

There is more to St Mary's than Sunday morning worship. Throughout the week, daytime and evening people meet in this place for a variety of purposes, everything from praying to playing. I'm reliably informed, however, that there is only one fixture on the monthly calendar which combines maximum intellectual stimulation with white-knuckle excitement, which is the St Mary's Poetry Group. In honour of- and as an advertisement for- one of our less well known fellowship groups, I was going to start this morning with a selection of verse from early twentieth century Welsh poet W H Davies but, clearly not being a poetic type I couldn't get any further than the first verse of his most famous poem, which reads

*What is this life but full of care?*

What is this life but full of care? Well probably it is for most people but not for everybody and not in the same way. Cares and worries come thick and fast for most but there is a qualitative difference between cares that consist of 'Can I make ends meet?' or 'Will I live to see tomorrow?' and ones that consist of 'Will Fortnum's send enough quail for the Pimms party?' and 'That footman hasn't polished his buckles'. And when the poem goes on to say that 'We have no time to stand and stare' the poet has missed the fact that sometimes the real care-wear of a life can be that it consists of very little else but time for standing and staring which anyone who has had an enforced absence from work can tell you is nowhere near as enjoyable as you think it might be.

So I think it's fair to say that not everybody's life is full of care. But we *can* say that all lives are full of repeats. All lives are full of repeats. All lives are... We do pretty much the same things each and every day, at the same times and the same places, day in, day out, sunrise, sunset, on and on. Breakfast is on a loop. Dinner is on a loop. Teatime repeats itself daily, especially if you had cucumber sandwiches. You sleep every day, usually in the same bed, for about the same amount of time, perhaps a bit less on a Saturday night. You keep eating the same dishes, talking to the same people, going to the same places, wasting time and money on the same pointless things, making the same mistakes, looping on life, round and round again. There is nothing new under your sun, and even should you chance upon some novelty, it won't be long before you'll start to repeat it.

As you get older, not only do you (incorrectly) believe that you've seen it all and (even more erroneously) that you know better than everybody else, you also grow increasingly prone to repeating *yourself* each time you open your mouth. If you're

particularly advanced in years there's the distinct possibility that you haven't remembered that you've already told the tale, five minutes ago, but far more likely you're perfectly well aware you and your listener have not long been here before... and you just don't care. You've lived a lot of life, life is repeats, so here's another one. I hope you're listening.

Repeats can be dull, deadening; they can be habit and sheer bone-idle laziness. They also make life doable and understandable and ever so slightly more cope-able. Life is like music in that you will never really grasp what's going on without those repeats, so helpfully for our sense of coherence life is very little else other than a series of repeats. That's why Anglican liturgy is pretty much the same every Sunday, even if you don't always get to sing your favourite hymn- because singing the same three hymns over and over again really would be just *too* repetitive. Still, at its most positive, if you're always playing the same tune, constantly banging the same drum, you get better at it.

Right, so ground prepared, you should now be delighted to discover that I'm on a double repeat today: not only am I going to be banging on once again about Love, but also I'm going to be once more sidestepping the challenge of preaching about the inner anatomy of God the Holy Trinity and talking instead about love. Been there, done that, got the T-shirt. Worn it, washed it, worn it, washed it, worn it washed it, and it still looks good as new. I make no apology. It is an optimist indeed who seeks novelty in a church and a desperate church that seeks to provide it. So it's back to banging on about love this morning [evening]. And even this, I'm afraid to say, is simply a reiteration of an ancient tradition- a repeat. Let me tell you that tradition.

There is an ancient and rather beautiful tale which weaves together many of the threads of this sermon so far. It's told about St John, the guy who penned the gospel that bears his name [read out this morning]. In his extreme old age St John was so weak, he had to be carried into each service at his church at Ephesus in the arms of his disciples. He was unable to say anything except 'Little children, love one another'. All the time, that was all he said. 'Little children, love one another'. For a while his church ignored it: it was just the sort of thing people in extreme old age tend to do, get stuck on a loop. Finally one of his disciples had had enough and asked St John: 'Master, why do you always say that? "Because," he replied, "it is the Lord's command, and if you do only this, it is enough.'" Turns out St John wasn't stuck in the run-out groove of senility. He'd boiled the gospel down to its essentials- Love one another- and then just repeated it.

