**7th June 2020**

**Trinity Sunday**

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Call to worship

The word of the eternal Father created us.
The love of the gracious Son redeemed us.
The presence of the Holy Spirit unites and empowers us.
Come and worship the glorious Trinity,
our God of power, love and peace.

Hymn: Holy holy holy lord God almighty



A prayer of approach

O God, you are at the heart of creation.
Your word brings life into being;
your peace gives living its fulfilment;
your Spirit unites us into your Son.
We draw near, seeking your love in our hearts;
your wisdom in our minds; your power in our lives.
Receive us with grace, in the name of your Son.
Amen.



A prayer of confession

Lord Jesus, you send us into the world,
but we confess that our vision is narrow;
you give us clear commandments,
but we pretend not to understand them;
you promise to be with us always,
but we ignore your presence and follow our own way.
Forgive us; give us fresh vision and restore us to your way,
we pray.
Amen.



A prayer of adoration

*Based on Psalm 8*

O Lord, our sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
Your glory reaches beyond the highest heavens,
O Lord, our sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
By the youngest to the eldest your praise is spoken forth,
O Lord, our sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
In sky, on land, and in water your creativity is seen,
O Lord, our sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
Amen.



Lord’s Prayer

**Matthew 28.16-20, 2 Corinthians 13.11-13**

I saw a cartoon the other day that had two women talking over the garden fence. One woman said to the other woman ‘where’s Fred?’. The other woman replied: ‘He’s in the garden’. The first woman looked and said, ‘I can’t see him in the garden’. ‘You need to dig’ replied the second woman.

It is a sharp and maybe cutting satire on our life together at the moment.

On the one hand there has been a greater sense of community during this pandemic. People have spoken over the garden fence. Neighbors have watched out for one another, people have volunteered to do shopping, pick up prescriptions. Until this week streets have turned out on Thursdays to clap the carers. Generosity has been seen towards the NHS and towards those who have been affected by the coronavirus, either those getting it or those facing the economic consequences of it. Politicians have tried to work together.

A common threat has resulted in a common response and a sense of community. Will it last as the threat perceivably lessons? Or will we go back to looking after just ourselves and the hustle and bustle of life and competition?

The darker side of community is also contained in that cartoon. Two neighbours talking – where’s Fred? He’s buried in the garden!

There has been concern at a rise in domestic abuse during this pandemic with people forced to live in close confines with people they don’t get on with and the consequential results in abuse and violence.

In the broader community the first major fracture of our collective effort was the Dominic Cummings revelation of a senior advisor to the government travelling over two hundred miles with Covid 19 symptoms on the premise of getting childcare. The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, seemed to justify him flouting the lockdown restrictions because he followed his instincts rather than follow the rules. Many others are now doing a Cummings and doing their own thing – following their instincts.

Then over a week ago came the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis where a black man George Floyd was apprehended and sat on by four white police officers, one of whom knelt on his neck for almost nine minutes causing Floyd to cry out ‘I can’t breathe’ and later led to his death by asphyxiation. The protests at his death that Black Lives Matter and the revelations of deep seated divisions and racism once again exposed a gaping wound in American society and made us all confront our prejudices.

Protest turned to riots which were arguably further inflamed by President Trump tweeting that the looting would turn to shooting from the authorities and a call to dominate the streets. He then allowed protesters to be fired on by tear gas so he could hold a Bible in front of St John's Episcopal Church, just across the road from the White House. His bible gesture was not welcomed by a range of clerics.

The Episcopal Bishop of Washington, the Right Reverend Mariann Budde, said: "The president just used a Bible, the most sacred text of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and one of the churches of my diocese, without permission, as a backdrop for a message antithetical to the teachings of Jesus."[[1]](#endnote-1)

James Martin, a Jesuit priest and consultant to the Vatican's communications department, tweeted: "Let me be clear. This is revolting. The Bible is not a prop. A church is not a photo op. Religion is not a political tool. God is not your plaything."

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, Primate of the Episcopal church, (who preached at harry and Megan’s wedding remember) said ‘for the sake of us all, we need leaders to help us to be “one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.”

Let’s not be tempted to dismiss this as a specific American tragedy and problem. Martin Luther King said ‘injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere’ and this brutality in broad daylight must move us all to confront our prejudices, our desire to be superior and disregard the suffering of others.

Throughout our existence and in our own lives we know we have the capacity for great goodness, sacrifice and love, yet also great hurt, insensitivity and even hatred.

Today is Trinity Sunday when the church traditionally looks at the nature of God as a trinity of three persons in one Godhead. Our Bible readings include that trinitarian formula Father Son and holy Spirit: Jesus uses it in Matthew as part of the Great Commission.

Or as Paul expresses at the end of his Second letter to the Corinthians:

***14****May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

At the heart of our Christian faith is the God we worship – and God is the ultimate, the absolute reality – what is really real. There is a unity yet a diversity in the Godhead. But this oneness is not a oneness of a distinct self-contained individuals; it is unity of a community of persons who love each other and live together in harmony. Personal means by definition interpersonal; one cannot be truly personal alone but only in relation to other persons.

