

## A Service for 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2023 Trinity Sunday (StF)

### Call to Worship: Psalm 8

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Amen.

*The author of our opening hymn, Reginald Heber, was appointed Bishop of Calcutta in 1823. His diocese was not only India and Shri Lanka, but the whole of the Far East, including Australia and New Zealand! He died at Trichinopoly in 1826, through overwork, aged only 43, but not before he'd written several beautiful hymns, including the one we're about to sing. Devout Jews address God with the words 'Qadosh! Qadosh! Qadosh!', or 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' during their worship, but the hymn written by Reginald Heber addresses the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit which is why I have chosen it for Trinity Sunday. Hymn number 11, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!'*

**1. 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.**

**2. 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.**

**3. Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,**

**Though the eye made blind by sin thy glory may not see;**

**Only Thou art holy! there is none beside Thee,**

**Perfect in power, in love, and purity.**

**4. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!**

**All Thy works shall praise Thy name, in earth, and sky, and sea;**

**Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!**

**God in Three persons, blessed Trinity.**

© R. Heber (1783 – 1826)

**Let us pray.**

Holy, holy, Holy God, Father, your Word created our universe and all life throughout it. You revealed yourself to human beings through the Law and prophets, so we might know, love and serve you, but when we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies, you displayed your boundless love and goodness in your Son.

Jesus Christ, you not only brought Good News in words and deeds, but gave your life at Calvary to break the power of Satan and to atone for the sins of the world. Rising from the tomb, you broke the power of death and offer us eternal life through faith in you.

Holy Spirit, when Jesus ascended to heaven, you came to inspire, comfort and guide us through our life, because your power lives within us. Amazing Trinity, hear and accept our heartfelt praise and adoration.

Thank you, O Lord, for all the good things that we enjoy, for the wide variety of gifts you offer us: our lives, our homes, our families and our friends, for everyone who has brought light and joy into our lives and for opportunities and experiences that have enriched our lives. As we look around on this Summer's day, we thank you for this beautiful world and for your enduring love, for even when we stray from you, we know that in love you seek us out and welcome us home.

Merciful God, we confess that sometimes we do not appreciate all the blessings you bestow upon us. Sometimes we spurn your gifts because they require us to use them for the well-being of other people, rather than our own prestige or benefit. At other times we abuse your gifts, or simply ignore them because of our laziness, fear, or sense of unworthiness. Often, we let you down because we try to act in our own strength, rather than calling on the Holy Spirit to empower, guide and encourage us. O Lord, in Jesus' lovely name pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, you hear and answer our prayers, so we are confident that you have forgiven us and call us to serve you. From now on, let the Holy Spirit rule our words and deeds, so we live as you desire us to and use our gifts of the Spirit for the good of the Church and our neighbours, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

***As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:***

**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 this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

*Our second hymn was written by Michael Saward, a former Canon at St. Paul's and author of "Christ triumphant". He was an avowed evangelist and was accused of being a 'trendy lefty' by Margaret Thatcher. We shall sing hymn number 400, 'Wind of God, dynamic Spirit.'*

**1. Wind of God, dynamic Spirit,  
Breathe upon our hearts today;  
That we may your power inherit,  
Hear us, Spirit, as we pray:  
Fill the vacuum that enslaves us –  
Emptiness of heart and soul;  
And, through Jesus Christ who saves us,  
Give us life and make us whole.**

**2. Voice of God, prophetic Spirit,  
Speak to every heart today  
To encourage or prohibit,  
Urging action or delay:  
Clear the vagueness which impedes us –  
Come, enlighten mind and soul;  
And, through Jesus Christ who leads us,  
Teach the truth that makes us whole.**

**3. Fire of God, volcanic Spirit,**

**Burn within our hearts today;  
Cleanse our sun – may we exhibit  
Holiness in every way:  
Purge the squalidness that shames us,  
Soils the body, taints the soul;  
And, through Jesus Christ who claims us,  
Purify us, make us whole.**

© *Michael Seward (1932 - )*

***We come to our prayer of intercession. Let us pray***

Heavenly Father, we offer our thanksgiving and praise for how you have blessed our lives in so many ways. Help us to share your grace by serving our neighbours as your earthly hands, by doing good as often as we can to as many people as we can for as long as we can. However, sometimes the situations we face are far beyond our powers, but nothing is beyond your wisdom and might. Therefore, when the best we can offer is inadequate, warm the hearts of people who possess such wisdom and power, so they may heal some of the brokenness in the world.

Lord, thank you for the peace and security we enjoy, for we know that so many countries are troubled and needy. We pray for aid to reach the victims of natural disasters promptly, especially those affected by recent flooding in Congo, Rwanda and Malawi, but particularly everyone affected by the devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. May generous aid be offered by governments around the world, not only to these lands, but to countries afflicted by droughts and famine. We ask a special blessing upon work being done by charities like the Disasters Emergency Committee, All We Can and Christian Aid to provide such victims with desperately-needed aid.