This sort of minimalistic thinking, elegant though it is, might appear to be a complete antithesis of our theme for today- The (all caps) TRINITY, St John's dictum a simple functional wooden table placed next to Trinity Sunday's ornate rococo confection. What today is all about, surely, is complex theology, big words and the uneasy feeling that perhaps your brain has started melting and, unless you keep perfectly still, is just about to run out of your right ear.

Let's investigate. What does our belief in the Trinity say? God is three. In one. God is Father, God is Son, God is Holy Spirit. One God. The Father on his own is not God, the Son on his own is not God, the Spirit on her own is not God. The Father is not the Son, neither are the Spirit. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Our Trinitarian belief was set out fairly early on in the history of Christianity- in the fifth century in fact- in the Athanasian Creed. You may have come across this in the old English Prayer book. When the Church of England decided to put its worship into contemporary language in 2000 for Common Worship, they didn't update the Athanasian Creed. Whether that's because it's already reached a state of perfection, the translators balked at the sheer tedium of the task or they were betting on the fact that the last person to read all of the Athanasian Creed perished in a shipwreck in 1933 I don't know. But if you want, you can still find it in the old Book of Common Prayer. If you set out to read this statement of our Trinitarian belief, one of the first things that strikes you about it, (or probably 'strikest thou' if you're getting into the spirit of the book), is that it is highly repetitive. Everything has to be said three times. And then again. And again. Just in case you hadn't got it the first time around, which of course you hadn't because it's all about the Trinity and therefore you'll never get it. The Athanasian Creed doesn't make for light reading. It doesn't make for great reading either: it's basically a series of repeats.

Which as we've already established is ok. It might even be helpful. Life's like that. And so is God, the source of that life.

In most churches around the world this Trinity Sunday, if the preacher is not desperately falling back on visual aids- God is like a shamrock, God is like three interlinked rings, even God is like a hard boiled egg (though never a pickled one)- the sermon is likely to be propounding a less arcane and archaic understanding of the Trinity which stresses relationship. God is a series of relationships between those three persons (Father, Son, Spirit) which means that we can be caught up into it, we can part of that relationship too. Even then, if they're doing it right, your preacher is

soon repeating herself. Those bonds are bonds of love, they are loving relationships. God is a community of love. And that community is held together by love. And is love. Which adds up to one whole lotta love. On repeat.

There's no escaping it. Every time you start to scratch below the surface of Christianity, any time you peer more closely at this particular doctrine or that particular belief; each time you brush away the accumulated dust of time, place and culture you're back to watching the same repeat: it's like being stuck in a lift for all eternity with St John. Little Children, love one another. Little Children, love one another. Has anybody pressed the emergency button? Little Children, love one another.

Although you won't hear it expounded very often the Trinitarian foundation of our faith is not really very biblical. For something that we claim fundamentally tells us what we believe about God, you'll be hard pressed to find it anywhere in scripture. Twice perhaps Father, Son and Holy Spirit are named in the same verse, but there's nothing that even starts to say God is like a shamrock, three in one and one in three. It's something we've had to deduce, something we've had to work out for ourselves. It's not a given. To be honest most of what we believe isn't, it's just a bit more obvious with the Trinity.

So do we junk it? Drop it out of our creed as being 'unScriptural'? Free our preachers from the worry of where the illustrative prop is going to come from or what to say the Sunday after Pentecost?

Of course not. Because as long as you're not a text literalist, the Trinity is profoundly Biblical, written all over it in fact, because as we've already established, as soon as you start looking you discover, it's all about Love. The scriptures tell us about God. And God is love.

You see, we're back there again. It's all very repetitive. But after all, love is one of the very few things in life that is worth repeating.