

TRINITY SUNDAY — 30TH MAY 2021 CIRCUIT SERVICE

INTRODUCTION

Over recent weeks, we have been remembering Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. Last Sunday we celebrated the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Today we celebrate our faith in one God, yet experienced as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

CALL TO WORSHIP Matthew 28:18-20.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

1ST HYMN 16 StF We give immortal; praise.

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| 1 | We give immortal praise,
To God the Father's love,
For all our comforts her,
And better hopes above.
He sent his own eternal Son
To die for sins that all have done. | 3 | To God the Spirit's name
Immortal worship give,
Whose new-creating power
Makes the dead sinner live:
His work completes the great design,
And fills the soul with joy divine. |
| 2 | To God the Son belongs
Immortal glory too,
Who bought us with his blood
From everlasting woe:
And now he lives, and now he reigns,
And sees the fruit of all his pains. | 4 | Almighty God, to thee
Be endless honours done,
The undivided Three,
And the mysterious One:
Where reason fails with all her powers,
There faith prevails, and love adores. |

Isaac Watts

PRAYER

O God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, give us a vision of your glory, that we may worship you in spirit and in truth, and offer the praise of glad and thankful hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All powerful God, you are greater than our minds can grasp God.

We see you in your creative power in the wonders of creation and we worship you.

God our Father, you have made yourself known in Jesus Christ,
showing us your immense love and mercy.

Living God, you inspire us through the inner presence of your Holy Spirit, day by day.

We praise you and thank you with all our hearts.

Loving God, in your presence, we acknowledge our failures.

We confess the things within us which make for conflict —
pride, greed, envy, intolerance,
our nursing of petty grievances and our unwillingness to forgive,
too often thinking of ourselves before others.

Lord, forgive us.

Ever-present God,

Put a new spirit within us —

a spirit of love and openness, acceptance and understanding, healing and reconciliation.

Empower us to serve you more faithfully day by day.

May the peace we pray for begin here and now in our hearts,

Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, hear our prayer. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

2ND HYMN 9 StF Hail! holy, holy, holy Lord! (Organ music only)

- 1 Hail! Holy, holy, holy Lord!
Whom One in Three we know;
By all thy heavenly host adored,
By all thy Church below.
- 2 One undivided Trinity
With triumph we proclaim,
Thy universe is full of thee,
And speaks thy glorious name
- 3 Thee, holy Father, we confess,
Thee, holy Son adore,
Thee, Spirit of truth and
holiness
We worship and adore.
- 4 Three Persons equally divine
We magnify and love;
And both the choirs ere long
shall join
To sing thy praise above.
- 5 Hail! Holy, holy, holy Lord,
Our heavenly song shall be.
Supreme, essential One, adored
In co-eternal Three.

Charles Wesley

READINGS

Psalm 8:1-9

- 1 O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.
- 2 From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.
- 3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
- 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?
- 5 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour.
- 6 You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet:
- 7 all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,
- 8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.
- 9 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

John 16:12-15

- 12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.
- 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.
- 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.
- 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you."

Romans 8:12-17

- 12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.
- 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,
- 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
- 15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."
- 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.
- 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

SERMON THE TRINITY — THREE EXPRESSIONS OF THE ACTIVITY OF GOD

This is Trinity Sunday.

I was told yrs ago that a certain Circuit used to designate it Local Preachers' Sunday —
This meant that the Ministers had the Sunday off!
I'll leave you to think why that might have been!

We believe in one God.

We believe God is eternal, omnipotent, (all powerful) and omnipresent (everywhere).

Yet, when we think of God, we think of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity, 3 persons, but one God.

It seems a contradiction.
Father, Son (Jesus) , & Holy Spirit.

St Augustine pointed out that no human mind could ever fully comprehend God.

He said, "**If you understand it, it's not God.**"

But we must try to understand who God is & what he is like.

**Through Christ Jesus the Son,
we meet the God whom he called Father,
and experience God's intimate Spirit
who, like the very breath of Christ breathed into us,
empowers us to be a people of grace.
We come to the Father through, Jesus the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit.**

It sounds like a lot of fancy words to express what we Christians experience and believe.
Different aspects of the same amazing God.

