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TRINITY SUNDAY B

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Trinity Sunday - Year B
26th May 2024



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

21 STF – Born in song! OR

11 STF – Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

421 STF – Empty, broken, here I stand, Kyrie eleison OR

29 STF – Jesus lead us to the Father

Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

Hymn:

648 STF – God to enfold you, Christ to uphold you OR

451 STF – Open the eyes of my heart

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

72 STF – Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist OR

416 STF – There is a wideness in God's mercy

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free OR

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky

Blessing

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Call to worship

You call us into relationship, with you and with each other.

Today we come, to be held together by your Spirit,
To meet with our communities and connect with our global neighbours.

Come amongst us as we worship you, triune God.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

21 STF – Born in song! OR

11 STF – Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty

Opening Prayers

Our opening prayers today are inspired by one of the set readings; Psalm 29 (NRSV). The words of the Psalm are in italics below. It may be helpful to have two voices to lead the prayer; one for the Psalm words and another for the prayer that follows.

Ascribe to the LORD, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness.

Glorious God we come to worship today as earthly beings who, nevertheless, want to give you honour and praise to the best of our ability. Your greatness lifts us beyond our ordinariness and in the radiance of your splendour, we are able to shine. **We give you all the glory.**

The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon leap like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox.

Indeed, your voice, Lord, is what we long to hear in worship today; through those who lead us, through Scripture lifted from the page, through silence as well as speech. Speak to us, Mighty One, with passion and power as we wait with open ears and expectant hearts for our small worlds to be moved and shaken. **We give you all the glory.**

The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the LORD shakes the desert; the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

Vocal, powerful God, help us to tremble just a little in worship today when we consider our lives; the dark and dismal parts of them which need your holy lightning to strike and illuminate us for good; the layers of pride and prejudice that wrap around us but need to be stripped bare. We confess our need for radical cleansing and transformation through you.

We give you all the glory.

¹ Call to worship written by **

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever. The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.

Mighty and majestic God, enthroned over all people and places, we humbly receive the strength you offer and the blessing of your peace today. We are nothing without the assurance of these and we are truly grateful. **We give you all the glory.**

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

What is your favourite Bible verse? (*Ask the congregation to make suggestions*).

If no-one suggests John 3:16, then ask them if anyone knows it. Then, read it aloud:

"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." – John 3:16

Can you say it with me? Once more, until we know it?

"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." – John 3:16

John 3:16 is one of the most popular verses in the whole Bible. But I wonder, does knowing the words mean you really know what it means? It's popular as a verse for people to remember and memorise, especially when we feel sad and down, because it helps to summarise who God is. This verse reminds us that God truly is an inclusive and loving God, a God for all. Let's take a closer look...

"For God so loved the world..." This is SO important to our faith, and to understanding God. The God I believe in really does love the world. The whole world. The good, bad, rich, poor, young, old, sick, healthy, angry, and joyful. God loves the whole of creation, and that includes each and every one of us. God loves those who declare their love for God, those who call themselves Christians, but God's love is so big that it includes those who don't too, even those who say they hate God. God is for all.

Why do you think this matters? It means you don't have to earn God's love. You are already loved - and there is absolutely nothing you could do that would change that love. That is pretty awesome, I think!

It also means we don't have to feel like the world is 'out to get us'. Because we know God always loves us. God's love doesn't make bad things go away, and we all make mistakes (what the Bible calls 'sin'), but it is so good to know that God will still love us even when we do mess up.

So we turn to the next section of that little verse: "...that He gave His one and only Son,..."

² Opening prayers written by Val Ogden

If you ever think that maybe God doesn't love you, just think about this part. God loved you so much that He gave up His own Son to show how much He loves and cares about you.

"...that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." With that perfect sacrifice we can live forever with God.