We remember people who are sick, lonely, bowed down by the pressures of life and bereavement, for all who live with a dementia, their families, friends and everybody who cares for their needs. In a time of silence, we bring our concerns for them to you, confident that, as we name them in our hearts, you will know their needs and reach out to them. ....

Gracious Lord, where it is possible let us be part of the answer to our prayer, by being sensitive to their needs and offering them practical support. Enfold them in the warmth of your love that they be healed, comforted and receive hope, courage and a lasting peace.

Lord, we know so many countries caught up conflict, and so we pray for the peace of the world, particularly in Ukraine, Sudan and Jerusalem, asking that peace and justice be established and prevail. We pray for the leaders of the world's nations. May they govern justly and with mercy, for without justice and compassion there is no real peace. In your loving-kindness remember the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice. Lord, help them find justice and healing, so they can rebuild their lives in hope and security.

Heavenly Father, you provide us with a feast of love, so we may share its abundance with our neighbours. Therefore, we pray for this church and indeed the whole Church of Christ, that we learn to live in the unity of the one Spirit and take Good News to all peoples in words and deeds of love. Heavenly Father, help us work together in outreach and help us bear the gospel light to a world darkened by materialism, sin and want. Grant us the faith and steadfastness we need to answer our call to serve the risen Lord.

Abba, heavenly Father, look upon us, our friends and families with loving-kindness. May the power of the Holy Spirit, keep us from harm, help us resist the temptation to sin, and, most of all help us to live out the gospel message in all that we do and say, so our

lives bring the gospel light into our world and we honour your holy name through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Our Old Testament reading is Isaiah chapter 6 verses 1 to 8**

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." 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!" Amen.

### **The Gospel reading is John chapter 16 verses 1 to 15**

"All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.

Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you." Amen.

*We continue our worship as we sing a hymn by Revd. Michaela Youngson, President of the Methodist Conference in 2018. She was born in Cornwall, raised in Yorkshire and trained for the Ministry at Queens, Birmingham. She is an author, broadcaster and, importantly, has written a splendid hymn, which we shall now sing! Hymn number 399, 'When deep despair casts out all light'.*

**1. When deep despair casts out all light  
And hope is wearing thin;  
Come Spirit, dance with gentle grace,  
Shine through the dullness we embrace**

**And make the colours sing;  
And make the colours sing.**

**2. When greed dictates that children die  
And poverty holds sway;  
Come Spirit, burn as living flame,  
Prompt us to act to end this shame;  
Cast apathy away;  
Cast apathy away.**

**3. When colour, lifestyle, creed or name  
Cause groundless hate and fear;  
Come Spirit, weave a web of peace,  
That prejudice and violence cease;  
Reveal God's purpose here;  
Reveal God's purpose here.**

**4. When guilt and fear tear us apart  
And faith's a bitter thing;  
Come Spirit, dance with gentle grace,  
Shine through the dullness we embrace  
And make the colours sing;  
And make the colours sing.**

© *Michaela Youngson*

**Sermon:** *"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth."* John 16:13

Sixty years ago last April, at R.A.F. Cosford, I flew three solos that qualified me for a glider pilot's licence. I was apprehensive because on my first pre-solo test glide I had a very heavy landing. When you land the glider you need to approach the landing strip at sixty miles per hour, but on that occasion it was raining heavily and, as the glider had an open cockpit, it felt as though grit was being thrown in my face. Half-blinded, I failed to round out in time, resulting in a huge bump as the glider bounced about thirty feet into the air, after which I regained control and landed without further mishap. I heard what I took for a shout of fury from the Chief Flying Instructor behind me, but the shout was one of pain, as his plywood seat had collapsed and he had splinters in his posterior. To my surprise, he took me up for two more test flights – in a different glider – then said I was fit to fly solo, adding that if I applied all he'd taught me, I'd have no problem. Not only was he right, but I performed a textbook emergency landing on my qualifying circuit when the winch that launched the glider failed when I was at only five hundred feet. The CFI complimented me for how I handled the situation, though I suspect he had his fingers crossed!

What does this have to do with our readings today? In John's gospel, Jesus was praying for his disciples at the Last Supper when his earthly ministry had reached its climax. In a few weeks they would be commissioned to take the Good News to the world, but they were signally unready, so he prayed for them and gave them the equivalent of a pre-solo briefing. Our reading about the call of the Prophet Isaiah in 742BC is couched in awe-inspiring imagery, as the Lord's greatness and holiness seemed to overwhelm the mighty temple in Jerusalem. It is not intended as a literal picture, but an attempt to convey the overwhelming nature of God's power in words, just as Luke had described the Holy Spirit's presence in imagery of a great wind and tongues of fire in that locked room at Pentecost. The real significance of Isaiah's call was his

awareness of his unworthiness to serve as a prophet and the Lord's grace in cleansing him of his sins, so he could speak for Him. Isaiah was not the only prophet or patriarch who expressed his sense of unworthiness: Moses declared that he was a hopeless public speaker – so the Lord used Aaron as his helper – while Jeremiah said he was too young for the Israelites to accept him. Nevertheless, they submitted to God's will and far exceeded their expectations.