1 THE SON

And Jesus of Nazareth is the key teacher.

The earthly life of Jesus — means we can know God in a direct, exciting way.

His enemies plotted and carried out his execution,

Supposedly in the name of law & order & the honour of God.

He died an awful death, but actively continued being himself to the last.

From the Cross — he forgave his enemies.

Then on the 3rd day — Christ risen put the seal of God's approval on everything —
leading to, & including, the Cross.

The people: who saw him, knew him, and loved him,

But found it hard to find adequate words to describe Jesus.

They first called him Messiah — God's anointed liberator of his people.

Some called him the image of the invisible God.

Some named him the very radiance of God.

Some like Thomas, took the words from the formal Roman oath of allegiance to the Emperor,
and applied it to Christ: "**My Lord and my God.**"

In this energetic, gracious, extraordinary Christ, God was uniquely and crucially active.

It's also clear in the New Testament that Jesus is not identified as "God in all his fullness".

Jesus refers to God as someone other than himself.

Jesus prays to God.

Jesus commands his spirit to go to God as he dies.

Christian insight is that: Jesus is God incarnate.

In Jesus, we see none other than the living God himself.

Jesus is understood to act as God & for God.

Whoever sees Jesus, sees God.

Jesus **speaks** with the **authority** of God.

Jesus makes **promises** on **behalf** of God.

Jesus **judges** as God.

When we worship,

we worship the risen **Christ as God**.

Jesus still prays to God.

Jesus is God incarnate (in human form)

Jesus is **not identical** with God,

in that it's obvious that God continued to be in heaven during Jesus' lifetime.

But, Jesus may be **identified** with God,

in that the NT has no hesitation in ascribing functions to Jesus which only God could do.

The terms Father & Son were a way of dealing with the dilemma.

Jesus allows us to sample God.

It really is God we encounter in Jesus.

But this doesn't mean God is localised solely in Jesus Christ.

The activity of Christ was the activity of God.

In the activity of Jesus, Divinity was revealed as the Saviour of humanity.

Jesus is the ultimate key to our understanding of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

**The more time we spend with Jesus, & participate in his activity within this world,
the more we will learn about the Trinity.**

The kind of God that God is, for me is utterly reflected by Jesus.

2 THE FATHER

God is the genesis of our life, our provider, our protector and nurturer.

But this is not sufficient by itself.

Because — the kind of Creator we Christians worship,
the distinctive initiator, provider, protector, & nurturer,
is revealed only by Jesus.

The Father mentioned in the Trinity is the Father of Jesus Christ.

**For a Christian, the activity of Jesus
reveals the nature of the Fatherhood of God.
The nature of the Father is seen in the nature of the Son.**

**Always let your understanding of that 1st Person of the Trinity be shaped by the life of Jesus.
Jesus is the person who perfectly reflects the nature of the Father.**

No one has seen God, but he who is nearest the Father's heart has made him known. (John 1:18)

3 THE HOLY SPIRIT

Likewise, **the activities of Jesus gives us the sure clue to the nature of the Spirit of God** —
the God who is personally, intimately among us.

The **Spirit** acts most surely in the **Jesus** of Nazareth:
who told us the story of the Good Samaritan, & lived it.
who gave us the parable of the prodigal son, & lived it.

Before Christianity:

The people of Israel believed in the **Spirit of God**
that holy 'Other' who **personally touched their lives.**

For the Christian:

**It is the carpenter from Nazareth, who gives content to the meaning of the Spirit.
Jesus reveals the Spirit.**

In many places in NT, **the risen and ever-living Christ and the Holy Spirit** are seen as one.
To **'be in Christ Jesus'** and to **'be in the Spirit'** are the same thing.

If we reckon we 'have the Spirit' then let us test it by Christ.

Is this Spirit, one that leads us to engage in the characteristic activities of Christ?

Trust nothing that is out of alignment with that Jesus we see reflected in the Gospels.

