

Romans 11:33-36 - Trinity Sunday. 22.5.2016

How great - how awesome - is our God!

³³ Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! ³⁴ For who can know the Lord's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? ³⁵ And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back? ³⁶ For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen. [NLT]

Who is God? What is God like?

Celebrating Trinity Sunday is not about proving the Trinity: Today is not about asking how can it be? How is it possible? How can God be three-in-one, and be one in three persons? We are not gathered here to prove by scientific means, that God is.

It is not about attempting to grasp what we can't understand. What this service is about, is that we praise the God who has shown himself to us, and to realise that we may trust him and his promises.

So we are called on in this passage from Romans to this God, who is so much greater than anything we can hope to understand. With Paul we want to learn again to say:

How great - how awesome - is our God!

The term *awesome* has come in for some sloppy treatment. For even the most unlikely thing, people say that it was 'awesome'. You are left wondering what exactly that might mean, but it seems to have been quite good.

When we speak of God being awesome - in the words of a modern song -, then we refer to the fact that he fills us with awe, with a sense of deep wonder at who he is. But behind this is also the fact that we often are made to wonder at how God acts.

We hear here that God is awesome, not because he acts in a way we can predict, but precisely because he acts in ways that we can't comprehend.

This is something Paul had experienced at first hand. He had believed that he knew precisely what God wanted - and that he was able to ensure his place in God's Kingdom by strictly following the rules for living as a pious Jew. But when Jesus confronted him on the way to Damascus, his entire life was changed.

The wonders of God for Paul were - quite paradoxically - that all the security he had believed to have with the Jewish way of life, were blown away. He was brought to realise that all kinds of different people were to find their way to God - even though they had never looked for him. At the same time the Chosen People of Israel had turned away from the salvation God offered them in Jesus Christ. How was that possible?

... how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! - That applies today as well. While the Western World with its Christian heritage appears to have lost its way with God, people in other areas of the world are coming to faith - even though they seem not to have sought him. How is that possible? - where the Reformation story started people seem to believe that the message of salvation is dispensable. There is so much else to occupy them.

Things are quite different in countries such as Mozambique - as we heard in a report by Pastor Winterle about the work being done there. In this country which is still suffering from the effects of a drawn out civil war, and where there is great want, there is a hunger for the message of hope which God's Word brings. The small beginnings of a church, which the Lutheran Church of Brazil is assisting, appear to be going ahead with rapid strides. Crowds of people are registering for Baptismal instruction, and many infants are being baptised.

On the other hand there is a great fear of the influence of Islam - especially in Europe with the flood of refugees there. The wonder is that people who must fear death if they were to convert to Christianity in their countries of origin, receive the news of salvation in Christ with open

arms, while the Europeans appear to be satiated by all they have apart from Christ. There are even reports from countries like Iran of people dreaming of Jesus, and of seeking out the - mostly underground - Christian communities to hear more of the message of being saved.

How great is our God! - how can one understand how he reacts to this almost unknown hunger for salvation. God does not ask about the past or about the worth of those who come to faith in Jesus. Instead he grants them his grace so that they get to know him, and to receive the new life he gives!

Who is God? How does he act? - ... *who can know the Lord's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice?* We may sometimes wonder whether things in Mocambique are always the way they ought to be, when large groups of people are baptised - or when people in Europe convert to Christianity. Do they really understand what it is all about? Are those who convert in Europe not simply looking for a way to be able to remain there?

Certainly some questions remain for us - but we should be careful not to question the way in which God acts. If God acted in the past to direct the happenings in the world so that his people would be saved, should he not also be able to do the same today?

God intervened in history so that his people were freed from slavery in Egypt. He directed the course of history so that his people were able to return home from exile in Babylon. And 'when the right time had come' (Galatians 4:4), God ensured that the course of history was directed in such a way that his Son would be born in Bethlehem.

... *everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory* - those things also which make the headlines in our time. God still has the power to direct the happenings of our world - and the way he does it, is that the story of salvation comes to people who did not know about this story. That was the case with our ancestors, when the message of being saved

through Jesus was brought to them, and that is what still happens today! We may have the impression that chaos has taken over, but God still is in power. We may be intimidated by what we see happening around us here in our country - but here too he is there to direct things. There may be much that we don't understand - but that does not mean that God has now abandoned the world to its fate.

God directs the history of the world, but he is also active in directing things in our personal lives. There may be much that we don't understand about what is happening to us - or to others. What we may know is that God has a goal in mind for us - and so that we reach this goal, things may happen which we don't understand, and which may leave us feeling lost.

How great is our God! - We cannot always understand how he leads things in our lives, but one thing is certain: that he leads us to a firm destination. The thing that stands above all for God is saving sinners and giving them life. He does not look for our worth before he does that, because we have our worth from what he gives us.

For all that God does - for the salvation which he gives even those who did not seek it; for all he has done, and still does, in your and my life, so that we are to have eternal life, there is only one fitting response: **All glory to him forever! Amen.**