God loves you so much that God was willing to send Jesus to live and die amongst us. Lastly, what happens after life in this world? That is in the verse too! All we have to do is believe in God. We don't have to be perfect, or grown up, or super smart, we just have to believe in God, put our faith and trust in God. You see we serve a God that is for all and is inclusive and caring. John 3:16 is the verse that demonstrates this truth perfectly for all of us.³

Hymn:

421 STF – Empty, broken, here I stand, Kyrie eleison OR

29 STF – Jesus lead us to the Father

Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

Hymn:

648 STF – God to enfold you, Christ to uphold you OR

451 STF – Open the eyes of my heart

Reflections on the readings

Sometimes, the readings for Trinity Sunday spotlight the Gospel of Matthew chapter 28 verses 16-20. 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. Easy peasy! There's the Trinity and we know what to do with it.'

Today however, our blessing is the Gospel of John chapter 3 verses 1-17 and we have to work a bit harder to find a Trinitarian formula. True – God is there; we also have the Son, but alongside the Son of Man so it's more complicated. We get the Spirit, but it's water *and* the Spirit or flesh *and* the Spirit in a kind of dualistic not a Trinitarian way. And at the end of the passage, the Trinity John's Gospel gives us reads much more like God, Son and World – no explicit mention of the Spirit. All very intriguing!

Well, you'll be grateful that we're not going to use our reflection time this morning for a very cerebral, complicated examination of how we might construct the doctrine of the Trinity out of John 3. 1-17. Instead, we're going to focus on a key character in the story – our brother Nicodemus – and what we might like to call the *Nicodemus Trinity*. All we mean by that is Nicodemus - who came by night seeking enlightenment - appears in John's Gospel three significant times. He's got a trinity of appearances: here in chapter 3, then in chapter 7

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

verses 50-52, and then in chapter 19 verse 39. It's a good exercise for us to reconnect with Nicodemus these three times because every time we meet him: a Pharisee, a theologically educated religious leader, we meet him in person, as flesh and blood, very earthed and struggling with what it means for his life now that he's encountered this Jesus. We should never forget that, at its best, the complex doctrine of the blessed Trinity is simply a tool to help us know God better in three persons. It's not supposed to leave us with three unmanageable, abstract, philosophical concepts. In Trinity, we meet God in three persons, whom we can relate to as well as revere. So here's the Nicodemus Trinity. Three times John's Gospel mentions him.

Firstly, Nicodemus is the **Discoverer**

He is alone, remember, and comes by night: it's dangerous for him to meet Jesus and try to discover more about him. He respects this fellow Rabbi and sees the workings of God in him. So he searches him out and seeks to know more. In John 3.2 he says to Jesus: *Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God; for no-one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.* Nicodemus the discoverer - wide eyed at the one who earlier in the Gospel changes water into wine, who causes havoc in the Temple. These miraculous and astonishing actions are signs of the Kingdom of God, right? But Jesus says. *Nicodemus – very truly I tell you – no-one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above.* The signs alone aren't enough. There are many sermons to be preached on that phrase, 'born again' or 'born from above' but the point is, Nicodemus the discoverer – the searcher, the seeker - finds he has SO much more to learn than he ever realised, if he is in any way going to grasp what God's Kingdom is all about. It's about more than Israel for a start. This journey of discovery that Jesus has begun in him will require his theological development and his spiritual transformation. And recognising that, we can all stand side by side with Nicodemus can't we? We ALL need to keep searching and seeking – to be on a never ending journey of discovery with God. And more will always be required of us – until the Kingdom comes.

Secondly, Nicodemus is the **Defender**

A courageous defender. By the time we get to John 7.50. this Jesus has really been causing problems – theological and practical ones. Who is he and how do we interpret all these words and these signs? Are they really the things of the Messiah and the coming Kingdom? Opposers of Jesus of course are sure they are not. Why? Because he's a Galilean and so his birthplace and heritage immediately disqualify him. Always interesting isn't it the people we dismiss and don't listen to because of their birthplace and their roots? Does that happen around here? So, in a meeting which John's Gospel records took place with the temple police, the chief priests and his fellow Pharisees, Nicodemus is shown as a lone voice of defence. In Chapter 7.51 we read, *'Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?'* He didn't make himself popular being the lone voice of defence mind you. He was ridiculed in fact. Are you from Galilee too? The second person of the Nicodemus Trinity – the courageous defender – speaks to us powerfully, I think. When might God call you or me to be the lone and unpopular voice in our defence of Jesus?

