



iBelieve Session 2. God and Creation

Creed Reference – I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth



Song

Song to the Trinity by Frank Anderson

Father in my life I see
You are God who walks with me
You hold my life in Your hands
Close beside You I will stand
I give all my life to You, help me Father to be true

Jesus in my life I see
You are God who walks with me
You hold my life in Your hands
Close beside You I will stand
I give all my life to You, help me Jesus to be true

Spirit in my life I see
You are Go who walks with me
You hold my life in Your hands
Close beside You I will stand
I give all my life to You, help me Spirit to be true

Prayer

Let Your God Love You

by Edwina Gateley
Psalms of a Laywoman

Be silent.
Be still.
Alone. Empty
Before your God.
Say nothing.
Ask nothing.
Be silent.
Be still.
Let your God
Look upon you.
That is all.
He knows.
He understands.
He loves you with
An enormous love.
He only wants to
Look upon you
With His Love.
Quiet.
Still.
Be.

Let your God
Love you.
Amen.

Scripture

1 John 4:8-12,16b

“Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is perfected in us. God is love, and those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.”

Activity

Background – The word trinity comes from the Latin trinitas, meaning the state of being threefold. God is only one, but exists in three persons. The fact that in English we have two terms, the Triune God and the Trinity for the same reality (the first emphasising God's unity, the second emphasising the distinction of persons) is an indication of the unfathomable mystery of the Trinity.

One way we can explore the Trinity is through looking at what relationship means. Our Triune God's very nature is relationship. God is love. The trinity are different aspects of that love.

Task:

Ask everyone to finish the sentence 'Love is...' (explain we're looking for a definition, not a description, and we're talking love in the big picture, not focusing on one type of love). Invite people to hold that thought, and split into small groups. Their task is to take everyone's definitions and see if they can come up with an explanation that everyone in the group is happy with.

Ask each small group to share their sentence with the large group. Depending on what answers they've come up with, choose from the following questions:

- Ask the groups to identify what the conditions must be for love to exist, i.e. it must be between at least two parties (love cannot exist in isolation from the other), it doesn't always have to be reciprocated, it transcends 'liking', love can be hard and painful as well as easy and joyful
- Ask the groups to identify ways in which you can recognise that love is present, e.g. kind words, taking care of someone, giving a gift, making a sacrifice
- Ask the groups to relate these ideas about love to God. How do we know that God loves us? You may look for answers like: He sent Jesus to be one of us, Jesus died and was resurrected for us, God made all of Creation and appointed us the guardians of it, God created us in his image. What does it mean when scripture says 'God is love'? How do we show that we love God? Is this similar or different to how we show love for each other? How?

Ask the group to revisit their definition of love, in the light of the conversation about God. Is there anything they want to add, or change to their explanation? Give them a chance to do this, and then feed the results back to the other groups.

Part 2: St Bernard of Clairvaux, one of the founders of the Cistercian Order in the twelfth century, said "Trees and stars will teach you what you can never learn from teachers." Take your group outside to somewhere quiet and where they can feel a connection with nature – you may have access to this sort of space at your church, or you may need to go to a reserve, or a beach, or a garden.

Read out the quote from St Bernard, and ask people what they think it means. Introduce a time of individual reflection, and invite everyone to find a space of their own where they can spend some time with Creation. Encourage them to use their senses in this task – sight, touch, smell, hearing. Ask them to open their eyes and their hearts to what Creation tells them about the world, themselves and their place in it, and about God. Spend some time in small groups quietly sharing what people experienced, then bring the group together and finish with a short prayer.

Adapt it: if the weather is bad, or your venue is not close to anywhere obvious where you can complete this task, it is possible to adapt this activity for inside. You will probably need to work quite hard to create an atmosphere where participants are able to connect with nature, and it will need some preparation. Whereas the outdoor activity naturally draws people to the vastness of creation, the indoor activity will more likely draw out the detail and intricacies of creation, e.g. the range of colours and textures of leaves or petals, natural examples of symmetry or patterns, and the incredible age of rocks.

Gather pot plants and cut flowers, to make a living display. To incorporate the sky and stars, you can create a display using either books and pictures of space, or search for images online and put them into a looped PowerPoint.

Try to engage all the senses through using music which incorporates sounds from nature; use a range of stones, soil, or fallen leaves that people can touch and examine closely; and try to find scented flowers or plants such as lavender or herbs which people can both touch and smell/taste.

Tool | Emmaus Walk

This is a great opportunity for people to step outside of their comfort zones, get to know their peers and try to see God in one another. It requires a level of maturity and willingness to enter into the task which some younger people may struggle with. It works with both groups who know each other well, and those that don't, depending on how you introduce the activity.

Emmaus walks are based around the story of the road to Emmaus in Luke's gospel. In the story, set shortly after Jesus' resurrection, two disciples are walking along the road talking. Jesus himself comes and joins them but they fail to recognise him until later on when they stop and he breaks bread for them.

After reading the story (Luke 24:13-35), the young people are invited to go walking in pairs and spend some time with each other. The aim is to meet Christ along the road.

This activity works well as part of a retreat. It is better if the sun is up, and when you have a picturesque place to walk around, although you can make it work in an urban setting. It is helpful to pre-plan with your leadership team how you are going to ensure the health and safety of your group while they are out and about. You may choose to adapt this activity if your group are young, or have particular behavioural needs that would make it hard for them to complete this task.

Adapt it: If the weather is bad enough to prevent you from going outside, it may be possible to get people to walk around the parish complex, or other indoor space instead. Be aware that participants may feel self-conscious or conspicuous if the space is not large, so your introduction should acknowledge this as well as encourage them to still 'go on a walk'. The physical aspect of walking is important – it helps people feel more relaxed, there is a sense of privacy, and it adds a literal layer to the symbolic journey. You could give them the option to walk together and find somewhere away from the other pairs where they can settle then walk back at the end, or specify that they must walk for at least half of the time that they have together.

How it works:

Start by reading the story of Emmaus, or at least explain it in detail. Recap the main points and highlight that the disciples met Jesus unexpectedly on the road.

Explain what is going to happen, with words similar to these:

"We're going to go for a walk in pairs, just like the two disciples in the Gospel did. The disciples met Jesus as they were walking, and we're going to see if we can do the same thing. The chances are, we won't meet Jesus in person, but the point is that you can always find Jesus and the love of God in others. God made us all and we are called to recognise that in ourselves and others. We are called to spend time with others, and to recognise what is good in them. So, we are going to go walking, and we are just going to have a chat."

Some suggestions:

- If your group already know each other well, you may want to give them a theme to explore in their conversation
- Don't let the young people pick their own walking partners, as otherwise they just choose the easy option of hanging out with their friends. Either the leaders can pre-select pairings, or people pick their partners out of a hat, but be aware of any particular pairings who would struggle to enter into the activity.
- You may want to give a prescribed route, or physical boundaries as to where they can go
- Tell the young people to stick to their pairs, and not to swap partners or put pairs together to form a group. Emphasise the importance of being wholly present to just one person.
- Make sure they know not to use cell phones or devices like iPods while they are walking. These items help us disconnect from each other, and prevent us from being present.
- Give them a specific time to be back – depending on your group, 30 minutes is a good time.
- Give a chance for them to ask questions so that they're clear on the task.