

**A service for 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2021 Trinity (StF)**

**Call to Worship: Romans chapter 8 verses 14 to 16**

The true children of God are those who let God's Spirit lead them. The Spirit we received does not make us slaves again to fear; it makes us children of God. With that Spirit we cry out, "Abba, Father." And the Spirit himself joins with our spirits to say we are God's children. Amen.

*Devout Jews address God with the words 'Qadosh! Qadosh! Qadosh!', or 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' during their worship, but our opening hymn published in 1826 by Bishop 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 237, '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,**

**Although 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.**

**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.**

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**Let us pray.**

Holy, holy, Holy God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, your Word created our universe and all that lives within it. Your wisdom and power are far beyond our understanding and we have come to worship you today with reverence and joy, for you are our God and Saviour and from the earliest times, you have striven to draw us close to you: first through the Patriarchs and then the Prophets. You alone are worthy of all honour, glory power and praise.

When we still rebelled against you, you shared our humanity through your only Son, Jesus Christ. He not only taught us in his words and deeds how to live life to the full, but died on a cross of agony and shame to atone for the sins of the world. When you raised our Jesus from the tomb, you offered us life beyond our earthly span.

After he ascended into heaven, Jesus sent your Holy Spirit to guide, comfort and empower us in our discipleship. Therefore, God in three persons, accept and bless our worship, for we seek to glorify your holy Name. Amen.

***In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession, when I say, 'Merciful Lord', please respond with, 'forgive and renew us'.***

Almighty God, we offer heartfelt thanks for all the many blessings we receive from you: for the good things we enjoy; for everyone who guides, loves and inspires us, but most of all for your undying love. Forgive us when we are selfish or self-righteous and judgmental and when we've been unwilling to trust in your saving grace.

‘Merciful Lord’ ..... **‘forgive and renew us’**.

Help us to change our ways as we acknowledge our sinfulness. Restore us to righteousness, so our lives reflect the victory Jesus has won over sin and death. Re-ignite the embers of our faith, so we may play our part in building your kingdom here.

‘Merciful Lord’ ..... **‘forgive and renew us’**.

Heavenly Father, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and trust you have already graciously pardoned us. Lord God, teach us to share your gift of love with all-comers, so we may honour you in the beautiful name of Jesus, our risen Lord.

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 in 1813 by John Marriot, a priest and friend of Sir Walter Scott, and who, for modesty’s sake, never allowed any of his hymns to be published in his lifetime. Let us listen to hymn number 669, ‘Thou whose almighty word’.*

**1. Thou whose almighty word  
Chaos and darkness heard,  
And took their flight,  
Hear us, we humbly pray,  
And where the gospel day  
Sheds not its glorious ray,  
Let there be light!**

**2. Thou who didst come to bring  
On thy redeeming wing  
Healing and sight,  
Health to the sick in mind,  
Sight to the inly blind,  
O now to all mankind  
Let there be light!**

**3. Spirit of truth and love,  
Life-giving, holy Dove,  
Speed forth thy flight;  
Move on the water’s face,  
Bearing the lamp of grace,  
And in earth’s darkest place  
Let there be light!**

**4. Blessed and holy Three,  
Glorious Trinity,  
Wisdom, Love, Might,  
Boundless as ocean’s tide  
Rolling in fullest pride,  
Through the world far and wide,  
Let there be light!**

***In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and its needs. When I say, 'Lord in your mercy', please respond, 'Empower us with your Spirit'.***

Loving God, we believe that all things are possible for you, so whilst we offer ourselves to do what we can to ensure the wellbeing of our neighbours, we turn to you in situations that are beyond our power, asking that you will reach out in mercy to bring an end to so much suffering around the world. May your living Spirit guide us in our discipleship.

**'Lord in your mercy' ..... 'Empower us with your Spirit'.**

We pray for all churches in our Circuit and, indeed, for churches throughout the world. Teach us to speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and to serve him in unity of mission. May your Spirit help us bear the gospel light to this suffering and sin-darkened world. We pray that you will bring us safely through this pandemic and renew our calling.

