

26th May 2024 – Morning Service

Trinity & Aldersgate Sunday

Margaret Bradley

On this Trinity Sunday we come to worship the one God, who is eternal Creator of the universe, who has come to us in the human flesh of Jesus and whose Spirit is present with us now.

StF 11 – Holy, Holy, Holy

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| 1) 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. | 3) Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness
hide thee,
Though the sinful human eye thy glory
may not see,
Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee.
Perfect in power, in love, and purity. |
| 2) Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns
around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
Who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be. | 4) Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name in earth
and sky and sea;
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity |

Reginald Heber

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Holy God, you, and you alone, are worthy of our worship and adoration.

There is nothing with which we can properly compare you, because you are greater than anything our small minds and limited imaginations could ever conceive.

You are formless, yet you give form to all. You are timeless, yet you act within history.

You are the God of all the galaxies of space, yet you make yourself known to us in a personal way.

You are all-powerful, yet choose to reveal yourself in vulnerable humanity in the person of Jesus.

You are awesome and majestic, yet compassionate and tender.

You are above and beyond us, yet here beside us through your Holy Spirit.

Before the amazing mystery of your being, we bow our heads in wonder and humility.

We also bow our heads in acknowledgement of our own unworthiness. Because you are perfect goodness, and there is that in us which is not good. You are perfect love, and there is that in us which is unloving.

You call us to follow Christ, and we excuse ourselves. You are the centre of all things, and we make ourselves, rather than you, the centre of our attention. In your mercy, renew us, and make us whole, as in Christ you have promised to do. We rejoice in his words, 'Your sins are forgiven' and we pray together as he taught us, saying:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Reading: Isaiah 6: 1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Reading: Matthew 28: 16-20

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 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, baptizing 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."

Te Deum (STF 799, 1-13)

We praise you, O God,

We acclaim you as the Lord;

all creation worships you,

The Father everlasting.

To you all angels, all the powers of heaven, the cherubim and seraphim, sing in endless praise:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

The glorious company of apostles praise you.

The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.

The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.

Throughout the world the holy Church acclaim you: Father, of majesty unbounded, your true and only Son, worthy of all praise, the Holy Spirit, advocate and guide.

You, Christ, are the King of glory, the eternal Son of the Father.

When you took our flesh to set us free you humbly chose the Virgin's womb.

You overcame the sting of death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

You are seated at God's right hand in glory. We believe that you will come and be our judge.

Come then, Lord, and help your people, bought with the price of your own blood,

and bring us with your saints to glory everlasting.

StF 769 – All glory to the Father be

All glory to the Father be,

The Spirit and the Son:

All glory to the One in Three

While endless ages run.

Alleluia! Amen.

St Fulbert of Chartres translated by Robert Campbell

Reflection

In our opening hymn we sang the words 'Holy, holy, holy'. God is three times holy, supremely perfect in majesty, in mercy and in goodness. The hymn reflects the overwhelming spiritual experience of the prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem in the Temple, which is dated at 742 BC. Although this happened over two and a half millennia ago, we consider this morning how Isaiah's archetypal encounter with God has resonances with our own spiritual experiences and with our worship.

The first element of Isaiah's experience was an awareness of the awesome, eternal presence of God.

The death of King Uzziah had left a vacant throne in Israel. As Isaiah's thoughts dwelt upon the transitory nature of human life, he was filled with a sense of awe and wonder that, although King Uzziah may be dead, God was still on the throne. God was still sovereign ruler over the whole earth and over all creation. God is greater and more exalted than any human power. King Uzziah's regal robes could no longer to be seen sweeping through the streets and buildings of Jerusalem, but God's robe is still to be seen. Our lifespan may be limited, but God is eternal.

I remember being planned to conduct worship at Providence on the morning of 31 August 1997. I remember it because this was the morning that we all woke to the news that Princess Diana had died as a result of injuries sustained in a car crash in Paris and people were in a state of shock and unreality. As I lay in bed, listening to the radio, aware that I had to conduct worship in a couple of hours' time, words from Psalm 103 came to my mind, and I used them to open worship that morning: *'As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.'*

The presence of death can provoke a powerful spiritual experience. One of my early formative religious experiences was hearing Elgar's choral piece 'The Dream of Gerontius' being played on a record in a music lesson at school. The words come from a poem written by John Henry Newman, who was canonised as a saint in the Roman Catholic Church by Pope Francis in 2019. They are the prayer of a dying man and the story of a soul's journey through death. The words and music combined to have a profound effect on me, and the music teacher was taken aback at the strength of my reaction to the work. In the first part of the work Gerontius knows that life is leaving him and he asks his friends to pray with him. The priest recites a blessing that begins 'Go forth upon thy journey Christian soul'. This is a translation from an ancient Christian litany and it reappeared again in my life in a very moving way as I shared in prayers with one of our former preachers, Barry Blunt, shortly before his death from cancer 15 years ago this month.

