

Trinity Sunday 2000 18 June Disability Sunday

Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8; John 4:1-25; Romans 8:12-17

The Trinity shows us that at the heart of God there is a dynamic relationship between the Creator, Redeemer and the Holy Spirit. In the Christian understanding the essence of God is relationship. The three aspects of the trinity interact and are interdependent to make the essence of God: the creative force, the Word and the Spirit that gives life. Our relationship with God as trinity changes and develops as we experience more of life. In life-giving relationships we are transformed as we interact with people and God.

The readings today express this transformation. Isaiah moves from the position of feeling unclean to being able to respond to God's call by saying "here I am send me".

The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman took her from being an outcast to participating in a theological discussion onto being a missionary to her own people.

Paul writing to Christians in Rome highlights the transformation from living in the flesh to living in the Spirit that enables them to use the term "Abba" a term of endearment normally reserved for a parent; for God the Creator.

Transformation is also about getting relationships right between groups of people within our community. We may need to change

some of our practises to take account of issues facing these people. This may challenge us to re think our faith.

A church could be completely physically accessible with the latest hi tech sound system and big print hymn books, but the church community could still be exclusive in its attitudes to people with disabilities. On the other hand, physical access may not be ideal but attitudes may be more inclusive in the way people with disabilities are encouraged to participate fully and barriers are worked around. (This morning is an example of working round the barriers, my speech is difficult to understand but this is overcome by having the sermon printed out). A word of caution here that if a church is committed to disability issues it will be working towards making its buildings accessible. In other words making things truly accessible requires transformation of our physical surroundings and the way we do things along with changes in attitudes. Attitudinal barriers are often hard to break down because it requires a transformation of the heart.

For most people there is a fear of disability because we are as seen as a group of people who are weak and dependent on others and in need of care. Often the media portrays people with disabilities as super heroes or helpless victims of fate. There is a sense in our culture that disability is not quite accepted and is often talked about in hushed tones. Relationships between people with disability and people without disabilities are often characterised by

an attitude of what I call professional care-giving. In these relationships there are differences in status, roles and responsibilities between carers and those being cared for. One is totally dependent while the other is independent. In these relationships there is little room for either person to grow and develop because the roles are prescribed.

How do we change attitudes to encourage life-giving relationships between people with disabilities and those without? Moltmann suggests that we need to build relationships based on friendship rather than professional care-giving where there is not a strict division between the carer and those needing care. Friendship is the foundation of mutual care where people are interested in each other's lives. People in a friendship are interdependent.

Jesus didn't treat the Samaritan woman in the conventional way, a Jewish man would not be seen talking to a Samaritan woman.

Early on in the story the woman questions Jesus on this point.

They are both acting out of character to help each other in their common human need for water and both ministered to each other.

In other words through their meeting their relationship was based on friendship.

When relationships are based on friendship there is a recognition of our common humanity and readiness to share in each other's lives. This may mean that people with disabilities offer ministry to

people without disabilities as well as the other way round, in this way we become the body of Christ in a more complete way.

While acting out of character, both Jesus and the Samaritan woman did not try to overlook who they were, in fact in the story it was revealed that the woman may have been a prostitute yet this did not stop her from being a missionary to her people and who knows it may even have worked in her favour!! The relationship transformed the life of the woman and may have transformed the life of Jesus too.

Far from hiding who we are, relationships based on friendship affirm who we are in all our diversity and gives us the freedom to be transformed. People with disabilities and without disabilities through friendship can share life together and perhaps discover that disability like many conditions in life can be both a struggle and a gift that can be affirmed even celebrated! Moltmann suggests that disability can be a gift of the Holy Spirit.

God in trinity helps us to see that relationships are important for at the heart of God there is interdependence allowing for transformation. The challenge is to have an accessible heart as a faith community so our church can be holy wholly accessible in Spirit as well as in word and deed.

**Vicki Terrell**