

A Trinity Story

(Excerpts from a sermon preached on Trinity Sunday in Benwell, where many Iranians have found a home and where worship is expressed in Farsi as well as English.)



This year marks 1700 years since the Council of Nicaea, a pivotal moment in Christian history. At Nicaea, church leaders gathered to articulate what we believe about God—and out of it came the Nicene Creed, the words we still say together on Sundays.

At that Council, there were delegates from Persia, now known as Iran, but none from Britain. Before the Church ever reached these shores, Persians were shaping our theology. Often the story we tell ourselves is that Christianity is spreading from the West to the rest of the world. But Bishop Guli Francis-Dehqani, who was born in Iran, reminds us that Christianity has been in Iran far longer than it has been in Britain.

Last week at the Persian Anglican Network Conference in Nottingham, delegates observed that despite being outlawed, there is a remarkable growth in Christianity in Iran. And today Christians from Iran, seeking asylum, are renewing our churches.

Growth takes unexpected twists and turns. It is just as much about expanding our mindset, letting ourselves be changed by encountering truth—especially when it comes from places we didn't expect.

The Trinity tells the story of a God who creates us for relationship, who steps into our world in Jesus Christ, and who remains with us through the Holy Spirit. It's the story of a love that is not content to stay distant, but draws near to heal, to transform, and to make all things new. It's a story of a love which binds us all in a holy relationship with one another, because we are different.

At this moment in time we think of the terror the people in Iran are facing. We hope and pray for a change in the regime that has exiled so many Iranians from their homeland. But we hope and pray that it is not through destruction and death that it is achieved. In a world that tries to reduce us all to binaries, to put us on one side or another, we remember that we follow a God who is not binary, but three in one, a God who calls us to relationship, so we can see God revealed in one another.

To contemplate the Trinity is to be drawn outward, into the world, to be re-made in love, and to help others discover that love for themselves. So may this Trinity be not a burden, but a gift; not a theological headache, but a glimpse into the beautiful, holy mystery of the God who made us all, who walks with us, and who abides in us still.

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