We all know that relating to other people brings with it the potential for great joy and also great hurt.

Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians at the end of which he says:

*Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.*

What has gone before is a letter that at times has been angry, frustrated, argumentative and addressing problems, and squabbles and fall outs between Paul and the other leaders and the community in Corinth.

John Proctor the retiring General Secretary of the URC writes in this month’s Reform magazine (which is free to view digitally on line: <https://www.reform-magazine.co.uk/2020/04/read-reform-for-free/>)

*The cross of Christ is at the centre of the letter (4:10; 5:14). His wounds and weakness become part of our story. Yet, in the shadow of the cross, the newness and promise of resurrection are ours too. ‘Afflicted in every way, but not crushed … struck down, but not destroyed’ (4:7-9). That’s Christian living, according to this letter. [[2]](#endnote-2)We read too of a present and powerful Spirit, opening eyes and changing lives (3:18), writing the story of God’s goodness in the living of the people of Jesus (3:1-3).*

*If that is the God of Second Corinthians, what does it tell of the Church? Here are some very varied Christian people – the awkward and contentious, the patient and generous. Some are good at caring and helping; others are too full of themselves. We see them in situations of stress and relief, tension and healing, resentment and misunderstanding, and reconciliation, support and sharing. This is a church I recognise. There are people like you and me, who don’t get everything right but are called to be together in ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’ (13:14).*

*So, why might this book be a word for this year? Because, for a long while to come, we shall often need to start with comfort. The virus, and measures taken to tackle it, have cut deeply into people’s wellbeing. Everyone has felt strain. Many have been pressured far beyond their usual resources and strength. Some are utterly heartbroken, hurt in ways that will never fully heal. We need to know a ‘God of all comfort’. We need Jesus to touch the tender places of human living. This is a year when faith has to start from the cross.*

*So, I shall carry on reading Second Corinthians. ‘Who is sufficient for these things?’ it asks (2:16). The answer is a few verses later: ‘We are not competent in ourselves … our competence is from God’ (3:5). ‘The Father of mercies’ (1:3) does not stay two metres away. Jesus knows what it’s like to be fragile and fearful. The Spirit gets behind all our masks (3:16)*

*Honesty, healing and hope – these are qualities I find in this letter. We need them now, more than many of us have needed them for a long time.*

If in God’s own deepest inner being God is a community seeking God, then that is also what God is in relation to us. Gone is the hierarchical, dominating God who asserts, defends, and maintains sovereign freedom and power at the expense of God’s creatures.

The freedom and power of God who is Father Son and Holy Spirit together is freedom and power exercised not to dominate and control but freedom to be with us and for us. It is not freedom to do anything and everything God pleases but freedom to be a loving and just covenant making God who wills our good. It is freedom and power exercised not to keep us dependent and powerless slaves but to set us on our feet and empower us to be God’s faithful friends, companions, and partners. God’s freedom and power is therefore not something that robs us of our dignity and freedom: it is the source of our dignity and freedom.[[3]](#endnote-3)

I’d like to believe that President Trump went to church to pray and reflect on his actions, but he has publicly stated that he does not belong to a particular congregation, only occasionally attends a service and has said many times that he does not like to ask God for forgiveness.

Instead of holding a Bible I hope he reads the Bible and not just the bits he wants to read. I pray the Holy Spirit would guide him and us in the will of Christ that we would know that there is nothing in the word of God which justifies the violent oppression of suffering people.

The repeated refrain of God’s word is that God is for the widow, the orphan, the oppressed.

God is the origin of truth and the author of justice. God is love. ‬

Jesus used his limitless power to save, choosing to die and not to ‘dominate’. He didn’t fire on his own people he gave his life for them.

I don’t know if you saw the pictures of the St Louis Police force. When a mob of angry protestors came towards them bearing placards about the George Floyd killing they lined up outside the Police Department and then all went on one knee – they took the knee – which has become a symbol of solidarity and Black lives matter. Instead of hurling insults at the police the protestors knelt with them and prayed with them and for them. The anger dissipated in a joint act of contrition forgiveness and lament for healing. Many cops believe their badges have been shamed by what happened to Floyd in Minneapolis. Others just want to get through their shifts and get home safe, without getting shot. They have a difficult job to do but admitting mistakes and prejudices is an act of honesty.

That’s how you stop riots. That’s how you deal with angry people.

If you want the anger and division to continue at whatever level – personal, church, community national – you don’t say sorry, you justify, you say you were right – you try to dominate, you force your way in a power struggle you win! But actually, you don’t – you perpetuate the hatred, the rift the divisions.

God on the cross through Jesus could well have gone on the justification trip – he was the innocent one – being crucified by the sin of the world. He had the power to dominate – to shoot, to destroy. Yet God in Christ forgave, absorbed the anger, returned it with love.

