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Sunday 4th June 2023

Trinity Sunday

The Rev’d Andy Braunston

Note

Across the land ministers and lay preachers are preparing to complain about either the readings set for Trinity Sunday or the fact it has fallen to them to preach on the Trinity. Please don’t do this! The Trinity is to be experienced not explained; worshiped not complained about! Congregations generally wish those who preach to make the ancient words of Scripture alive to their contexts; to use them for challenge and comfort, to see in them tools to understand, and confront, the powers of our age. Much time is wasted, and many people are annoyed, when preachers shirk this tremendous responsibility to complain about their lot!

**Call to Worship**

With cherubim and seraphim, we bind unto ourselves this day

**the strong name of the Trinity!**

By power of faith, Christ’s incarnation, baptism, death

and bursting from the spicéd tomb, we bind unto ourselves this day:

**the strong name of the Trinity!**

By virtue of starlit heaven, glorious sun’s lifegiving rays,

pale moon’s slivery light, flashing of lightening free,

whirling wind’s tempestuous shocks and earth’s old stable rocks,

we bind unto ourselves this day: **the strong name of the Trinity!**

Christ be with, within, behind, and before us.

Christ be beside us, comforting and restoring.

Christ be beneath and above us, in quiet and in danger,

in mouth of friend and stranger.

We bind unto ourselves this day: **the strong name of the Trinity!**

*adapted from St Patrick’s Breastplate*

**Prayers of Approach, Confession and Pardon**

Eternal Trinity, You are holy and our songs rise to Thee.

Eternal Trinity, You are holy

and we join the saints in casting our crowns before Thee.

Eternal Trinity, all Your works praise your name, in earth, sky and sea.

God, Eternal Majesty,

we praise You knowing You are our beginning and end,

the changeless One who calls us to dance with all of creation.

Jesus, Enfleshed Word,

we praise You yet know we resist Your call to dance,

preferring to go our own way and stay in the dark. Forgive us.

Holy Spirit, Flame of eternal love,

You dance with us, filling us with joy, laughter, and inspiration,

help us to know Your presence,

bringing forgiveness and allowing us to forgive others.

Give us the strength to forgive ourselves. Amen.

*assumes first hymn is Holy, Holy, Holy*

**Prayer of Illumination**

Before the ages, O God, You breathed over the formless void

and brought all things into being.

Breathe on us now, as we hear Your word read and proclaimed,

that we might hear, understand, and follow where You call. Amen.

**All Age Activity**

Have three long ribbons or coloured ropes (coloured washing line works well) Green for the Father, red for the Son and Yellow or White for the Holy Spirit. Attach them to somewhere central at the front of the church, the Communion Table or pulpit works well, and have three people plaiting them, almost as if they are maypole dancing, so that it becomes one rope ­ three in one ­ a trinity. They could do this for the whole service (if the chords are very long!) or just as people come, or just for the All Age intro, as they work you could talk of the God known to us in three ways yet with an essential unity, just as the chord is made of three parts but one (hopefully beautiful) plait.

*adapted from*

*https://theworshipcloud.com/view/written/trinity-sunday-all-age-service*

**Readings**

*Genesis 1:1-2:4a* | *St Matthew 28:16-20*

**Sermon Notes**

Many graphic representations of the Trinity are Celtic designs with no visible end or beginning. This sense of no end or beginning is a useful one to play with as we think about the Genesis passage. It’s placement at the start of the Old Testament makes us subconsciously think it was written first, that it’s a good place to start to read the Bible. It’s placement is good in that it shows God doesn’t have favourites, isn’t the deity of a single race, isn’t just the God of Abraham and Sarah, and is a counterblast to some tendencies amongst religious folk to think that God is our God and no one else’s. Yet the stories in Genesis, whilst looking back to the start of humanity, were collected and written down during the exile of the Jewish people in Babylon – about 500 – 600 years before Jesus. The stories might have been told for generations but it’s not the earliest of the Biblical books – Job might be, or the source document that was used to write up the first few books of the Old Testament.