The loving Jesus: meeting strangers,
 embracing outcasts,
 forgiving sinners,
 calling disciples,
 empowering the meek.

The Spirit is for us here and now.

The life of Jesus is the Holy Spirit in full celebration.

After Jesus' earthly life: The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
 The work of the Holy Spirit illustrated in the book of Acts.
 The fruit of the Holy Spirit in believers.

CONCLUSION

For me, **Trinitarian faith means the celebration and practice of the Gospel of Christ Jesus.**

Not a sacred formula, not a definition of the Mysterious Being of God, but —

an alignment of: **what God has done for us, and
 is doing for us, and
 will do for us.**

When we talk of God, what god do we mean?

Who is the God whom Christians worship and adore?

The God whom Christians worship and adore is:

**The God who raised Jesus from the dead and
is now present in his people, the Church, in the Holy Spirit.**

The doctrine of the Trinity is

a shorthand way of identifying exactly what God we are talking about.

How do we encounter this God?

He may be found in Jesus.

To have encountered Jesus is to have encountered God.

How do we encounter Jesus?

Through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit represents Jesus Christ to us

in order that we may gain access to the Father through Jesus.

How can God be 3 persons and one person at the same time?

When we think of God, we don't think of 3 individual gods, but of one God
whom we experience & encounter in a 3-fold manner.

- e.g (i) As with an iceberg, there is far more to God than meets the eye.
(ii) Celtic symbol made out of one piece of string.
(iii) River: source, the single stream of the river, & estuary:
 the same flow of water, but all are needed.
(iv) Triangle.
(v) Clover the leaf is more than the 3 parts.
(vi) **Jeremy Begbie: musical illustration.**

He was the amazingly gifted tutor I was privileged to have at theological college, who was a professional musician as well as a brilliant tutor. When he gave a lecture about the Trinity, he had the grand piano moved into the lecture room. He used a piece of music to illustrate the meaning of the Trinity. It was brilliant and at the time I understood it perfectly, but I've never been able to recall the details or explain it to anyone else. How I wish I had it on video!

However, there is no adequate illustration of the Trinity. It's unique.

It emphasises the mystery of God.

There is only one God.

That far we have common ground with Jew and Moslem.

But from there we go on to our distinctive faith:

Through Christ Jesus the Son,

we meet the God whom he called Father,

and experience God's intimate Spirit

who, like the very breath of Christ breathed into us,

empowers us to be a people of grace.

We come to the Father through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

3RD HYMN 764 StF We believe in God the Father.

1 We believe in God the Father,
 God Almighty, by whose plan
 earth and heaven sprang to being,
 all created things began.
We believe in Christ the Saviour,
 Son of God in human frame,
 virgin-born, the child of Mary
 upon whom the Spirit came.

2 Christ, who on the cross forsaken,
 Like a lamb to slaughter led,
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 he descended to the dead.
We believe in Jesus risen,
 heaven's King to rule and reign,
 to the Father's side ascended
 till as judge he comes again

3 We believe in God the Spirit;
 in one church, below, above:
 saints of God in one communion,
 one in holiness and love.
So by faith, our sins forgiven,
 Christ our Saviour, Lord and friend,
we shall rise with him in glory
 to the life that knows no end.

Timothy Dudley-Smith

INTERCESSIONS Attributed to Francis of Assisi 1181-1226. (*I and me have been changed to we and us.*)

Lord, make us instruments of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that we may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

4th HYMN **338 StF** **There is a Redeemer.**

1 There is a Redeemer,
 Jesus, God's own Son,
 Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
 Holy One.

*Thank You, O my Father,
For giving us Your Son,
And leaving Your Spirit—
Till the work on earth is done.*

2 Jesus my Redeemer,
 Name above all names,
 Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
 O for sinners slain.

3 When I stand in glory
 I will see His face,
 And there I'll serve my King forever
 In that holy place.

Melody & Keith Green

BLESSING

God grant to the living, grace;
 to the departed, rest;
 to the Church, and the world, peace and concord; and
 to us and all his servants, life everlasting;
and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always. **Amen.**