclusive Church*, Canterbury Press: 2008)