

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry an act of devotion for individual or families
Sunday 30th May 2021 at 10:30 am
Trinity Sunday

Opening words

Marvelling at the mystery and the wonder of the universe to which we belong:
Let us worship God the Creator.
Remembering Jesus and his ministry which revealed the Father's glory:
Let us worship God our Saviour.
Acknowledging the presence of love around and within us:
Let us give thanks for the Holy Spirit.

Opening Hymn R&S 34

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty
Early in the morning, our song shall rise to Thee
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty.
God in three persons. Blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see
Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee.
Perfect in power, in love and purity

Prayer of Approach, Thanksgiving and Confession

God we give you thanks
Living and loving God you are never far away, but always near, from the beginning you have been
our Father, our Mother and our friend.
You gave yourself to us through the love and life of Jesus and now your Spirit comes to live within
us.
You are eternal, you created us all in your image, you inspire our praise and worship at all times
and in all places, you care for us and on you we depend.
So come, Holy Spirit

Through the spirit of peace and wisdom, help us to understand your purpose in our lives.
Let his life be at work in our church and continue to give hope to the world, so that everything we do
and say may express our gratitude and honour to your name.
We give you thanks for those of faith who have helped us grow
And we hope that each one of us will use our gifts, to sustain each other
And to build your kingdom here on earth.

We seek your forgiveness when we lose faith in the goodness of creation.
You have invited us to share in your kingdom but we make excuses,
We are concerned about our home, our work and school.
We confess that we are not always the kind of community you call us to be.
Forgive us and help us to encourage those who are weak,
Provide bandages for those who are injured,
Search for the lost and speak out against injustice.

Amen.

Readings



Isaiah 6:1-8 - "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Psalms 29 - The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty

Romans 8:12-17 - For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

John 3:1-17 - For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Hymn R&S 308

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me

Reflection

Welcome to Trinity Sunday.

Traditionally, it is the Sunday which the minister takes off. That is because the Trinity is a controversial doctrine and can be very difficult to explain. Many Christians admit they don't understand it, while many more Christians don't understand it but think they do. In fact, although they'd be horrified to hear it, many Christians sometimes behave as if they believe in three Gods and at other times as if they believe in one. Trinity Sunday, which falls on the first Sunday after Pentecost is one of the few feasts in the Christian calendar that celebrate an actual doctrine rather than an event.

So in order to help people understand the Trinity we sometimes will ask them to think about things which come in three or can appear in three different forms but is one single item. The most popular one which a lot of people think of is water. Water can come in the form of ice when frozen and steam when it is heated and it is still water. Water plays an important part in trying to understand the Trinity. Another example is from St Patrick who used the shamrock to explain the Trinity. Can you think of other examples?

In an attempt to explain a little about the Trinity, I tend to see the three in one as *community* and the one in three as *unity*. The words flow from each other and together and with us we can bring the kingdom of God here on earth. The picture above which is an icon created by Russian painter, Rublev represents the three angels who visited Abraham and Sarah to tell them they were going to have a son, and this interpreted as a representation of the Trinity. So let us start in Genesis. In the beginning the Spirit moved over the surface of the water. The word 'Trinity' was not specifically mentioned but as she moved over the water, in the Creation story, and there was Jesus with God the Creator.

The New Testament doesn't use the word Trinity either, but in Matthew's Gospel we see reference to the three in one ... "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age." (*Matthew 28:19 & 20*). Last week as we celebrated Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were at one in unity and their baptism by the Spirit led them to form a community.

So many theologians and philosophers have argued that the doctrine of the Trinity is fairly pointless and has no real relevance to being a Christian. However, I would like to take a few minutes to show that the Trinity is the very essence of our faith and it matters a great deal. In history in 1054 when

the churches tried to explain the Trinity it caused a great schism and to this day the split still exists. We would only tie ourselves up in more knots if we go down that route. Maybe another time. So let us see how Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus takes us some way to explore living life in community and unity of the Trinity.

Jesus and Nicodemus discussed what it meant to be born again by the Spirit. This happens shortly after Jesus clears the Temple, creating an interesting link with what it means to live a holy life pleasing to God. In this passage, Jesus instructs Nicodemus on how to become part of the kingdom of God. It is not a set of steps to follow; rather, Nicodemus is told he must be born again. He misses the point which Jesus is trying to make and he failed to recall that at Jesus' baptism the Spirit appeared like a dove and voice of God confirmed Jesus as the beloved Son. This was all happening while Jesus was still in the water.

From the reading Nicodemus' somewhat earthly questioning provided Jesus opportunity to teach us about heavenly things, including God's loving plan for the world and the role of the Son of Man in that plan. God is discovered hidden in plain sight in our individual and communal lives: awesomely 'other'; intimately close; sometimes both.