A minister friend of ours, who once headed the Connexional Local Preachers Department, Rev John Lampard, helped to write the liturgies for the services for the dying and for the dead in the Methodist Service Book. John included this old prayer, which has caught hold of his imagination so much that he wrote a whole book devoted to it. I spent time with Barry every day in the week before he died. A couple of days before his death, he told me that he was ready to let go and so I asked if he would like me to say prayers for the dying with him. We used his copy of the MSB, which includes the prayer beloved of our friend, John, *'Go forth upon your journey Christian soul, in the name of God the Father who created you; in the name of Jesus Christ who suffered for you; in the name of the Holy Spirit who strengthens you.... May you rest in peace and may the city of God be your eternal dwelling.'* You can imagine the strength of emotion in those moments at his bedside. It was a great privilege to have been able to have shared that experience with Barry. There was a powerful sense of the awesome, eternal presence of God.

Isaiah's experience in the Temple began with a sense of awe and wonder which moved him to adoration and praise. So too Christian worship today still begins by acknowledging the nature and mystery of God.

StF 81 – Now thank we all our God

- 1) Now thank we all our God,
With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom his world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms
Has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.
- 2) O may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in his grace,
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills
In this world and the next.
- 3) All praise and thanks to God
The Father now be given,
The Son, and him who reigns
With them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God,
Whom earth and heaven adore,
For thus it was, is now,
And shall be evermore.

Martin Rinkart translated by Catherine Winkworth

The second element of Isaiah's experience was a sense of sin and guilt removed.

In the Temple, Isaiah became aware of the awesome, eternal presence of God. A God who is perfect in goodness and purity exposes our own human frailty and unrighteousness and sinful nature. Consequently, Isaiah also became acutely conscious of his own personal unworthiness and of his people's sinfulness. Full of sorrow and dismay he cried out 'Woe is me! I am lost.' How could such a God come close to him?

To his amazement, he discovers that he is not lost, but that God acts to eliminate his sin and guilt. Isaiah describes it as being like a cauterization, where a wound, or infected tissue, is seared with a heated instrument. With the later revelation of Christ, as Christians we see the Cross as a powerful expression of this truth. In Jesus we see God's mercy and grace in human form.

On Friday Methodists commemorated Wesley Day. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, had a personal experience of God's grace, which he described in his journal. This year, the celebration of Trinity Sunday also coincides with the Methodist celebration of Aldersgate Sunday, which is held on the nearest Sunday to 24 May. On 24 May 1738 John Wesley attended a meeting in Aldersgate Street and felt his heart strangely warmed and later he wrote, '*I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.*' These words are written on the heart of every Methodist.

That's why, in Christian worship, when we confess our sins to God, our prayer is always followed by an assurance of forgiveness. '*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. This is his gracious word, "Your sins are forgiven."*' '*Know that your sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ our Saviour, and rejoice in his goodness and grace.*' '*Here is good news for all who put their trust in Christ. Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven."*' '*There is now no condemnation for those who live in union with Christ Jesus; for the law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death.*' No condemnation! We are set free from sin! No wonder we all respond in heartfelt gratitude, 'Amen! Thanks be to God' for this experience of sin removed.

StF 345 – And can it be

- 1) And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
- 2) 'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds enquire no more.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds enquire no more.
- 3) He left his Father's throne above
So free, so infinite his grace
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For, O my God, it found out me!
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For, O my God, it found out me!
- 4) Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray -
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.
- 5) No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Charles Wesley

The third element of Isaiah's experience was an awareness of being under a divine compulsion to 'Go for God'.

Isaiah's experience of God in the Temple was one of awe and wonder at God's eternal presence. It included a sense of guilt removed. Thirdly, Isaiah heard God saying, *'Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?'* He responded, *'Here am I. Send me.'*

Last week Christians celebrated the festival of Pentecost, when the disciples of Jesus were filled with God's Holy Spirit. They were sent out to continue the work that Jesus had begun and to take the Gospel message to others. This is the calling of each one of us. Some people have a strong sense of vocation to a ministry, some to a particular occupation, others to a church office. Every one of us who comes to worship the holy and awesome, merciful and gracious God, also comes to be transformed in order to be sent out into the community and into the world. Jesus' final words, according to the Gospel of Matthew, were words commissioning his disciples to go. *'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.....teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.'*

Sometimes those leading worship end a service by asking us to say to one another *'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship/companionship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.'* But Christian worship has traditionally concluded with a blessing followed by a commission from God to 'Go'. *'Go in peace, in the power of the Spirit, to live and work to God's praise and glory.'* *'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.'* Roman Catholics call their service 'Mass'. For many years it was conducted in Latin rather than the worshippers' mother tongue. The word Mass probably derives from the final words in Latin *'Ite missa est'* – 'Go, it is the sending out.' Similarly, the word 'mission' derives from the same Latin root for sending.