Genesis was written as a prequel to Exodus which told the story of the formation of the Jewish people from being slaves in Egypt, being set free by God’s saving power, wandering through the wilderness and then establishing themselves as a people in the land of Israel. Genesis helped the people look back whilst they were enduring the pain and horror of exile in a strange land. In the chaos and confusion of warfare, deportation and destruction the ordered nature of Genesis’ creation stories were comforting. The logical order of night and day, the sense of light breaking through the darkness, God’s creative power were all good things to dwell on in dark times when no one was sure what the next day will bring. Just as God has allowed the people to be moved over the Tigris and Euphrates, God delivered them from Egypt through the Red Sea but, before that, God’s own Spirit had breathed over the waters bringing light and life. In a time of dislocation faithful Jews learned to read this story of creation with it’s almost liturgical resonance and find comfort. God ordered the days of creation, so God would order things aright now.

The Psalm set for today, Psalm 8, echoes the Genesis reading. It might be a little earlier than Genesis but, as ever with the Psalms, it’s more or less impossible to date them. The Psalm gives a sense of the glory of God in creation and the seemingly insignificance of humanity yet, at the same time, records the Psalmist’s wonder that God would have raise humanity to little less than a God. Like the creation passage these verses would have given comfort in hard times, reminded folk that despite the chaos and confusion of the age God is at work bringing order out of chaos.

Genesis gives us a glimpse into the creative work of God’s Eternal Majesty and of the ever imaginative work of the Holy Spirit, hovering over the waters, dancing at creation’s start.

This work of creation also gives us a sense of community. God uses the royal “we” in the passage – something rather strange to our ears now in an age of less deference – but we’ve this community idea going on – God breathes, the Spirit moves, humanity is created. God’s creative activity isn’t a solitary one just as God isn’t solitary.

God then gave humanity the task of carrying on this creative work of love. God created women and men in the divine image; centuries of male dominated society and theology forgets this. Eve was created in the divine image, just as Adam was. Eve was to be a strong helper in the creative order, not subordinate to Adam. Eve shared with Adam the mandate to be fruitful, to rule and subdue the earth.

Here, in these stories of Creation we see an equality at play which mirrors the equality in the life of God’s own self, an equality in a communion of what we often call the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. An equality of love and dynamic creativity to be modelled in Eve and Adam’s love, a creativity to be modelled in our own lives now. Neither sex at creation was to be superior to the other; both are given shared sacred duties, both are to be equal partners.

These ideas were played with by the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart who, when writing of creation felt that when God the Father laughed, God the Son was born, and when they both laughed the Holy Spirit came to be. Further, when all three laughed humanity was born. It’s a lovely image, an image showing we’re born in joy and laughter, the joy and laughter of God’s own self.

It’s an image that can sustain us as we ponder Jesus’ command to the disciples, and to us, in the Great Commission in Gospel passage where we’re called to go to all peoples to baptise and make disciples in the name of our Triune God.

Faithful Jews learned to trust in God in the gloomiest of days through the regular breaking through of the sun each morning reminding them of the gracious ordering of creation. The liturgical pattern of the Genesis story reminded them of God’s design. The creative dance that God started at creation, which gave the Jewish people of old hope and sustenance in the bitter days of exile, propels us forward now in our work of evangelism where we invite people to join in that creative dance, to see the life, energy and communion of God reflected in our own lives, endeavours and communities. It’s a command to imagine what a new community might look like, a community of equality and delight, of joy and laughter born from the joy and laughter of God’s own self.

**Affirmation of Faith**

Today, Eternal One, we rub the sleep from our eyes

and discover more of who You are.

Today You give well-aimed hammer-blows

at the clay jars of the gods we want,

the gods who reinforce our own pride or prejudice,

until they fall away and reveal You.

A different God, a dangerous God, a subversive God,

a God who comes to us like a beggar with wounded hands,

a God who comes to us in wind and fire,

in bread and wine, in flesh and blood: a God who says to us,

**‘You did not choose me; I chose you.’**

Today, O Christ, we rub the sleep from our eyes

and discover more of who You are.

We realise You don’t fit neatly into all our little categories –

if you did You’d simply be someone we’d invented,

a neat theological answer laid out on a cold slab

in response to age old questions.