Thirdly, meet Nicodemus the **Disciple**

Yes, discoverer, defender and disciple. Jesus who had so challenged his faith development and urged his spiritual transformation has now died and Nicodemus - along with Joseph of Arimathea whom John calls 'secret disciple' – are paired together in chapter 19. And there is something of great magnitude here. The Gospel writer chooses to draw our attention to a small but significant detail. When disciple Nicodemus (Chapter 19.39) came to pay his respects, to do what was necessary before burial, he carried with him an *enormous* quantity of myrrh and aloes – the traditional substances of anointing – *about one hundred pounds*. In John chapter 12.2 – when Mary anointed Jesus with costly perfume – the Gospel speaks of *one* pound of nard - and Judas complained that was a waste of money. One hundred pounds: what does John's Gospel want us to grasp because of that detail? Rudolf Bultmann's commentary suggests that when Nicodemus the disciple brings this huge and costly devotion in spices, it speaks of a truth of immense quantity that has dawned upon him. Commentator Lesslie Newbigin suggests that Nicodemus's costly devotion belongs to the world which is passing away. Yet it is at precisely this moment that the world waits to be 'born from above' through Resurrection and Pentecost. As Nicodemus the disciple attends his Lord's burial with his costly devotion, he reflects, surely, on the many ways the person of Jesus has affected his person. And Nicodemus's new birth – the one he was so confused about initially - is just around the corner. But it's the whole world which is going to be born again - not just him.

So we have indeed looked at a Trinity today. A minor trinity perhaps, inspired by our dear brother Nicodemus: discoverer, defender, disciple. May his persons speak powerfully to our persons. Amen.

Questions for reflection:

1. What does your 'journey of discovery' in life and faith look like at the moment? What are you searching and seeking for?
2. Have you every judged a person or situation without giving them or the circumstances a fair hearing? What is it important for you to defend?
3. How do you react to the idea that God intended the whole world to be 'born again' or 'born anew' through Jesus, not just individuals?

