

The Bridgwater Drive Church, 30 May 2021, Trinity Sunday. Written service circulated to all

Music to start: God so Loved the World, Stainer sung by the choir of St Martin's in the Field
<https://youtu.be/xvO5SyyqipU> (please note this link has an introduction by Revd Sam Wells)
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Welcome to worship from The Bridgwater Drive Church. Today will be a Communion service here at Bridgwater. If you are a member of Christ Church watching at home and wish to celebrate the Lord's Supper, you may, however the Christ Church monthly communion was celebrated last week.

Call to worship (inspired by Psalm 29)

The voice of our God and King is heard in blessing,
as it echoes in its majestic powers over all creation.
We come to worship our God, and to celebrate the
Mystery and Reality that is God's everlasting glory.
The voice of God is heard in all creation – and it responds
with joy to the voice of its Creator, Sustainer and Renewer.
We come to worship our God, and to celebrate God's
power and generosity towards all creation and all peoples.
We come to worship our God, and to celebrate the
way we are welcomed into God's glorious presence.
The voice of our Holy God is heard in the sacred
spaces, and God's grace is received as we worship.

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Hymn Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness (R&S 187)

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of
lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.

Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,
high on his heart he will bear it for you,
comfort your sorrows and answer your
prayerfulness,
guiding your steps in the way that is true.

Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
of the poor wealth you would count as your
own;
truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness
these are the offerings to bring to his throne.

These, though we bring them in trembling and
fearfulness,
he will accept for the name that is dear;
mornings of joy give for evenings of
tearfulness,
trust for our trembling and hope for our fear.

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of
lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.

Opening Prayer from the URC Prayer Handbook, p41
Prayer of Confession

God, you loved this world so much that you sent your own son, Jesus Christ
to live and die among us, in order that we might have life.
Forgive us for keeping that abundant life to ourselves,
for jealously hoarding your generous gifts, for choosing self-interest over compassion and justice.
Teach us what it means to live as children of the light, generously sharing your abundance
with our brothers and sisters in need. **Amen**

Hear and believe these words of grace:

God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him.

And so I declare to you: In Jesus Christ we are loved, we are forgiven! **Thanks be to God!**

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Offertory

You are reminded to send in your gifts for the work of the church by cheque or bank transfer.

Holy One, receive our gifts by your grace.

Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. **Amen.**

Bible readings: John 3:1-17

Romans 8:12-17

Today is Trinity Sunday. When I was a student, I used to joke with the minister of my home church that I would have to be either ill or on holiday every Trinity Sunday because I didn't understand it! But the point, I think, about the Trinity is that it is a mystery; we're not really meant to understand it, and it is one of the few aspects of mystery that the Western church still has. If anyone claims to be able to explain the Trinity, I would take it with a pinch of salt! The other main point about the Trinity is that it is about relationship. God is a relationship, within God's self – God the creator, the eternal being, joined with God incarnate who lived a human life as Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit – guide, helper and sustainer.

Today's gospel reading from John, contains perhaps the best-known sentence from scripture – 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...' but I hadn't realised until this week, when I read a commentary on workingpreacher.com, that this well-known passage shows Jesus discussing in some detail all three persons of the Trinity. Not in an intellectual, theological way, but Jesus challenges Nicodemus to move from theory to practice, from knowledge to faith, from curiosity to commitment. Nicodemus thinks that as a religious leader he understands who Jesus is and who God is. Jesus calls his assumptions into question. Like a typical scholar, Nicodemus begins the conversation with a statement based on evidence. "We know" that Jesus is a teacher come from God. How do we know? By observation, logic, and deduction. Jesus' signs provide convincing proof that God is with him. But Nicodemus' conclusion is partial and incomplete. Lacking both courage and commitment, he has come to visit Jesus by night. Far from being a follower of Jesus, he is unwilling even to be seen with him.

Jesus responds to Nicodemus by saying that no one can see God's reign without being born again from above. Unless Nicodemus allows God to change his whole way of being in the world, he will not be able to perceive God at work. Nicodemus promptly demonstrates his lack of spiritual perception by taking Jesus at the most literal level. Mystified, he asks, "How can anyone be born after growing old?" Jesus explains that by water and the Spirit God gives people rebirth into the reign of God. Those who are reborn in this way become spiritual beings, shaped and sustained by the Spirit who bears them. And so, we have the Trinity – Jesus, the Son, talking about God and the Holy Spirit.

In his conversation with Nicodemus Jesus refers to all three persons of the Trinity. God is the One who loves the cosmos and who, unwilling to let it perish, gives the Son. God sends the Son not to condemn the world and its inhabitants, but to rescue and restore them. The Greek word translated as 'saved' means save in the sense of heal and make whole. Jesus is both the only Son of God and

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the human one, the Son of Man. He descended from heaven and has ascended to heaven, thus connecting heaven and earth. He remains in constant contact with God the Sender, revealing God by bearing witness to what he has seen and known. Those who place their trust in Jesus will have eternal life, being reborn by the Spirit. The Greek word for Spirit can mean spirit, breath, and wind, and Jesus plays with this ambiguity. Like the breath of God in Genesis, the Spirit gives life to believers. Like the wind, God's Spirit blows wherever it wishes, and those who are born of the Spirit share in this mysterious freedom. While people can sense the presence of the Spirit, they can neither comprehend nor control it.

The eternal life that the gift of God's Son gives is life shaped by, and utterly dependent on, God's love. It is not simply life in heaven after death. It begins now, in the moment that believers entrust their lives to Jesus. When we receive eternal life, we enter into God's reign in the here and now. We become citizens of God's kingdom depending on the Holy Spirit's guidance. Citizenship in God's reign is not a solo affair. Believers are reborn into God's new family. Just as God is in relationship in the Trinity, so we are in relationship with God and with each other.

Our second reading from Romans, is complicated and again not one that I had previously thought of as talking about the Trinity. But let us focus on just two verses: 'all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God... you did not receive a spirit of slavery... but a spirit of adoption.' Central to this text is the affirmation that Christians are children of God by adoption, having been claimed by the Spirit of God. No one can acquire this status through observance of the law or any merit of their own, as we read elsewhere in the letter to the Romans. Setting aside that often in real life, adopted children are desperate to find their birth parents, in the best cases, to be adopted means to be chosen, included, and loved. To be longed for and desired desperately. God has claimed us. God has adopted us as his very own, because God so loved all of creation that he gave his only Son to redeem it. The foundation of Christian life is an active awareness that we have been brought into the very life of the Triune God, where we are loved, secure, and empowered by God's Spirit. This gift is what enables us to reflect Christ in our daily lives.

We would probably like the text to end there so that we can ponder the vast privileges that have been bestowed on us as children of God. But Paul goes on to remind us that suffering is an inevitable part of sharing in the life of the crucified and resurrected Christ – "we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him". Paul goes on to talk of the sufferings of the present time, and we certainly have known suffering in the past 14 months. Even if we have not had Covid19 ourselves, or known someone who has, we have had our liberty taken away; all that we took for granted and thought was a given was swept away – going to church on a Sunday, hugging loved ones, being able to leave our homes for something other than food shopping or collecting medication, socialising, going on public transport without a mask... I could go on, but you can all think of many examples, and yet they pale into insignificance when set beside countries like India or Brazil.

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Just as we are united with Christ in joy so are we united with Christ in pain. No one is an island; we are all connected. We have learnt this in the pandemic – that we are dependent on those we looked down on before – supermarket shelf fillers, cleaners, hospital porters. We have all experienced the pandemic differently, but we have also experienced it together, in relationship, connected while we were physically more separate than ever. We are united with Christ, in the Triune God, in the good times and the bad, in the joy and the pain, and so too are we called to support each other in all circumstances and all times, without prejudice or discrimination, linked together as the body of Christ, made in the image of God.

Hymn How deep the Father's love for us (Mission Praise 988)

How deep the Father's love for us?
How vast beyond all measure?
That he should give his only Son
To make a wretch his treasure
How great the pain of searing loss?
The Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many souls to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers
It was my sin that held him there
my pardon he accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection
Why should I gain from all of this?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom

Lord's Supper

We remember, as we do at every communion service, the gift of the life and death of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Come to this table, you who are beloved in Christ. Come, not because you must, but because you may.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.
You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.
You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people throughout the generations, and the gathered wisdom of many years.
You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up in difficult times where there was little peace.
He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.
He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.
He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.

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For these things, he suffered. For these things, he died.
And he was raised from death and lives with you forever.
You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us,
to remind us of Jesus Christ and to make us one in him.
For all these gifts we thank you, and join with all your people
on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

This is the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died
Christ is risen
Christ will come again.**

Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine,
and upon your people, that Christ may be with us,
and we may be ready to live for you
and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. **Amen**

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Sharing of bread and wine

Prayer after communion

Most gracious God, we thank you for what you have given us.
You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.
Now we give ourselves to you, and ask that our daily living
may be part of the life of your kingdom,
and that our love may be your love
reaching out into the life of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayers of intercession

Gracious God, we pray today, for all those who go hungry and for the people who help them,
through volunteering at foodbanks, by donating food and money, or by speaking out and raising
awareness.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for the NHS and care home staff, for doctors, nurses, porters and cleaners, carers and
their families, and for all those involved in the delivery of vaccinations.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all people in leadership, locally, nationally and around the world that they may act with
wisdom to bring about and maintain peace and order. We pray for the police, here and around the
world, that they may learn to treat all people equally without prejudice and that they be more caring
to those with disabilities or mental illness, and more respectful of women. We continue to pray for
peace in the Middle East and an end to violence in Colombia and Myanmar.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

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We pray for those who feel lonely and sad, who are still not able to see family or friends, while most of us are starting to enjoy a little more freedom. And we pray for wisdom and patience to not rush our progress to less restrictions. We pray for all those who have had COVID-19 or lost a loved one to the virus and for those whose treatment for other conditions has been delayed.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those who are ill and those who care for them; for those awaiting test results or treatment, for the dying and those who mourn. May your infinite love and grace surround them and bring them peace, in Jesus' name. May your loving presence known to those who are lonely. Give your strengthening power to those who are weak. May those who lack be filled, those who mourn be comforted, those who worry be calmed and those who seek forgiveness find it in Jesus Christ; in whose name we now pray

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn Fill thou my life, O Lord my God (R&S 406, omit v 4 & 5)

Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy being and Thy ways.

Praise in the common things of life,
Its goings out and in;
Praise in each duty and each deed,
However small and mean.

Not for the lip of praise alone,
Nor e'en the praising heart,
I ask, but for a life made up
Of praise in every part:

So shall no part of day or night
From sacredness be free,
But all my life, in every step,
Be fellowship with Thee.

Blessing

Just as God's Word was sent into the world to heal and redeem,
so God sends you into the world this day to be light and love, healing and hope.
Go now to be light for the world!
And may the grace and peace of God the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer
be with us today and remain with us always. Amen

The Bridgwater Drive Church sung Blessing.

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