

A service for 26th May, 2024 Trinity (StF)

Call to Worship: Romans chapter 8 verses 14 to 16

The true children of God are those who let God's Spirit lead them. The Spirit we received does not make us slaves again to fear; it makes us children of God. With that Spirit we cry out, "Abba, Father." And the Spirit himself joins with our spirits to say we are God's children. Amen.

Devout Jews address God with the words 'Qadosh! Qadosh! Qadosh!', or 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' at the beginning of their worship, but our opening hymn published in 1826 by Bishop Reginald Heber addresses the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit which is why I have chosen it for Trinity Sunday. Hymn number 11, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!'

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.**

**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.**

**3. Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,
Although 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.**

**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.**

© R. Heber (1783 – 1826)

Let us pray.

Holy, holy, Holy God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, your Word created our universe and all that lives within it. Your wisdom and power are far beyond our understanding and we have come to worship you today with reverence and joy, for you are our God and Saviour. We know from our early history you have striven to draw us close to you: first through the Patriarchs, then the Prophets and finally through your beloved Son. You alone are worthy of all honour, glory power and praise.

Christ Jesus, faithful Son of the heavenly Father, you not only taught us in words and deeds how to live life to the full, but you became the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world on a cross at Calvary. Moreover, your resurrection offers us life beyond our earthly span. All honour, glory, power and praise be yours.

Spirit of the living God, you have come to guide, comfort and empower us in our discipleship. Fill our hearts with love and joy, accept and bless our worship, for we seek to glorify you, Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession, when I say, 'Merciful Lord', please respond with, 'forgive and renew us'.

Almighty God, we offer heartfelt thanks for all the many blessings we receive from you: for the good things we enjoy; for everyone who guides, loves and inspires us, but most of all for your undying love, even though we are often selfish or self-righteous and judgmental and have been unwilling to trust in your saving grace.

'Merciful Lord' 'forgive and renew us'.

Help us to change our ways as we acknowledge our sinfulness in thought, word and deed: in acts of commission and omission. Restore us to righteousness, so our lives are Christ-centred and faithful to your wishes. Re-kindle the embers of our faith, into a strong flame, so we may play our part in building your kingdom here.

'Merciful Lord' 'forgive and renew us'.

Heavenly Father, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and trust you have already graciously pardoned us. Lord, teach us to share your gift of love with all-comers, faithfully and joyfully, so we honour you in the beautiful name of Jesus, our risen Lord. Amen.

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:

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 second hymn was written in 1813 by John Marriot, a priest and friend of Sir Walter Scott, who, for modesty's sake, never allowed any of his hymns to be published in his lifetime. Let us listen to hymn number 106, 'Thou whose almighty word'.

**1. Thou 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. Thou who didst come to bring
On thy redeeming wing
Healing and sight,
Health to the sick in mind,
Sight to the inly blind,
O now to all mankind
Let there be light!**

**3. Spirit of truth and love,
Life-giving, holy Dove,
Speed forth thy flight;
Move on the water's 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 {1780 – 1825}

In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and its needs. When I say, 'Lord in your mercy', please respond, 'hear our prayer'.

Loving God, we believe that all things are possible for you, so whilst we offer ourselves to do what we can to ensure the wellbeing of our neighbours, we turn to you in situations that are beyond our power, asking that you will reach out in mercy to bring an end to so much suffering and brokenness around the world. May your Spirit guide and strengthen us in our discipleship.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our Church, churches in our Circuit, in local circuits and, indeed, the World Church. Teach us to set aside our differences as we speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus, so we can serve him in unity. May the Holy Spirit help us use our love, gifts and graces to guide neighbours to accept Jesus as the friend, Lord and Saviour of the world. May we bravely bear the gospel light to this conflicted and broken world in words and deeds of grace.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Jesus blessed peacemakers as children of God', so we ask a blessing on everyone who is working for peace in this broken world. We pray that aid-workers and medics as well as negotiators enjoy success in their work. May fighting in Ukraine, in Gaza / Palestine, Haiti and Somalia come to an end and may the tension between Iran and Israel not escalate into open warfare. Inspire national leaders to negotiate and compromise instead of resorting to force when disputes arise. Teach them to govern with mercy and justice which are the foundations of real peace. Lord, in your compassion reach out to all victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and oppression. Grant them the courage and support they need to rebuild their lives and help them find healing in body, mind and spirit.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Lord of creation, we know that our lifestyles are damaging the ecosystem upon which we and all living beings depend. The effects of global warming are evident in the extreme weather that is affecting every continent, with floods, droughts, famines, wildfires, melting ice-caps and increasingly strong storms making life increasingly difficult for many nations. For the sake of life on this planet in future generations, help us to live more sustainably by becoming less wasteful and using only the resources we need.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Lord of Shalom, of well-being and healing, hear our prayer for people who are sick in body, mind or spirit, especially those who are living with a dementia and their carers, as well as everybody who is in any kind of need, or trouble, or who have been bereaved. May they receive the care and support they require to experience peace and healing, but may they also experience your presence in their time of need.

Lord, in a time of silence, we pray for everyone we know who needs your help, confident you will reach out to them

Lord, may we be sensitive to the needs of our neighbours, so we may offer them friendship and practical support, but we pray that you will enfold them in the warmth of your love, so they receive healing, hope, courage and transcending peace.

Abba, Father God, bless us all, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm, strengthen our faith and help us share your abundant love with all-comers, in the name of our risen Lord Jesus, to whom be glory and honour for evermore. Amen.