**'Lord in your mercy' ..... 'Empower us with your Spirit'.**

God of shalom, of peace and unity, we grieve about the brokenness of relationships in so many countries. We pray for the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice. Breathe your Spirit upon national leaders; warm their hearts and lead them along the paths of peace, mercy and justice. Remember, particular the conflict in the Holy Land, let the end to hostilities continue to hold and may we see the start of meaningful negotiations that will enable Jews and Arabs to co-exist peacefully.

**'Lord in your mercy' ..... 'Empower us with your Spirit'.**

Loving Lord, inspire and guide people who care for our environment and who are striving to keeping earth habitable for future generations. We pray, too, for people who campaign for a fair and proper use of the world's resources, including the distribution of coronavirus vaccines to countries like India and Brazil, where many people are suffering with and dying from coronavirus and where their health systems are being overwhelmed. May your Spirit inspire countries that can offer support to do so swiftly.

**'Lord in your mercy' ..... 'Empower us with your Spirit'.**

Heavenly Father, we remember before you people whose memories and faculties are diminishing because of a dementia and also their families, friends and carers who are struggling to cope and whose distress has been increased by this pandemic. Grant all of them the support and hope they need to keep going.

We pray for people we know who are sick in body, mind or spirit; those who are in any kind of need or trouble; neighbours who are living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and, in particular, everybody who mourns the loss of somebody dear. In a time of silent reflection, we offer you names of people for whom we are especially concerned. .... Lord, help us to offer them both practical support and friendship, but warm them with your love, so they may find comfort, healing, courage and enduring peace.

**'Lord in your mercy' ..... 'Empower us with your Spirit'.**

We ask you to bless everybody who is working for our wellbeing, especially members of the NHS, scientists who are developing vaccines and cures, for carers and key-workers, as they try to bring us through this time of trial and anguish. Keep them safe and grant them success in their endeavours.

**'Lord in your mercy' ..... 'Empower us with your Spirit'.**

Abba, Father God, bless us all, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and help us to lead Christ-centred lives by sharing your abundant love with all-comers, in the name of our risen Lord Jesus, to whom be glory and honour for evermore. Amen.

*We continue our worship with a hymn from “Hymns and Psalms”, written by Charles Wesley. Number 300, ‘Father of everlasting grace’.*

**1. Father of everlasting grace,  
Thy goodness and thy truth we praise,  
Thy goodness and thy truth we prove;  
Thou hast, in honour of thy Son,  
The gift unspeakable sent down,  
The Spir’t of life and power and love.**

**2. Send us the Spirit of thy Son,  
To make the depths of Godhead known,  
To make us share the life divine;  
Send him the sprinkled blood to apply,  
Send him our souls to sanctify,  
And show and seal us ever thine.**

**3. So shall we pray and never cease,  
So shall we thankfully confess  
Thy wisdom, truth, and power, and love,  
With joy unspeakable adore,  
And bless and praise thee evermore,  
And serve thee as thy hosts above:**

**4. Till, added to that heavenly choir,  
We raise our songs of triumph higher,  
And praise thee in a bolder strain,  
Out-soar the first-born seraph’s flight,  
And sing, with all our friends in light,  
Thy everlasting love to man.**

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**The Gospel reading is John chapter 3 verses 1 to 17**

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said,  
“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

In reply Jesus declared,

“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

“How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”

Jesus answered,

“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that

everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Amen.

### **Sermon: The Trinity and Jaffa Cakes!**

Trinity Sunday fills some preachers, Ministers and Priests with apprehension, as sermons about the Holy Trinity are not easy, though St. Patrick taught some hostile Irish Druids about the Trinity more than 1400 years ago, using a shamrock. The term, ‘Trinity’, does not appear in the Holy Bible. It was first used by Tertullian at the end of the Second Century, at the time of the Apostles’ Creed and only came into full use during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries after the Nicene Creed had been agreed. What, you may ask, are these references to Creeds? The answer lies in the disagreements between early Christians about Jesus’ nature and our beliefs. The concept of the Holy Trinity was unknown to Jews in the First Century AD. Even a scholar like Nicodemus struggled.

