

A service for any Methodist Church (StF)

10.30 a.m. 7th June, 2020 Trinity

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!'

Let us pray.

Holy, holy, Holy God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, 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, who not only brought Good News in words and deeds, but gave his life at Calvary to redeem us from our sins. When he ascended to heaven, you sent your Holy Spirit to inspire, comfort and guide us through our life, because your power lives within us.

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, 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 Seward, 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.'

In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and its needs.

Creator God, as we praise and thank you for this beautiful world, we are only too well aware of its brokenness, some of which is caused by natural disasters, but much of which is the result of mankind's failure to recognize and honour kingdom values such as justice and loving-kindness. As our response to your amazing grace may your gift of the Holy Spirit help us to serve you in whatever way we can to make our contribution to the wellbeing of our neighbours, nearby and far away from us. Sometimes, when the best we can offer is inadequate, in those circumstances we ask you to warm the hearts of and motivate people who can really make a difference.

God of love, hear our prayer for peace, founded upon justice and mercy, throughout the world. May your Spirit guide governments of all nations, so they learn the value of negotiation and a willingness to compromise when disputes arise, so armed conflict is avoided. We remember, too, the victims of warfare, terrorism and persecution throughout the earth. Grant all of them effective support, courage and hope, so they may rebuild their broken lives.

Gracious God, in the name of our risen Lord Jesus, create within us a desire to build a world where kingdom values are upheld: where we strive to help the poor here and abroad; where we share justly the earth's resources,

rather than fighting over them; where we work together for the common good, accepting, indeed, rejoicing over our differences and standing up against prejudice in any of its forms.

Heavenly Father, as we share the grief of families and friends who have lost loved ones during this pandemic, we pray for the deliverance of victims of COVID 19. Heavenly Father, many of us are filled with anguish at the immense suffering of people here and abroad. Lord, the bleakness of both the gloomy news and the strains of the lockdown are severely testing our faith and resolve. Reassure us that you are with us throughout this time of trial, so we all may face an uncertain, even threatening future, with hope grounded in your salvation.

Lord of life, hear our prayer for the NHS which we know is under immense pressure. May it receive all the support and equipment it needs to heal the sick and to grow to meet the changing needs of our society. Bless all doctors, nurses, ancillary staff, care workers, key-workers and kind-hearted volunteers, who potentially put themselves in harm's way as they seek to help Coronavirus patients and vulnerable members of society. We pray especially for our local hospitals, as well as all in our community whose efforts keep us safe. Grant them the determination and courage they need to cope with the pressures they are facing and keep them safe in their work.

Spirit of healing, whose loving-kindness is boundless, let the light of your love shine upon people in our community who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble: for all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, that they may find healing, renewed strength and peace, not only as a result of the care and support they receive, but by experiencing your holy presence in their time of need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them; grant them comfort in their distress, reassurance in their confusion and a sense of being valued for who they are.

Loving God, remember neighbours who are lonely, afraid, broken-hearted, overworked, or who are facing a broken relationship, as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, trusting that you will know their need and will reach out in compassion to them..... Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, from which there is healing, courage, strength and peace.

Holy God, on this anniversary of the birth of the Church, grant that this church and churches throughout the world may unite in love and action, so we represent the glory of shalom, the kind of peace which passes understanding and offers your full blessing. May we bear the Gospel light bravely in a sceptical and sometimes hostile world in Jesus' name.

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 next hymn is on the sheets provided and was written last year. We shall sing, 'God of eternity'.

**1. God of eternity,
One Holy Trinity,
No more a mystery
Through Jesus, our Lord:
God of infinity,
Gracious divinity,
Shared our humanity
And gave us his Word. *Chorus:***

*O, Holy Trinity,
How could it ever be
Off'ring salvation
To sinners like me?*

**2. Father of time and space,
Bearer of boundless grace,
You love the human race
With all of its flaws;
Revealed your holy ways,
Ordained our prayers and praise,
Sustains us all our days
And gave us your laws. *Chorus:***

**3. Jesus our friend and King,
Came to salvation bring,
Yielding up everything
Except for love:
Came to reveal God's grace,
Save Adam's fallen race;
On the cross took our place,
Yet rose from the grave. *Chorus:***

**4. Spirit like wind and fire
Our feeble souls inspire;
Grant we may never tire
Of bringing you praise.
Comfort and guide us still,
Fruits of our faith instil;
Us with your goodness fill
Throughout our days. *Chorus:***

*O, Holy Trinity,
From our fears set us free,*

So we can serve you

With both love and glee.

M. Rider. (1st June, 2017 – on holiday in Aberdyfi – to “Meekness & Majesty” StF362)

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 hymn number 398, written by Revd. Brian Wren at Pentecost, 1969, when he was a Congregational Minister at Hockley, Essex. It reminds us that the Spirit is alive and well today. We shall sing, ‘There’s a spirit in the air,’

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

As a follower of West Bromwich Albion, it ought to pain me to confess my admiration of Stan Cullis, in my opinion Wolverhampton Wanderers’ greatest manager, though modern fans might claim Nuno Espirito Santo as their number one. However, Mr. Cullis managed a truly great team throughout the 1950s, for his discipline was legendary and a pep talk at half time would often transform the team from probable defeat to victory. He did not resort to the hairdryer tirades of Sir Alex Fergusson, but he stood no nonsense and his players respected him, more than fearing him. He had the ability to make players believe not only in his tactics, but in themselves, so they could go out and defeat even the toughest of opponents.

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 matter of weeks they were to be commissioned to take the Good News to the world, but they were signally unready to succeed, so he prayed for them and gave them the equivalent of their half-time pep talk. 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 overflow the mighty temple in Jerusalem. It is not intended as a literal picture, but an attempt to convey in words the overwhelming nature of God’s power, just as Dr. Luke described the Holy Spirit’s presence in imagery of a great wind and tongues of fire that rested on all of the hundred and twenty 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 God. 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, he submitted to God’s will and far exceeded their expectations.

In our 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, they would be excluded from public worship and even killed because many Jews would not accept the Good News they had been commissioned to spread throughout the world. Jesus said 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."** This takes us to the heart of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God the Father has always wanted a special relationship with human beings, yet attempt to do so through the Mosaic Law and writings of the prophets failed to turn human hearts to him. Indeed, the God of the Old Testament was perceived of as fierce and ready to punish wrongdoers.

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, the Jews, 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: our sins, which kept us from a right relationship with God are pardoned through grace when we accept Jesus as the Messiah, so we become 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, strengthen 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.

The Spirit is not just confined to ancient history: he 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 for transforming South Africa from Apartheid to a rainbow nation and, dare I say it, doctors, nurses, paramedics and carers, who have committed themselves to the wellbeing of others, even at the cost of their own health and lives, during this COVID 19 pandemic. Actually, I dare to say it, for they are motivated by practical love through which God reveals himself. He is seen in us when we show our love for neighbours nearby or far away and dare to share Good News with them.

The Spirit is here to empower us when we answer Christ's call and he 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 everybody will live in us when we trust in him. Amen.

“We would seek your great commission: / sending us to every place – / preach, baptise, fulfil; my mission, / serve with love and share my grace.” We conclude our worship as we sing hymn number 410, ‘Lord, your Church on earth is seeking’

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.