We continue our worship with a hymn by George Rawson in 1876. Mr. Rawson was a solicitor in Leeds and was a joint compiler of “The Leeds Hymn Book” in 1853. Although he was a Congregationalist, George Rawson helped Baptists produce “Psalms and Hymns for the use of the Baptist Denomination”. Sadly, this hymn is rarely sung by denominations other than we Methodists! We shall sing hymn number 17, ‘With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing’.

- 1. With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing,
Free hearts and free voices how blessed to bring;
The old, thankful story shall scale thine abode,
Thou King of all glory, most bountiful God.**
- 2. Thy right would we give thee – true homage thy due,
And honour eternal, the universe through,
With all thy creation, earth, heaven and sea,
In one acclamation we celebrate thee.**
- 3. Renewed by thy Spirit, redeemed by thy Son,
Thy children revere thee for all thou hast done.
O Father! Returning to love and to light,
Thy children are yearning to praise thee aright.**
- 4. We join with the angels, and so there is given
From earth Alleluia, in answer to heaven.
Amen! Be thou glorious below and above,
Redeeming, victorious and infinite love.**

© George Rawson {1807 – 1889}

The Gospel reading is John chapter 3 verses 1 to 17

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said,
“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

In reply Jesus declared,

“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

“How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”

Jesus answered,

“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have

eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Amen.

Sermon: The Trinity and Jaffa Cakes / Mars bars!

Trinity Sunday fills some preachers, Ministers and Priests with apprehension, as sermons about the Holy Trinity are not easy, though St. Patrick taught some hostile Irish Druids about the Trinity more than 1400 years ago, using a shamrock. The term, ‘Trinity’, does not appear in the Holy Bible. It was first used by Tertullian at the end of the Second Century, at the time of the Apostles’ Creed and only came into full use during the 4th and 5th Centuries after the Nicene Creed had been agreed. What, you may ask, are these references to Creeds? The answer lies in the disagreements between early Christians about Jesus’ nature and our beliefs. The concept of the Holy Trinity was unknown to Jews in the First Century AD. Even a scholar like Nicodemus struggled.

The reading from John’s gospel shows how a devout Pharisee, Nicodemus, sought answers from Jesus when he was wrestling with his teachings. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, a Scriptural scholar and a seeker of God’s kingdom. He acknowledged that Jesus had come from God, saying, **“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”**

His problem was the idea of being ‘born-again’. Jesus explained that this meant being filled with the Holy Spirit after baptism, but Nicodemus still found the concept hard to grasp – it was outside his knowledge and experience – and Jesus told him that he needed to have faith. He ended by telling the Pharisee about his role: **‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.’**

Evidently, Nicodemus learned to trust in Jesus, for he defended him in the Sanhedrin during the Feast of Tabernacles and he accompanied Joseph of Arimathea to ask for Jesus’ crucified body. Such actions show that Nicodemus’ doubts had been replaced by strong faith, though he probably had no real grasp of the reality of the Holy Spirit until her coming at Pentecost.

Let us consider the Trinity using a Jaffa cake (a Mars bar works as well, but I like Jaffa cakes). If we take the sponge cake as representing God, we have the Creator and sustainer of all life, a mighty, awesome and holy God, who was seen in the Old Testament as a remote, all-powerful and demanding figure, quick to punish and unfathomable in his ways. He wants to draw us into a special, close relationship, but when the law he gave Moses failed to achieve it, he took human form as Jesus Christ.

Let us consider Jesus as the layer of orange in the Jaffa cake. His ministry not only taught us how we should live, but it revealed his Father’s true nature. God is faithful, forgiving and self-giving. In short, God is boundless love. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, while his resurrection declares that death no longer has the final word. Jesus is not just a great prophet: he is both human and divine; God in man.

The top layer of chocolate represents the Holy Spirit who, in last week’s account from Acts was received by the hundred and twenty followers in Jerusalem. Everyone was transformed by the Spirit from frightened, indecisive and feeble friends of Jesus into fearless preachers of the Good News of God’s Salvation. However, the Holy Spirit is not confined to the dust of history: she inspires and empowers people now. I am convinced she is at work amongst aid-workers and medical staff in Gaza, working in

extreme danger. She is encountered in people like the late Frank Field MP, who devoted his life in Parliament to fighting for the marginalised in society. I believe she inspired Marcus Rashford in his campaign for meals to be provided for under-privileged children during school holidays. Many of our best charities like Christian Aid and Action for Children have been inspired by the Spirit and let us never forget the Spirit strangely warming John Wesley's heart at Aldersgate Street on 24th May, 1838.

So, there we have it: God is a Trinity of three separate beings, but one in essence, just as a Jaffa cake is one cake with three components, as is a Mars bar. If we are to succeed as disciples, we need to recognize the love and sovereignty of God the Father whose nature was revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, his Son and the inspiration, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. May we serve the Father by answering the Son's call in the power of the Lord's gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We conclude our worship with a clarion call to evangelize by Canon Edward Burns. It was written in 1968 as part of a challenge to write evangelical hymns in the diocese of Blackburn. Hymn number 418, 'We have a gospel to proclaim,'

**1. We have a gospel to proclaim,
Good news for all throughout the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name:
We sing his story, tell his worth.**

**2. Tell of his birth at Bethlehem –
Not in a royal house or hall,
But in a stable, dark and dim,
The Word made flesh, a light for all.**

**3. Tell of his death at Calvary:
Hated by those he came to save,
In lonely suffering on the cross,
For all he loved his life he gave.**

**4. Tell of that glorious Easter morn;
Empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
That we might share his victory.**

**5. Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
By all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his church
To live for him, the Lamb who died.**

**6. Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel message we proclaim:
We sing his glory, tell his worth.**

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Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forevermore. Amen.