**We know that when You are laid on a slab, You rise again.**

Today, O Spirit, we rub the sleep from our eyes

and discover more of who You are.

You are a signpost in the dark, pointing the way.

You are the assurance of love which holds us in our pain.

You are the flame which burns in our gloom.

**You call us to be people of the light.**

Today, Trinity, we rub the sleep from our eyes

and discover more of who You are.

Today You remind us that You always transcend our grasp,

even our most intelligent grasps.

**We know, love, and adore You, Holy Trinity of Love. Amen.**

adapted from words by NT Wright in

*For All God’s Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church*

(Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), p. 24.

**Intercessions**

God of creation,

we praise you for the beauty, diversity and energy the earth, our wounded mother.

We give thanks for the life of our planet, for its ecosystems and creatures,

the vegetation, insects and animals with whom we share this our fragile habitat.

Increase, O God, our understanding of creation,

the wondrous ways in which You have knit our world together,

give us a greater love for Your creation,

that we may learn to live in harmony and peace with each other,

and with our fellow creatures.

*pause*

God, in your mercy….**hear our prayer.**

Suffering God, we lift to You today all who are in pain:

those living with the ache of grief,

those fleeing war, oppression, and poverty,

those whose burdens are too much for them,

those rejected and despised

for how they live, who they love or what they are.

Enable us, Suffering One, to help shoulder our share of pain,

to work for a world where there will be no more suffering, crying, mourning,

or oppression, a world where You dwell in our midst.

*pause*

God, in your mercy….**hear our prayer.**

Spirit of Laughter and Love, we pray for those who seek to lead

through elected or appointed office, in religious or civic life,

that You may inspire them to live and act justly and wisely,

that the poor may be lifted up, the oppressed run free,

and the wounded healed.

Help us, O Spirit,

to play our part in the better administration of our society,

help us to call our leaders out when they let us down,

reject Your ways of righteousness and oppress the poor.

Help us, too O God, to see our own failures and woundedness,

and to see Your healing.

*pause*

God, in your mercy….**hear our prayer.**

Holy Trinity of Love, we bring to you now, all those we know and love

in any type of need or pain

*longer pause*

God, in your mercy….**hear our prayer.**

Accept our prayers, Triune One, as we pray together, **Our Father**…

**Offertory**

Worship always involves giving – making the effort to be here, to attentively listen, to open ourselves to God and our fellow worshippers, to pray for the needs of the world are all forms of giving. The Christian life is all about giving – giving up some of our own needs and desires in order to live as Christ calls us. In the process of giving and receiving we model the life of the Trinity whose self-giving love nurtures, sustains, and inspires us. Through the giving of our financial gifts we give practical expression to God’s work in our world and so we pray:

Eternal God, known to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

as Majesty, Word, and Flame of eternal love,

as one who creates, redeems, and sustains,

bless these gifts we offer for Your glory,

and make us into a people who work and yearn

for your Kingdom to come. Amen.

**Holy Communion**

The Eternal One be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them up to the Most High.**

Let us give thanks to God’s Eternal Majesty. **It is right and just for us to offer praise.**

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, always and everywhere to give you thanks,

holy, almighty, and eternal Majesty,

crucified, yet risen, Enfleshed Word,

Flame of Love breathing through all creation.

Three-in-One we praise and adore You,

revealing Yourself again and again in glory, suffering, and new life.

We, Your holy Church, acclaim You,

we, Your stumbling people thank You,

we, Your impaired witnesses cry to You.

Holy Trinity of Love, known to us in so many ways, yet one in being and equal in glory,

we join with the angels and archangels in their unending hymn of praise…

*adapted from the Church of England’s Preface for Trinity Sunday*

**Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts.**

**Heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The Word was with God in the beginning.

Through the Word all things came to be,

not one thing had its being but through the Word.

All that came to be had life through the Word,

and that life was the light of humanity,

a light that shines in the gloom,

a light that the gloom could neither understand nor overpower.

The Word became flesh, and tabernacled amongst us.

He came to his own people, who did not accept him,

but to all who did accept him,

he gave power to become the children of God.

