

Order of service for Trinity Sunday at Christchurch

Sunday May 30th 2021 at 10.45am

Let us bring questions, bring doubts.

Bring all that we find hard to understand.

Bring all that holds us back from believing.

Bring all we think we know.

Bring all we long for and all we hold in our hearts.

Bring everything we are and let us draw close to God, Three in One

Amen

Welcome to our worship this morning on this Trinity Sunday from
Christchurch, Hitchin

Trinity Sunday, when we ponder the mystery and majesty of our God, when we realise we are often unable to find words to describe and explain and yet when we once again remember that this same God shared our human path and comes as close to us as our own breath in the Holy Spirit.

I am Christine, a local preacher in the North Herts. Methodist Circuit and a member at Christchurch. I should like to thank Tom and James for providing our music, Sue for reading and John for doing all the technical things behind the scenes.

So come let us worship in our opening song

STF 15 The Splendour of the King.

The splendour of the King,

clothed in majesty;

let all the earth rejoice,

let all the earth rejoice.

He wraps himself in light

and darkness tries to hide,

and trembles at his voice,

and trembles at his voice.

*How great is our God, sing with me,
how great is our God, and all will see
how great , how great our God.*

And age to age he stands,
and time is in his hands;
beginning and the end,
beginning and the end.

The Godhead, Three in One,
Father, Sprit, Son,
The Lion and the Lamb,
the Lion and the Lamb.

How great is our God,

Name above all names,
worthy of all praise;
my heart will sing:
how great is our God.

Name above all names,
worthy of all praise;
my heart will sing:
how great is our God.

How great is our God.....

Chris Tomlin, Ed Cash and Jesse Reeves

Prayer of adoration – the first part is based on Psalm 29

We gather in your name, O Lord,

for you are the Lord who gives strength to your people and blesses them with peace.

You are the Lord who comes close to your people and draws them into your heart.

You are the Lord who equips your people and calls them to serve in your world.

You are the Lord who loves your people and invites them into the fellowship of the Holy Trinity.

You are Lord. We worship you.

Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

we praise you for the might and the mystery of your being .

We praise you for the uniqueness and unity of your fellowship.

We praise you for drawing us together and for setting us apart.

We praise you in song, in silence, in the mundane and the mystical. We praise you. Amen.

Introduction to reading

Our first reading today comes from the book of the prophet Isaiah. King Uzziah has died of leprosy, a punishment, so it says in the book of Chronicles, inflicted on him for usurping the priest's role in the temple. Our reading comes from Chapter 6 but it is believed that this event took place before the teaching and prophecy of Isaiah which is found in the first five chapters of the book. This probably makes sense as these chapters are full of Isaiah relaying God's warnings to the nation of Judah for their misdeeds. A nation that would eventually be conquered by Babylon and many of their people would be sent into exile. So it would seem that this dramatic calling came first.

Today as we hear Sue read the words, close your eyes, if you wish, and imagine the scene in the temple as God draws close to Isaiah.

Reading 1 Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.'

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.' 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!'

Reflection 1

Imagine the scene in the temple, in Isaiah's vision, this is certainly one of heaven meeting earth. Here, maybe even during a service, he is overpowered by the immediacy of the One he worships. God is seated on a throne, high and lofty, yet the hem of his robe fills the temple. We have to remember that the main sanctuary of the temple was about 10 metres across and 20 metres long and at least 14 metres in height. As someone expressed it, 'Isaiah would be seeing an elevated vision of God, as he looked up it was as though he was looking into heaven and yet almost drowning in the fabric of the hem of God's robe filling this space.' And then there were the seraphs and not only is the sight almost overwhelming as they fly around but the sound of their singing would fill the space 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of hosts'. The temple shook and the sanctuary was full of smoke. Again, thinking of the temple ritual, the sign of smoke was usually associated with sacrifice to God. No wonder Isaiah is overwhelmed, even frightened but, most of all, filled with awe.

