**Barrie Keenan’s Reflection at St Andrews on the Terrace Sunday 27 May 2018**

***What is the trinity we have – how do we understand it?***

We have all been living now for quite some years - recall something about our way of living that is very different now than what it was for you some whatever number of years ago?

Recall something now in which your thinking has changed?

From time to time a diverse range of events come together that necessitate quite radical changes in the way faith is experienced, understood and expressed in words.

As we now walk by faith into the future, we have to decide how much from the past path of faith we find useful and how much we must leave behind.

Last Sunday we reflected on what happened for the followers of Jesus following the “coming of the Holy Spirit”.

For those early Christians new things were being experienced - interpreting them was difficult because they were new. Understandably there were differences in interpretation.

as gatherings of Christians spread throughout Israel and other lands around the Mediterranean Sea to Ephesus, Colossae, Constantinople to Rome and beyond. they did not have the communication facilities and capabilities we have today, they did not have google or readily available access to reference books or libraries.

So numerous different interpretations emerged and evolved.

Christian thinkers from Paul onwards set out to clarify the character of this new path of faith in the context of the Greco Christian culture in which they lived and their understanding of the world as it was current at that time. They were Jewish – they knew of the activity of the God who had brought their people out of Egypt, established the covenant, given them the Law in the Torah, and brought them to the promised land.

The question ow was how could they incorporate the continuing influence of memories of the life of that man Jesus of Nazareth who was now worshipped as the Christ.

But that was not all – they then had to find a way of expressing the inner vitality and life that they experienced within the fellowship of the gatherings, the congregations of the church.

This they called the Holy Spirit, or the power of God within human minds.

From the councils of those times by the year 500, they constructed the two doctrines, of the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity that provided the framework of thought and practice that shaped the Christian path of faith for the next 1500 years.

Thinking about the Trinity the first person - God the Father, the creator, is referred to as the Supreme Being up there in heaven. Jesus the Son had lived on earth and from whom they had learned much. The Holy Spirit was one of those forces that had been known about for centuries and had been acknowledged as having power. It is interesting that both Hebrew and Greek use the same word - ***ruah*** in Hebrew and ***pneuma*** in Greek for both wind and spirit – that which you can see the effect of even if you cannot see it itself.

So, what do we think now - our way of thinking about our world is very different from that of the ancients. Reality for us is what we can confirm with our senses and what is open to public investigation.

Rather than just thinking of the earth we have to come to grips with the universe. This is awe-inspiring not only in its dimensions but also in its capacity to create out of itself even more complex and beautiful patterns of energy.

First came what is described as the “big bang” then the slow accumulation of gases into stars, then the explosions into supernovas then the formation of planets out of stardust and finally, as far as we know to date the evolution of life on at least one planet.

This universe has been a continuing process of change, manifesting both growth and decay over some 15 billion years. Although we speak of the universe as having had a beginning we equally have to realise there was never a time when it did not exist. For time and space, themselves came into existence only with the universe itself

therefore, the universe is all there is nothing outside of it and nothing came before it.

This means it is illogical to postulate the prior existence of a creator

the universe has to be self-explanatory and from the universe itself we must learn what it can tell us about itself and how it works. Then again, we are an integral part of it.

Our very existence and our continuing life are dependent upon it.

About the second person of the Trinity – the man Jesus.

To restrict the incarnation of the divine to one human person namely the man Jesus of Nazareth is to miss its full significance. Recent scholarship shows us that a more extensive interpretation of incarnation is already present in the New Testament.

Jesus was not at first separated from his fellow humans by a great gulf in the same way that the glorified Christ later became to be. Rather he was seen as the one who bought God down-to-earth. His teaching and manner of life enable people to sense the presence of the divine in the affairs of ordinary daily life. What a difference it makes if we see the doctrine of the incarnation to be applied to the whole of humankind.

The incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth is not a unique historical event but a symbolic portrait of the spiritual process of the cosmos that has been in operation from the very beginning and consists in the humanisation of God and the divinisation of humanity itself.

The gospel says that God is love and that love is of God.

Remember what Bishop Michael Curry said in his address to Harry and Meghan speaking of the power of love. "Imagine if love is the way... When love is the way, we will let justice roll down in the land. Poverty will become history... We'd actually treat each other like we are actually family."

The third dimension is that of globalisation. The huge difference is the combination of the availability of travel, the interchange of reliable knowledge, communication by way of the Internet, as well as traditional mass media and of course social media.

Different ways of being human are losing their absolute distinctiveness and a common way of being human is slowly emerging.

Global consciousness is the modern equivalent of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

We could well be living on the eve of an all-inspiring new leap – a mutation – in the process of cosmic evolution.

Unfortunately, we have no guarantee of this for in fact we might be living in the last days before the human species brings about its own destruction.

As the primitive Christians looked into the future with faith based on their current experience they experienced the substance of their faith in terms of the holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We in turn must draw on our basic experience of reality to express our faith in the future.

While our experiences and our realities are very different there are three elements which I submit constitute an important this-worldly Trinity.

The first is the self-evolving physical universe which as we understand it encompasses the whole of reality.

The second is the human species that has evolved out of this creative universe and thereby brought us into existence.

The third being is that which the collective consciousness of humankind has in term bought fourth the body of cultural knowledge, values and aspirations without which we could not be human.

Is it reasonable to say that these three constitute the God “in whom we live and move and have our being”?

Jesus said to Nicodemus that he needed to be born again of the spirit. The phrase being born again understandably puzzled Nicodemus.

Radically changing our way of thinking can be equally puzzling and perplexing for us but can we hear sitting here today that same challenge?

How do we think differently?

As the traditional creeds stated it Father, Son and Holy Spirit are proclaimed as being “three in one because of the incarnation – so the self-creating universe, the self-evolving human species and the emerging global consciousness are also of one “substance” because of the cosmic creativity that shows itself in all three.

As Lloyd Geering expresses it so succinctly in “Coming back to Earth” “clearly this understanding of the secular Trinity owes much to the earlier affirmations of the Incarnation and of the Holy Trinity.

The more we humans become a harmonious global society, relating in a healthy way to each other and to the planet, the more confident we can be about the future.

This hope rests on putting our faith in the secular Trinity of the world, humanity, and

global consciousness.”

So may it be.