And now this Word, who was born not out of human stock,

or urge of the flesh, or will of a man,

but of God, comes to us in bread and wine.

For we remember the night, when Jesus,

the Enfleshed Word, born as one of us,

met with his friends and shared in the simplicity of a meal.

During the meal he took bread, blessed it, broke it

and gave it to his friends saying:

“Take this all of you and eat it, this is my body,

which is given for you, do this and remember me.”

In the same way after supper, he took the cup filled with wine,

gave thanks and gave it to his friends saying:

“Take this all of you and drink from it, for this is my blood,

the blood of the new and everlasting promise of God,

for you and for all people. Do this and remember me.”

Let's remember Jesus as we celebrate the central mystery of our faith......

**Christ has died! Christ is Risen! Christ will come again!**

Holy Spirit, Flame of Eternal Love,

come upon these simple gifts of bread and wine,

and, as we receive them, lift us beyond them into Your presence,

and enable us to enflesh Jesus in our lives.

Let us be, O Triune God, words which tell of Your Word,

lovers showing Your love, and heralds proclaiming Your presence,

that with all creation, we may sing of your praise for ever,

Eternal Majesty, Enfleshed Word, Abiding Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever, Amen.

To prepare ourselves to meet the Lord in Holy Communion let us sing the Lamb of God.

**Lamb of God, Lamb of God**

**you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, Lamb of God,**

**you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, Lamb of God,**

**you take away the sins of the world grant us peace.**

**Post Communion Prayer**

God of a love stronger than death,

you have given us new birth into a living hope

through the gift of your Son.

God with us, like a mother you have fed us with yourself

and strengthened us for journeying ahead.

God of truth and power, you take our weakness and our sin

and refashion us by grace.

Gracious God, may the love which bids us welcome at this table

gather all your children into one,

in your eternal presence, whole and free at last. Amen.

*from the URC Worship Book.*

**Blessing**

May the One who created all things, set the heavenly bodies in place,

moves the planets in their heavenly dance,

and who created you from star dust, bless you.

May the One who humbled himself to be born as one of us,

walked through the dust of earth,

endured betrayal, torture, and unjust death,

and rose from the grave,

wounded yet victorious, bless you.

May the One who danced at creation’s start,

who lifts us from the dust of our lives,

fills us with energy, joy, and laughter,

and who called the Church into being, bless you.

And the blessing of the Three-in-One, our Holy and Undivided Trinity,

be with you, and all whom you love, now and always, Amen.

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| **Hymn Suggestions** | | | | |
|  | RS | CH4 | StF | MP |
| Holy, Holy, Holy | 34 | 111 | 11 | 237 |
| I Bind Unto My Self This Day | 36 | 639 |  |  |
| I Sing the Mighty Power of God | 43 |  | 107 | 293 |
| Praise With Joy the World’s Creator  https://www.theologyofwork.org/work-in-worship/hymns-psalms-poems/hymns/less-familiar-hymns-related-to-work/praise-with-joy-the-worlds-creator-hymn/ | | | | |
| Womb of Life And Source of Being |  | 118 |  |  |
| God We Praise You, God We Bless You |  | 120 |  | 1277 |
| God Whose Almighty Word |  | 112 | 106 |  |
| God the Father of Creation |  | 113 |  |  |
| Loving Creator, grant to your children |  | 116 |  |  |
| God is love let heaven adore him | 95 | 123 | 103 | 187 |
| Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud |  | 133 |  |  |
| Bring Many Names, Beautiful and Good |  | 134 |  |  |
| Mothering God You Gave Me Birth |  | 117 |  |  |

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP- *Mission Praise*

The hymn *I Bind Unto Myself This Day* is both hauntingly beautiful and really hard to sing! You may want to use this version

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fqzWs6KPoE>

for opening and closing music. Drop me an email if you want this as two tracks (the entire piece is quite long but works well when divided) The beat in this track increases rather nicely as the song goes on.

This hymn, *Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth*  by Jean Janzen, after Mother Julian of Norwich, is unfamiliar but you might like to have it played during the service, possibly during Communion or as a time of reflection after the sermon. You can hear it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Z5UTfzX4Uk>

or drop me an email and I’ll send it to you.