Do we have times when we have felt complete wonder, a sense of the presence of God near, in words that we find hard to explain? I guess if you went round a group of our members and friends, the thing that would be most often described would be awe- inspiring landscapes, a lofty mountain view, a wonderful sunset. The sort of thing that, when we sing the hymn, 'O Lord my

God, How great Thou art!' come to mind. But it can also be a heaven touching earth moment when looking at the close detail of a beautiful flower, a child struggling to walk for the first time, a touch of a hand and renewed strength after illness or injury. And in those moments, which I am sure we have all encountered, we thank God, we are amazed that this wonderful God created these moments out of love for us all. But is that where it stops, is it just a moment in time?

For Isaiah, this remarkable vision that he encountered did not stop there. Isaiah, in midst of the might and majesty of God , made a response. He realised his wrongdoings and the wrongdoings of his people. He confessed his sins and then this symbolic action took place, his lips were touched with a live coal, his sin was blotted out. Do we react like this when we encounter the wonder of God, do we ask that we can be renewed and forgiven? Isaiah is a prophet from the Old Testament. We have Jesus who died for us all on the cross in order that our sins can be forgiven, that we can be in a right and full relationship with God. There is no special area, like the temple, where we have to go to find God - through Christ we can be in his presence everywhere.

And God wants to use us as he did Isaiah , through the power of the Holy Spirit He is calling us to work for him ,not always in dramatic ways like the prophet [although who knows what God is calling us to]. We must allow the Holy Spirit to enter us, to discern what he wants us to do, in this time, in this place. And just as in the time of Isaiah, there is plenty to do if only we will listen.

At first this reading may not seem an obvious one for Trinity Sunday. But in fact it is – we are invited not only to worship God in awe and wonder [as we did in our opening song] but ask that our sins are forgiven through Jesus and discern through the Holy Spirit what he would have us do. God, Three in One. After our next prayer and song, Sue will read a short passage from Paul's letter to the Romans, for in these words our relationship as followers of Christ with God is clarified.

But first let us pray:

Prayer of Confession

God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to you we pray and before you we seek forgiveness.

How dare we limit you to our experiences alone, to what we understand, to what we know,

to what we want to be the truth?

How dare we mould you into an image of comfort and convenience that suits us?

Our immaturity and self righteousness so often obscures our view of you,
God forgive us and help us to hear your voice: 'Whom shall I send?' Amen

STF 663 I, the Lord of sea and sky

I, the Lord of sea and sky,

I have heard my people cry.

All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.

I, who made the stars of night,

I will make their darkness bright.

Who will bear my light to them?

Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord.

Is it I Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord,

if you lead me .

I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain,

I have borne my people's pain:

I have wept for love of them.

They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life for them.
Whom shall I send?

Daniel L Schutte

Reading 2 Romans 8: 14-17

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba ! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Reflection 2

Here in these few verses from Romans, we are lead on further from the picture in Isaiah. God Three in One brings new life to those who believe. In Christ we belong to the family of God, we are not alone; we belong to a worldwide community of believers. A community that has spanned the years. Paul says that we receive the spirit of adoption - what does this mean? Adoption in the

Roman Empire, at the time that Paul was writing, was very different from the process we know today. If a family had no son to inherit the property they might adopt a mature young man, perhaps from another branch of the family or even from outside. [Let us not forget in Paul's time, we are talking of a male dominated society.] Most famously, Julius Caesar adopted his great – nephew who became his son and after his death, the emperor Augustus. This person became part of the family and there was a rise in their social status. For us as adopted sons and daughters of God we enter into a new life, and it shows how much we matter to God - we are valued members of that family. Imagine how much this must have meant to some of the early Christians, let us realise how much it should mean to us. This new relationship does not crush our freedom, rather we enter, when we give our lives to Christ, the security and care of a strong relationship with God our Father.

And when we do this, we learn, through the Spirit, to follow the pattern of Jesus, God's son. We accept that our lives will not also be smooth or easy but if we follow the example of Jesus we will know as He did, the guidance of the Spirit through prayer and action.