In gospel reading we move forward eight centuries to Jesus as he addressed his disciples at the Last Supper. He warned them that like him, they would be rejected, be excluded from public worship and even killed because many Jews would not accept the Good News they were commissioned to spread throughout the world. Jesus added that he was going to return to his Father in heaven, but they should not be grief-stricken, for unless he was crucified, raised from death and ascended to heaven, then the Paraclete – the Holy Spirit – could not come to them and live in them, because Christ would not have fulfilled his ministry. Jesus explained how the Holy Spirit would empower them: **“he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment”** means the Spirit will convince people that they are wrong not to accept Jesus and the gospel message, so like the three thousand at Pentecost they will repent, turn to Christ and be baptised in his name; he will set believers right with the Father through grace, so they are free to serve in response to God's boundless love and the Spirit will condemn Satan and his followers, diminishing their power until the end of time when they will be destroyed. Jesus added, **“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you”**, Taking us to the heart of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God the Father has always wanted a special relationship with human beings, yet attempts to do so through the Mosaic Law and the prophets failed to turn human hearts to him. Indeed, the God of the Old Testament was perceived as fierce and unapproachable.

Therefore, in order to reveal his true nature, God the Son shared our mortal flesh and showed through both his teaching and healing that the Father is loving, merciful and inclusive; he did not only love his Chosen People, but cares for everyone. Moreover, in order to let us draw close to the Father, Jesus redeemed us from our sins by dying at Calvary as the once-all sacrifice for the sins of the whole world: Christ's death and resurrection have made us God's holy people, his earthly children. However, we cannot answer our call in our own strength, for we need understanding, guidance and courage to face the world, which is where the Holy Spirit comes into the equation. He guides us, strengthens us and gives us a deeper understanding of who God is and what he wants us to do.

Last week, we read how a hundred and twenty hopeless, indecisive, terrified failures hiding inside a bolted room in Jerusalem received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and were so emboldened that they poured out onto the street, praising God in every known tongue. Peter, a fisherman by trade, not a preacher, spoke to the assembled crowd with such authority and clarity that three thousand men and no doubt more women and children became believers, were baptised, received the Holy Spirit and were

empowered to live out and proclaim the gospel message. Thus began the Church that so terrified the Roman Empire that it brutally tried to suppress Christianity until Constantine made it the state religion three centuries later.

The Church has survived attempts to destroy it for two thousand years because it proclaims God's truth: if it were based on a series of lies, it would not have done so. The Spirit is not just confined to ancient history: he / she lives and works today, sometimes in unexpected and unsuspecting people: Bob Geldof, who was moved to found Band Aid in response to a terrible famine in Ethiopia in 1985; Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, who transformed South Africa from Apartheid to a rainbow nation and I dare say, doctors, nurses, paramedics and carers, who committed themselves to the wellbeing of others, even at the cost of their own health and lives, during this COVID 19 pandemic. Actually, I believe they are motivated by practical love through which God reveals himself. God is seen in us when we show our love for neighbours nearby or far away and share Good News with them. The Spirit is here to empower us when we answer Christ's call and he / she won't let us down, for the Father who loves us so much that he gave his only Son as the Saviour and friend of all will live in us when we trust in him. Amen.

*We conclude our worship as we sing hymn number 398, written by Revd. Brian Wren at Pentecost, 1969, when he was a Congregational Minister at Hockley, Essex. The hymn reminds us that the Spirit not confined to the dust of history, but is alive and well, working in the world today. We shall sing, 'There's a spirit in the air,'*

- 1. There's a spirit in the air,  
Telling Christians everywhere:  
Praise the love that Christ revealed,  
Living, working, in our world.**
- 2. Lose your shyness, find your tongue;  
Tell the world what God has done:  
God in Christ has come to stay;  
Live tomorrow's life today!**
- 3. When believers break the bread,  
When a hungry child is fed,  
Praise the love that Christ revealed,  
Living, working, in our world.**
- 4. Still his Spirit leads the fight,  
Seeing wrong and setting right:  
God in Christ has come to stay;  
Live tomorrow's life today!**
- 5. When a stranger's not alone,  
Where the homeless find a home,  
Praise the love that Christ revealed,  
Living, working, in our world.**
- 6. May his Spirit fill our praise,  
Guide our thoughts and change our ways:  
God in Christ has come to stay;  
Live tomorrow's life today!**

**7. There's a Spirit in the air,  
Calling people everywhere:  
Praise the love that Christ revealed,  
Living, working, in our world.**

© *Brian A. Wren {born 1936}*

***Benediction***

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and for evermore. Amen.**