



**Rev Diana Rattray**  
**God in relationship**

Isaiah 6: 1-8

John 3: 1-17

Year B Trinity

30 May 2021

We can have words, analogies, images and icons of the trinity but they fall short of an adequate explanation, description or image purely because the Triune God is mystery. God is undivided and diverse. God is more than even centuries of debate over wording or creeds can capture.

Today I would encourage you to bring to mind and heart your beginnings, turning points in your life of faith and place yourself once more in the life of the trinity. The trinity is the true model of right relationship. And we know that we often do not get relationships right.

Life is hard, faith decisions can be hard and in spite of our best efforts we make mistakes. All of us fall short of the perfect relationship within the Godhead and all of us fall short of our faith ideals.

To have our relationship with God right is to have our relationship with ourselves right – and therefore our relationship with others. When our relationship with God, ourselves and others is not right, we may be troubled, stressed, and at worst alienated - from God, ourselves and others and we can be destructive.

If we take time to pause, to reflect, to immerse ourselves in the flow of God's compassion revealed as Creator, Redeemer and Giver of Life then we can live compassionately and we take compassion out into our world and context.

When I resigned as Vicar of All Saints at the end of 2019 I was not sure what I was going to do next. However things have a

strange way of working out. A week after I left parish ministry I was working part time for Shine, Safer Homes in New Zealand Everyday.

Shine is a provider of support for those who are experiencing family violence as well as providing education and training for community groups, schools and in the workplace. I found myself in the Education and Training team. I only work in the Shine offices in Kingsland half a day per week, spending my other two days at Te Puaruruhau, for the Auckland District Health Board.

Family violence is a health issue. People experiencing intimate partner violence are more likely to present with other health issues and there is also a greater risk if there are children in the household. I thought I knew quite a bit about domestic violence and intimate partner violence, however I have been on a steep learning curve over the last year or so.

I will talk more about my work in a session after church today. What I want to focus on now is how much emphasis we place on right relationships in the church, and what that means for those of us who do not fit the prescribed norms.

When I was in my early twenties, before I was ordained, I worked for an Anglican parish which was large and vibrant and had a evangelical/charismatic theology. I was never comfortable with the stringent definitions of right relationship, sexuality and morality. I guess I was mostly there because there were other young people there, which was not common in other Anglican churches.

My dis-ease became more apparent to me over the years as some who were upheld as living the gospel definition of right relationship were actually causing pain to their partners or themselves through their hidden behaviours or actions.

The statistics tell us that 1 in 3 women in Aotearoa New Zealand have experienced intimate partner violence at some point in their lives. When we think of Intimate Partner Violence often it is physical assaults or worse that come to mind. In my work we see all types of abuse: physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, and abuse which is not just a one off event but may go on for a very long period of time.

The heteronormative, patriarchal church structures and justice systems have made life more difficult for many women and in some cases have resulted in the abuse continuing or even increasing. All of us in the church today have a role to play in promoting good, equal, healthy relationships as well as being willing to hear and believe the accounts of those who are brave enough to tell their stories.

Our gospel today tells of those who came to hear the stories of Jesus. Some were swayed by stories of miracles but it was a deeper faith relationship that Jesus taught and sought. We do not know a lot about Nicodemus. What we do know from our gospel story is that he was a leader of the Jews and he was not afraid of asking questions. What we are also told was that he came to see Jesus by night. Perhaps he was afraid of being seen, perhaps he was trying to hide from someone or something. He was also a questioner of the status quo.

Some of the verses in the gospel account today are the most quoted passages from the bible. Let's not get hung up on rebirth, being born again, or John 3:16 and eternal life. The issue is not really conversion from unfaith to faith, but conversion from one kind of faith in Jesus to another. It is a matter of getting the Christology right, or, in less technical terms, understanding who Jesus really is and how that has consequences for one's spirituality, one's lifestyle.

Nicodemus needs to take a completely different approach to faith. He needs to have a new kind of seeing and knowing. In other words he needs to change if he is to see or open himself

to a relationship of faith. As it was for Nicodemus, it is in being real with ourselves and real in our relationships with others that we in turn open ourselves to God and in this relationship our deepest needs are met. This is not a matter of following carefully defined should or should not's. It is about being inwardly connected in such a way that we have an orientation which unites our joy, our intentions, our attitudes and our actions. When you look deeper than the miraculous, or the unattainable or the superficial you see the connection between Jesus and God and you see God in Jesus not trying to compete for adoration in the market of miracle workers, but seeking to establish a relationship of love and community. The focus is life. The means is relationship. The motive is love.

The writer of John, earths faith and spirituality in a relationship and a person, rather than in momentous events or experiences or in places here or hereafter. John invites us to develop a spirituality which sees God in all of life.

The more we allow ourselves to be loved the more we are free to be immersed in the flow of creator, redeemer and giver of life.

So may it be.

Amen.