The doctrine of the Trinity was one that evolved in the early church - a way of expressing what people had learnt of the different aspects of God. Over the years there have been many arguments about this doctrine, many books have been written and many of these not easy to understand. Last week in the Telegraph newspaper there was an article about the doctrine of the Trinity. Great, I thought – I must read this. I have to confess that I hardly understood a word of it so what would those, who didn't know anything about the Christian faith, think? They would have been bewildered. For me the Trinity is expressed simply in this statement. Led by the Spirit, in the love of the Father and the life of the Son – we encounter God, the Holy Trinity, in our daily life.

A prayer for Trinity Sunday

Holy, and glorious God,

you are far beyond the reach of our finite minds,

yet through the Holy Spirit

you have made yourself known to us by many witnesses, and above all, you meet us

in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through him we know you as a God of love;
a love that enfolds the whole of creation:
and we believe you call us to respond to that love,
to be numbered amongst those who,
knowing themselves loved, have the confidence to seek and share that love.

Like Isaiah of old,
we know that we ourselves are part of the human problem;
yet we dare to pray, take us, poor instruments that we are,
and let your love grow within us until it overflows into the lives of others,
that they too may come to know that you love them
and that you will hold them fast now and forever. Amen

And so now we turn to **our prayers for the people of God's world**

After each section of the prayer I will say the words God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, will you respond: **We ask for new life in you.**

God our Creator, we pray for the world brought to birth by your love;
Where your children continue to fight and kill, die of hunger and disease,
oppress and exploit one another.

Today we pray especially for the continued violence between Israel and Palestine, in the land where you lived and taught and shared your love and also for many other areas in our world where tensions continue near the surface, including in our own land. We continue to pray for an end to the inequalities in

the provision of food, water and health care especially relating to the vaccination programme against COVID

God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

We ask for new life in you.

God our Saviour, we pray for humankind whose joys and pains you came in love to share, and who are still in need of repentance and forgiveness, of healing and comfort, of faith and hope.

We pray especially for those known to us who are struggling at this time , those coping with the effects of long term illness or isolation, those fearful of return to normality, young people who are concerned about their studies and their future , people anxious about their job situation and prospects , those grieving and readjusting to loss. In the silence let us lift those known to us to God.

God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

We ask for new life in you.

God among us , we pray for the church, which you created , sustained and filled with love, especially this church here at Christchurch , Hitchin. We ask that you give us vision and courage, unity with one another and the strength to serve you in the world.

God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

We ask for new life on you.

So now may God the Father, Son and Spirit, bless, protect and guide us. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Final blessing

Go in the name of the Father who created and nurtured us.

Go in the name of the Son, Jesus our Lord,
who taught and teaches us.

Go in the name of the Holy Spirit who inspires and burns within us.

God in the presence of our triune God. Amen

STF 8 God with us: Creator, Father

God with us: Creator, Father,
bringing everything to birth;
Mother of the whole creation,
fire of stars and life of earth:
down the countless years composing,
from the earth's evolving night,
love's response to love, and forming
mind and soul to seek your light.

God with us: Redeemer, Brother,
Friend for ever at our side,
here, in flesh, you walked among us,
taking up your cross, you died.
Crucified, despised, rejected,
Perfect Love, who shared our shame,
streaming from the cross , your judgement,
full of mercy, clears our name.

God with us: unwearied Spirit,
from the birth of time and space,
surging through unconscious being,
joyful, Life-Creating Grace:
through the centuries you find us ;

you, as God, inspire our prayer;
Life and Power at work within us.
Love for ever, everywhere!

God, Transcendent, far beyond us,
closest Friend, unfailing Guide:
through the ages , wronged , affronted,
in your poor , still crucified!
God with us: convict, forgive us:
by your holy love destroy
all that hinders peace and justice:
fill this aching world with joy!

Alan Gaunt