Chine McDonald a Christian speaker and author said on Radio 4 thought for Day this week:

*Images of police officers kneeling in repentance in America make me hopeful that change may be possible; it takes will and effort to take such deliberate actions. Repentance is a ‘doing’ word; as are the verbs familiar to Christians, found in the book of Micah: act justly, love mercy and walk humbly. Let’s hope these symbolic images are more than just gestures and are instead the first steps towards lasting change.*

Several religious leaders are hoping that Trump's visit to the shrine of the late Pope John Paul II, the next day after his Bible holding exploits, may encourage him to reflect on the words that the then Pope, delivered to the United Nations in 1995.

"The answer to the fear which darkens human existence at the end of the 20th Century," he said, "is the common effort to build the civilization of love."

May we be inspired on this Trinity Sunday, by the nature of the God we worship that we may be drawn into God’s ways of love and peace for our own sakes and the sake of our world. May we go into all the world and teach and live the ways of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

It was an arresting and disturbing image of George Floyd crying out ‘I can’t breathe’. Last week Pentecost we reflected on the breath of God the Holy Spirit transforming us. The knee on the neck ‘I can’t breathe’ reminds us of the ways we can quench, stifle, stop the ways of God in our lives and in the world. Let us pray.

Where there is conflict between nations and within nations and between races;
where people live in fear of the bullet and prejudice;
when parents weep for children who have been killed:
We can’t breathe: breathe on us breath of God

For leaders and people in authority

For police and security forces responsible for law and order and justice - when things are unjust

We can’t breathe: breathe on us breath of God

In homes filled with anger, cruelty and neglect;
where there are no safe places;
where poverty and addiction bring suffering and pain:
We can’t breathe: breathe on us breath of God

To those whose minds are tormented by depression;
to those whose hold on life is fragile;
to those whose lives are filled with stress anger, division, prejudice.

We can’t breathe: breathe on us breath of God

To those who are nearing the end of life;
to those who love and care for them,

To all dying in desperation and losing hope:

. We can’t breathe: breathe on us breath of God

Breathe me life into your creation – that we may act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with you.



Jesus met his disciples after his resurrection and said ‘Peace be with you’

The Peace of the Lord be with you all.

We come and share this meal as our Lord commanded us to do in memory of him.

**Invitation to the Table**

Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God!
By the mysterious wonder of our triune God,
we gather here to celebrate a feast for all time,
joining with Jesus and his disciples in an upper room,
with the church of the ages who have come here so often,
with sisters and brothers in faith all along the way,
with people we know well and we don’t know at all.

Here we trust that the mystery of God will become real.
Here we gain a taste of the divine.
And here we are fed as we go forth to serve in the world.
Come, all of you, and share this feast of the holiness and wonder of God.[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**

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.**

We praise your name, most holy God,
for it is good and you are good.
You reveal yourself to us in countless ways,
even inviting us into the mystery of your inmost being
where you are one in three and three in one.
In your creation, you show us the marks of your hand,
and in creating us in your image,
you call us to bear your presence into all the world.
For your wondrous being and your glorious creation,
we join our praise with the sound of all creation
to sing joyfully in praise of your wondrous glory:

Holy, Holy , Holy, God. Heaven and earth are full of your glory: Hosannah in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God. Hosannah in the highest.

We your church sing your praise, eternal God,
for in your threefold glory we know Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.
Fully human, fully God,
he was born of low estate and lived among us,
an ordinary man in an ordinary time
who yet showed your extraordinary grace.
He proclaimed your coming kingdom in word and deed,
challenging the powerful,
healing the sick and distressed,
and calling all people to live in light and life.
Even though he was executed by the powers of the day,
you raised him to new life
to show that your power was stronger than death.
Still now he reigns in glory,
united in your holy oneness
to show your presence to all people.

Remembering his life, death, and resurrection,
we gather at this table as he did to share this feast of heaven and earth,
that by your power we might be united with you in this bread and cup.

***Sharing in bread and wine***

Just as we have known your presence and love in the gift of Father and Son,
so, O God, reveal yourself to us in the wonder and power of your Holy Spirit.
Pour out this Spirit of love and hope,
that we might rise from this holy meal to love and serve in your world.
Keep us faithful in our service to you,
that we might give you glory and honor and praise forevermore:

**Holy Father, Holy Son,
Holy Spirit: three we name you,
while in essence only one;
undivided God we claim you,
and adoring, bend the knee
while we own the mystery.**

Amen.

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HYMN: Thou whose almighty word

A sending out prayer

May the grace of the Father be with you;
may the love of the Son enfold you;
and may the peace of the Spirit comfort you,
today and always.
Amen.

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-52890650> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://ocean.exacteditions.com/issues/88403/page/16> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. S Guthrie, Christian Doctrine, WJK Press, 2018, p93 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.liturgylink.net/2015/05/28/communion-trinity-sunday/> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)