The reading from John’s gospel shows how a devout Pharisee, Nicodemus, sought answers from Jesus when he was wrestling with his teachings. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, a Scriptural scholar and a seeker of God’s kingdom. He acknowledged that Jesus had come from God, saying, **“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”**

His problem was the idea of being ‘born-again’. Jesus explained that this meant being filled with the Holy Spirit after baptism, but Nicodemus still found the concept hard to grasp – it was outside his knowledge and experience – and Jesus told him that he needed to have faith. He ended by telling the Pharisee about his role: **‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.’**

Clearly, Nicodemus learned to trust in Jesus, for he defended him in the Sanhedrin during the Feast of Tabernacles and he accompanied Joseph of Arimathea to ask for Jesus’ crucified body. Such actions show that Nicodemus’ doubts had been replaced by strong faith, though he probably had no real grasp of the reality of the Holy Spirit until her coming at Pentecost.

Let us consider the Trinity using a Jaffa cake (a Mars bar works as well, but I like Jaffa cakes). If we take the sponge cake as representing God, we have the Creator and sustainer of all life, a mighty, awesome and holy God, who was seen in the Old Testament as a remote, all-powerful and demanding figure, quick to punish and unfathomable in his ways. He wants to draw us into a special, close relationship, but when the law he gave Moses failed to achieve it, he took human form as Jesus Christ.

Let us consider Jesus as the layer of orange in the Jaffa cake. His ministry not only taught us how we should live, but it revealed his Father’s true nature. God is faithful, forgiving and self-giving. In short, God is boundless love. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, while his resurrection declares that death no longer has the final word. Jesus is not just a great prophet: he is both human and divine; God in man.

The top layer of chocolate represents the Holy Spirit who, in last week’s account from Acts was received by the hundred and twenty followers in Jerusalem. Everyone was transformed by the Spirit from frightened, indecisive and feeble friends of Jesus into fearless preachers of the Good News of God’s Salvation. However, the Holy Spirit

is not confined to the dust of history: she inspires and empowers people now. I am convinced she has been at work amongst NHS staff on critical care wards throughout the pandemic, as well as in care homes. I believe she inspired Marcus Rashford in his campaign for meals to be provided for under-privileged children during school holidays. Many of our best charities like Christian Aid and Action for Children have been inspired by the Spirit.

So, there we have it: God is a Trinity of three separate beings, but one in essence, just as a Jaffa cake is one cake with three components. If we are to succeed as disciples, we need to recognize the love and sovereignty of God the Father whose nature was revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, his Son and the inspiration, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. May we serve the Father by answering the Son's call in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*We shall conclude our worship with a clarion call to evangelize by Canon Edward Burns. It was written in 1968 as part of a challenge to write evangelical hymns in the diocese of Blackburn. Hymn number 418, 'We have a gospel to proclaim,'*

**1. We have a gospel to proclaim,  
Good news for all throughout the earth;  
The gospel of a Saviour's name:  
We sing his story, tell his worth.**

**2. Tell of his birth at Bethlehem –  
Not in a royal house or hall,  
But in a stable, dark and dim,  
The Word made flesh, a light for all.**

**3. Tell of his death at Calvary:  
Hated by those he came to save,  
In lonely suffering on the cross,  
For all he loved his life he gave.**

**4. Tell of that glorious Easter morn;  
Empty the tomb, for he was free.  
He broke the power of death and hell  
That we might share his victory.**

**5. Tell of his reign at God's right hand,  
By all creation glorified.  
He sends his Spirit on his church  
To live for him, the Lamb who died.**

**6. Now we rejoice to name him King:  
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.  
This gospel message we proclaim:  
We sing his glory, tell his worth.**

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### ***Benediction***

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forevermore. Amen.**