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

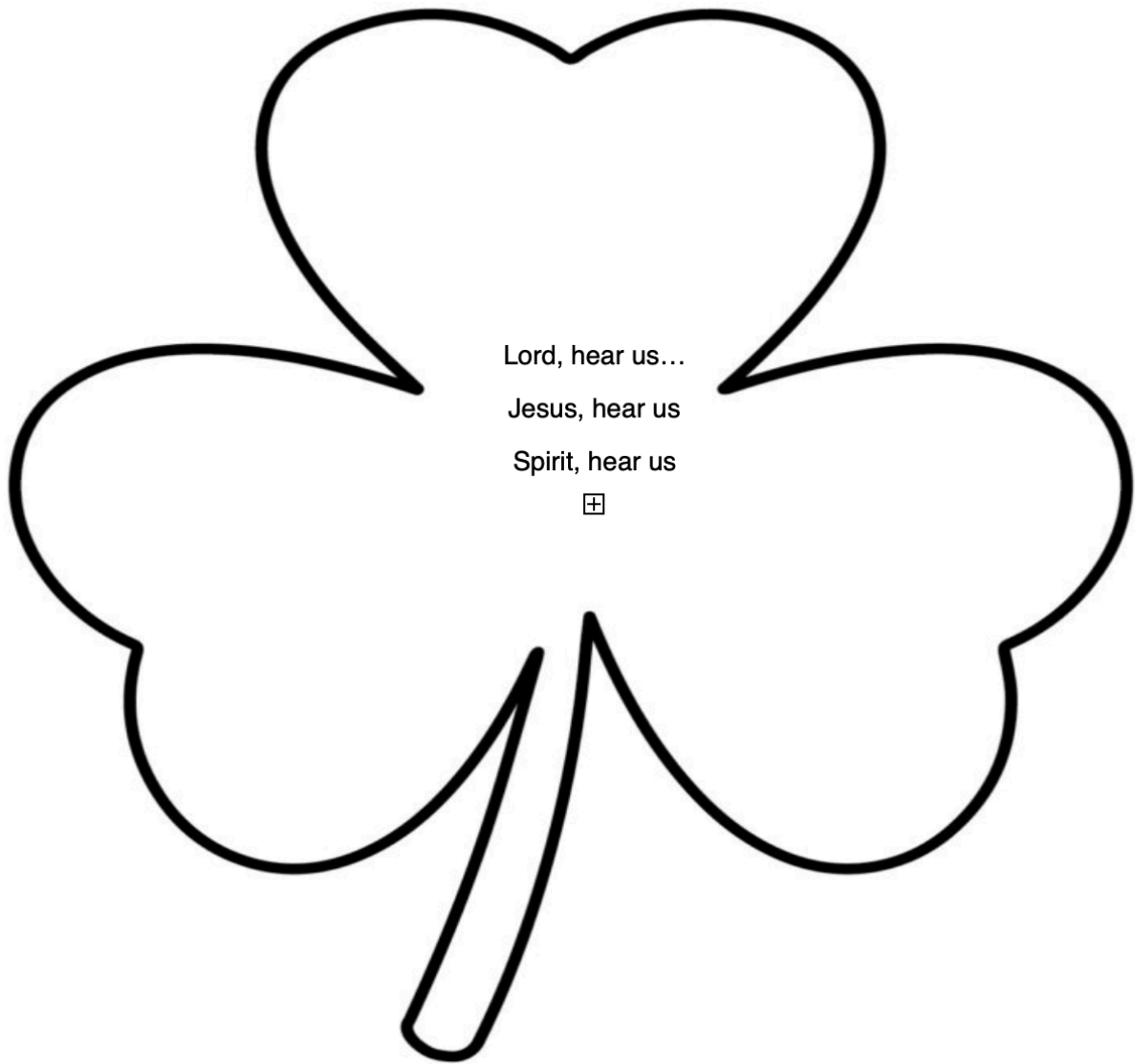
72 STF – Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist OR

416 STF – There is a wideness in God's mercy

⁴ Reflection written by Val Ogden

Prayers of intercession

St Patrick, whose Feast Day was back on 17th March, introduced many a visual aid for reflecting on Trinity. In our Intercessions today, we're invited to use this template of a shamrock and share with a neighbour about the prayers we may feel led to jot down on each of the three leaves. If sharing with another worshipper to do this doesn't appeal, simply sit quietly with the image and pray your prayers off the page.



Conclude the time of intercession using a simple, threefold, Celtic-inspired rhythm of prayer, naming topics very simply, as worshippers feel led. One voice leads the first line with all joining in the second and third lines. See examples below. Continue for as long as this feels helpful and conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

Lord, bless our Church. **Jesus, bless our Church. Spirit, bless our Church**

Lord, heal the sick. **Jesus, heal the sick. Spirit, heal the sick**

Lord, guide our leaders. **Jesus, guide our leaders. Spirit, guide our leaders.**

Lord, stay close.

Jesus, stay close. Spirit, stay close.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Gracious God, we give thanks for all you have done for us.

As we are grateful, so too we return our gifts to you and to the building of your kingdom here on earth.

Use us, and use these gifts for the transformation of your world, Lord God.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free OR

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky

Blessing

As we rise and head out into the world,
We go to meet you, Lord God,
To discover where you are already at work,
And to get involved.

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Val Ogden

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker