

Order of Service – Trinity Sunday – 7th June 2020

Call to Worship and opening time of adoration and praise https://youtu.be/XYkrV_9Lvzo

We share our worship together this morning in the name of God the Father,
who creates time and space, galaxies and stars and planets,
in the name of Jesus Christ, born on planet Earth,
and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who fills Earth with its presence.

Creator God,
in this time we call 'now'
in this space we call 'here'
we worship you.
Make your presence be felt among us.

Father, we love You
We worship and adore you
Glorify your name in all the earth

Glorify your name
Glorify your name
Glorify your name in all the earth

Jesus, we love You
We worship and adore You
Glorify your name in all the earth

Spirit, we love You
We worship and adore You
Glorify your name in all the earth

Psalm 8 (from the Youth Bible)

Lord, our Lord,
Your name is the most wonderful name
in all the earth!
It brings you praise in heaven above.
You have taught children and babies
to sing praises to you
because of your enemies.
And so you silence your enemies
and destroy those who try to take revenge.

I look at your heavens,
which you made with your fingers.
I see the moon and stars,
which you created.
But why are people important to you?
Why do you take care of human beings?
You made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honour.

You put them in charge of everything you made.
You put all things under their control:
all the sheep, the cattle
and the wild animals,
the birds in the sky,
the fish in the sea
and everything that lives underwater.

Lord our Lord,
Your name is the most wonderful in all the earth!

Hymn 118 from Singing the Faith: *Tell me who made all of creation.*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Od_qFJ2g50

1. Tell me who made all of creation?
Who designed the wonders of nature?
Whose idea was pattern and colour,
Wonderful to see?

*Everywhere around me
I can see the hand of God,
The evidence surrounds me
In the greatness of His world.
(repeat)*

2. Tell me who made music and laughter?
Who designed our bodies to start with?
Whose idea was thinking and feeling?
Who gave life to me?
 3. Don't stop looking, don't stop believing,
God is to be found when you seek Him.
All creation tells of his glory,
For eternity.
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Prayer of confession https://youtu.be/z2lser_C4Qo

Great God of all creation, who are we that you are mindful of us?
You placed this wonderful planet into our hands.
We confess that we do not always do all we can to care for the world around us.
By Your grace, forgive us.

Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, you came to Earth to show how we should live.
You showed love to everyone, no matter who they were,
Sinners, outcasts, those who were ill or diseased, the poor.
We confess that we do not always follow your example and ignore people in need.
In Your mercy, forgive us.

Holy Spirit, you were sent to guide and give courage to those first disciples,
To spread the good news of God's love to all who would listen.

We confess that we often find it hard to talk to others about our faith and we miss opportunities to share the good news.

Through your live-giving breath, forgive us.

If we are truly sorry, through His grace, mercy and live-giving breath, our loving God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, will forgive all our sins.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

The gospel reading: Matthew 28 v16-20 (New International Version)

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Sermon – Ruth

Today is Trinity Sunday and after the excitement of Pentecost, we see God welcoming us into community and inviting us to extend that community to others.



Have you noticed in recent years the rise of non-gendered pronouns? The way to speak about a person used only to be "he" or "she", but now we have a third option. We can refer to them in the plural, as 'they'. This is pretty ideal if you don't actually know whether the Chris you're talking to or about is Christine or Christopher, or whether the Pat is Patrick or Patricia, or even whether Aaron, Jordan and, I kid you not, Elisha is a boy or a girl. Not that it matters of course, except that sometimes people get upset when you get it wrong. Hence the use of 'they' if you're not sure.

And non-gendered pronouns have been used of God, as well. It's not always helpful to always refer to God as 'he' even though it's done consistently through both Old and New Testaments. It's perhaps even less helpful to use 'he' for the Person of the Holy Spirit, and

you'll often find people referring to the Spirit in the feminine. Not everyone will react well to that, but then not everyone will react kindly to what is the status quo. So today of all days, when we celebrate the Trinity, One God in three persons, it seems most appropriate to use

the word 'they' and 'them' even though we're talking about the Person of God, one in three and three in one. And an image that is commonly used to represent this is the very famous painting by Rublev, called the Icon of the Trinity sometimes also referred to as the Icon of the Hospitality of Abraham.

The picture in this icon is based on the story in Genesis when Abraham received three mysterious strangers to his tent. He invited them in, and gave them a meal, and they turned out to be angels bringing the message to Abraham and Sarah that despite their old age, they would have a son within a year. You can read about this in Genesis chapter 18 vs 1 to 14.

There are many other icons which take this theme, but Rublev took the elements and stripped it back to basics and then cast it into a supremely Christian context. The three visitors are definitely represented as angels, we can see that by their wings; but we can also understand them to represent the three Persons of the Trinity. The house on the top left represents the tent of Abraham, and also our eternal home to which we may aspire, which Jesus referred to in John 14 vs 2 where he said:

My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

The mountain on the right hand side seems to be bowing to the group of three; all of nature bows in worship to God and in psalm 97 vs 5 refers to the mountains melting **"like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth."**

In the centre of the image is a tree. In the Genesis story this was the oak under which Abraham was sitting when he received his guests, but in a Christian context, a tree represents the cross on which Jesus was crucified.

The three figures are sitting around a table. For us that represents community. We are never closer than when we eat or drink together and community is so important to us. It's one of the things we've missed so much over the past few months. It will be one of those things we'll have to get used to doing again, as restrictions on gathering together are slowly and cautiously lifted and we start to go out to see our friends and families again, albeit in small numbers and still at a safe distance.

However, because this is a religious icon and a religiously significant picture, this isn't just any old table. Abraham served a real feast for his guests, with roasted meat and bread and wine, but here all is represented have is a cup and what looks like a lump of bread in it, which we will recognise as the elements of communion; Jesus offering himself in communion to all his followers; God with us and we, then, being united and one with God.

The most important part of the picture is possibly the space at the front. The viewer stands before the icon, and then becomes the fourth person at the table, invited into the sacred space with the members of the Trinity. Each of us is invited to take our place at the table in this fourth spot. There's a little square on the table and it's thought that some of the original

pictures may have had a mirror placed there, so that the person looking at the icon could see themselves reflected and be aware of being in the presence of God.

The three figures are not an attempt to represent directly the three Persons of the Trinity, but simply suggest aspects of God's nature. Their gestures of blessing and the way they are seated suggest a circle, a symbol of eternity. Whoever welcomes God as Abraham did finds themselves welcomed by God, welcomed into a communion of love and joy that has neither beginning nor end.

The priest and author Henri Nouwen wrote this,

“Long ago in Russia, there were many attacks made on a small town, and in a [certain] monastery the monks got very nervous and could no longer concentrate on their prayers because of all the violent conflicts throughout the town. The abbot called his icon painter, Rublev, to paint an icon to help the monks remain prayerful in the midst of restlessness, trouble, and anxiety. Rublev painted an icon based on the visit of the three angels to Abraham in Genesis 18, seated around a table of hospitality.

“Andrei Rublev painted this icon not only to share the fruits of his own meditation on the mystery of the Holy Trinity but also to offer his fellow monks a way to keep their hearts centred in God while living in the midst of political unrest. The more we look at this holy image with the eyes of faith, the more we come to realize that it is painted not as a lovely decoration for a convent church, nor as a helpful explanation of a difficult doctrine, but as a holy place to enter and stay within. As we place ourselves in front of the icon in prayer, we come to experience a gentle invitation to participate in the intimate conversation that is taking place among the three angels and to join them around the table.” End quote.

That image has been around for six hundred years. I'm sure there has been a great deal of political unrest, uncertainty, fear and anxiety during that time. Some things don't change much and people need reminding and to remind themselves that God alone is constant, unchanging and eternal. We support each other within our communities, our churches, though rather more virtually than physically these days.

But it's important that we don't just stick to mixing with people who are like us. God said

“Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” (Gen. 1:26).

In turn, we are also commanded to spread the news of our Christian community and to include others in it, perhaps people we wouldn't normally meet or reach out to, inviting them into the sacred space as well and making them welcome. Jesus' final words to his disciples were a command to go and make disciples of all peoples in all nations, spreading the gospel of liberation and freedom and love, something the disciples started to do in amazing ways at the first Pentecost which we remembered last week.

The mystery of the Trinity is one that many struggle with, because it's simply human to try to rationalise and to label things so that they make sense. God revealed Godself through creation

and though the Spirit that moved over the face of the deep and through the Word that became flesh. We cannot just think of God as one person and reduce the distinctiveness of the three Persons nor should we emphasise the distinctiveness to the extent of making three separate gods. God calls us into community as creator, redeemer and friend and sends us out to reflect that community and that love to others. This is shown no more powerfully than in Jesus' parting words to his disciples. We often call it the Great Commission, but you could equally call it the Great Promise, offering strength and encouragement though difficult times; that Jesus will be with us always to the end of the age. (Matthew 28.20)

God has called us into community. With whom will we share that living community in the week to come?

Hymn: Singing the Faith 11: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwuDSw-9cUQ>

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!

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.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee
Though 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.
Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty
Oh thy works shall praise Thy name In earth and sky and sea
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty
God in three persons, blessed Trinity

Prayers of intercession <https://youtu.be/MunQBekIKMM>

As fellow disciples of Christ
Let us ask God's blessing
On the Church and on the world.

Dear Lord and Father, we pray for our nation and the wider world, and all the diverse people in it. Help those who are persecuted and discriminated against because of their race, and give them the courage and strength to make their voices heard, and be listened to. May all people help one another to live in peace and unity, and to grow in your everlasting love, remembering that we are all created in Your image. **Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.**

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for your Church throughout the world, which began as a result of your life, death and resurrection, as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those first disciples. We pray that, even in these times when it is not possible to be together, the Church can be a visible sign of unity and hope in the way that we support and encourage each other. Help us to fulfil your great commission as best we can, finding new and creative ways of working together and of witnessing to You in the world. **Christ hear us. Christ graciously hear us.**

Holy Spirit, we pray for our local communities and the people within them who are particularly struggling as the current pandemic continues. Be with everyone who may feel scared or nervous about lockdown restrictions being eased. Help us to be the lights of Christ shining in our world by caring for others, speaking up about injustice and spreading the good news of Jesus to those we meet. **Holy Spirit hear us. Holy Spirit graciously hear us.**

We pray for those who are sick and those who grieve. May the peace and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest in their hearts and bring healing.

Silence

We bring all our prayers for others together as we say together the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples:

**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 today our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory
Forever and ever.
Amen**

Hymn: Singing the Faith 15 – The splendour of the King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKLQ1td3MbE>

The splendour of a 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 is 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, Spirit, Son,
The Lion and the Lamb,
The Lion and the Lamb.

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

Name above all names
Worthy of our praise
My heart will sing
How great is our God
Name above all names
Worthy of our praise
My heart will sing
How great is our God.

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

Blessing <https://youtu.be/6FQXYCdVtck>

God, who created you in the divine image, sends you forth
to reflect the presence of our Creator to everyone we meet.

Jesus, who has redeemed you, has established the reign of God in our midst
to bring healing to the broken of the world.

The Holy Spirit, who calls you to be God's people,
goes with you to many places to tear down the walls that divide us,
and to build lives of hope for all of God's children.

May you all be blessed by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Now and forever, **Amen.**