When we come to worship, we come to encounter God. Like Nicodemus we can ask questions but we need to understand that our encounters with God draw us into deeper, more wholesome and interconnected relationships. We find that God is untameable yet present to every leaf and flower. God is wonderfully comforting, yet uncomfortably challenging! His visible presence is everywhere, yet elusive, as if God had just gone around the corner. So, in this encounter Jesus challenges Nicodemus to move from theory to practice, from knowledge to faith, from curiosity to commitment. Jesus challenges us to do the same.

Jesus used the term 'being born from above' to challenge Nicodemus to a deeper understanding of God's work in the world. Nicodemus would be familiar with the notion of God as king, but this challenge to be born from above/again to "see" this kingdom pushes him to expand his notions of God and kingship and "see" Jesus beyond a (Rabbi) a teacher sent from God and a miracle-worker. Nicodemus shows he hasn't grasped the spiritual intention of Jesus' "above" when he asks about the biological possibility of being born "again." This naive misunderstanding happens time and again across Jesus' ministry, but allows Jesus opportunity to teach, here about the nature of the Spirit and the need to be born of the Spirit. The Baptist testified that the one coming baptizes with the Holy Spirit (John 1:29-34). This promise is fulfilled in the Spirit brought by Jesus.

In conclusion I want to mention something Jesus said to Nicodemus "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." This text has been used to save people spiritually from their sins, but I think it is time for us to understand that the eternal life promised by Jesus has to do with the life we live now.

The eternal life promised by Jesus that comes through the presence of the Spirit can only be understood if it is fully drenched in the waters of our world and the wombs of our mothers. Thus, there is eternity in every river and in all the oceans as there is eternity in the work of the Spirit and in the love of God through Jesus. For the Spirit of God is also made of waters. Remember the Spirit at creation.

If we look around our world today we are drying up, both naturally and spiritually (I know with the weather we have been having it may not feel like it). We need a fresh out pouring of the Spirit. We need to care for the water (our blue planet) so the Spirit can continue working in our lives and in our world. We must start to relate the life of the Trinity that is the life of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, with our lives.

So we can relate together, in unity and community. More than ever, we need to gain a new awareness of the Spirit, so that we can finally understand the eternal love of God for the world. By God's mercy they will be not merely forgiven, but made whole, remade in God's image as one people, equal in all ways. Living in the Spirit, through the love shown to us by the Son we can indeed bring God's kingdom here - It is a way of living and a way of being. May God give us to strength to live our eternal lives here and now. Amen

Song for Reflection R&S 295

Breathe on me, breath of God: fill me with life anew,
That I may love as you have loved
And do as you would do.

Breathe on me, breath of God, until my heart is pure,
Until my will is one with yours
To do and to endure.

Prayers of Intercession

Creator of our world, we give you praise. As we look around we see war, disaster, indifference and injustice. We pray for our world....God the Holy Spirit, you so love the world that you fill us with your power to make a difference and bring about change; to draw others to a deeper knowledge of you and leave a better legacy for generations to come. Grant us wisdom and grace.

God the Father, ground me in your being as we pray for those who flounder and struggle with the pressures of life. May they see some shape, some purpose to life and find a way to move forward. May their struggles become less tangled, and may they find calm in the chaos of their living...

God the Son, enfold me in your love as we pray for those who know little or no love, security or peace; for those who live in fear and loneliness; for those who are shrouded in pain and smothered by death; for those without family support and succour, the friendless and the homeless...

God the Holy Spirit, embolden us to share as we pray for those who have no hope, no dreams, no visions; for those who have no knowledge of you, who have not seen you, nor felt you, nor encountered you; for those without faith and trust, those seemingly lost to themselves and to you... God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, these are all your children; for them we pray. **Amen.**

Let us say the Lord's Prayer...

Hymn R&S 566

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation by water and the word:
From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her and for her life he died.

Called out from every nation, yet one through all the earth;
Her charter of salvation one Lord, one faith, one birth:
One holy name she blesses, and shares one holy food;
As to one hope she presses with every grace endued

Yet she on earth has union with God the Three-in-One;
And mystic, sweet communion with those whose rest is won:
O happy ones and holy! Lord, grant to us your grace,
With them the meek and lowly, in heaven to see your face.

Blessing

May the blessing of the God
Who danced at the dawning of creation - dance with us.
May the blessing of the Son
Who challenges us to bring good news to the world - dance with us.
And may the blessing of the Spirit
Who invites us to dance with her in unity - dance with us
Now and always. Amen.