The theologian Emil Brunner observed that *'The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning.'* A congregation that has no sense of mission, of its members being sent out, but exists to enjoy its own fellowship and perpetuate its premises, will die. We are all under divine compulsion to Go for God.

Isaiah's threefold experience included a sense of awareness of an awesome eternal being that is wholly other; an experience of guilt removed; a consciousness of being sent. In the reading from Matthew's Gospel, we heard how, some 800 years later, the early Syrian Church from which this Gospel arose, had formalised these three experiences of God into a baptismal liturgy. New Christians were being baptised 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'. As Christians today we worship the one God, who encounters us in divine majesty, in the person of Jesus Christ assuring us of sins forgiven, and as the Spirit who sends us out to work for God's kingdom in the world.

StF 410 – Lord, your church on earth is seeking

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| 1) Lord, your church on earth is seeking
Your renewal from above;
Teach us all the art of speaking
With the accent of your love.
We would heed your great commission:
Sending us to every place -
Preach, baptize, fulfil my mission,
Serve with love and share my grace. | 3) In the streets of every city
Where the bruised and lonely dwell,
Let us show the Saviour's pity,
Let us of his mercy tell.
In all lands and with all races
Let us serve, and seek to bring
All the world to render praises,
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King. |
| 2) Freedom give to those in bondage,
Lift the burdens caused by sin.
Give new hope, new strength and courage,
Grant release from fears within:
Light for darkness; joy for sorrow;
Love for hatred; peace for strife.
These and countless blessings follow
As the Spirit gives new life. | |

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Giving Thanks

Eternal God, we thank you for creating a world full of beauty and interest, and for giving us life. We thank you for Jesus, who lived and worked among us, and who was raised to new life after his death on a cross. We thank you for your Holy Spirit in the world today, working within the lives of people and situations. And we thank you for all the many ways our lives have been blessed. May you be praised for ever and ever.
Amen.

Prayers for Others

We pray for the life of your Church throughout the world, for the Church in our own land and for the congregations in our Circuit. May every Christian take seriously the call to mission and service to others. May your Kingdom come: **your will be done.**

We pray for the life of the world and for those who bear the responsibility of leadership in times of tension and conflict, economic uncertainty and climate crisis. We pray that the international community might come together and do everything it can to deter further escalation of violence, suffering and loss of life in Palestine/Israel and in Ukraine, and that long-term, fair and peaceable solutions might be achieved in these disputed areas. May all who are held prisoner be set free and may people overcome their suspicion and mistrust of one another to reach out across seemingly intractable divisions. May your Kingdom come: **your will be done.**

We pray for our families, friends and those living in our local community. Especially for those who are in need, sorrowful, anxious, in pain. Draw near with your saving love to bring healing and hope.

May your Kingdom come: **your will be done.**

Collect for Trinity Sunday

You, God, have created all things and through Christ revealed your salvation in all the world. Give us a vision of your glory, and by your Holy Spirit fill us with life and love, that we may praise you and serve you through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

StF 106 – God whose almighty word

1) God whose almighty word
Chaos and darkness heard,
And took their flight,
Hear us, we humbly pray,
And where the gospel day
Sheds not its glorious ray,
Let there be light!

2) Christ, you have come to bring
On your redeeming wing
Healing and sight,
Health to the sick in mind,
Sight to the inly blind,
O to all humankind
Let there be light!

3) Spirit of truth and love,
Life-giving, holy Dove,
Speed forth your flight;
Move on the waters' face,
Bearing the lamp of grace,
And in earth's darkest place
Let there be light!

4) Blessed and holy Three,
Glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might,
Boundless as ocean's tide
Rolling in fullest pride,
Through the world far and wide
Let there be light!

John Marriott

Blessing / Sending Out

The love of the Father enfold us, the wisdom of the Son enlighten us, the fire of the Spirit enflame us, and the blessing of the Three-in-One be upon us, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Go in peace, to love and serve God, in the name of Christ and in the power of the Spirit. **Amen.**