

THE SUNDAY SUPPLEMENT

7th June 2020 – Trinity Sunday

Welcome to this week's *Sunday Supplement*. For those who can access it, a service of Holy Communion is available on our YouTube channel from 7am Sunday.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMSD6J4ngi9rCe7kzY66Xfw>

The video includes an opportunity to share in the prayer for Spiritual Communion which is set out on page 4 of the *Supplement*.

READINGS & COLLECT

Isaiah 40:12-17, 27-end

Psalms 8

2 Corinthians 13:11-end

Matthew 28:16-20

*Almighty and everlasting God,
you have given us your servants grace,
by the confession of a true faith,
to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity
and in the power of the divine majesty
to worship the Unity:
keep us steadfast in this faith,
that we may evermore be defended from all adversities;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

Amen.

SUNDAY MESSAGE

This message is also available as the sermon in our recorded communion service.

Today we read and hear the climax of Matthew's Gospel. Matthew doesn't have an ascension story, but these words have a joyful air of finality about them. There is a sense that something is drawing to a close, a farewell, just as our epistle, the closing words of Second Corinthians, is a farewell. But, as we saw through Ascension and Pentecost, Christ's Ascension to heaven is both the inauguration of his kingly rule and also the occasion for the gift of the Spirit. It is very far from being the end of the story. It is, as Churchill might have said, perhaps the end of the beginning. God with us

always. Paul draws his own words of farewell from the Trinitarian subject matter of today's Gospel and, in doing so, he brings forth the words that we know as the Grace, words with which we so often close our activities, our worship or prayer.

There are two key themes in today's Gospel. The first of these is about Jesus's identity. Matthew notes that Jesus is an object of worship; Jesus talks about his universal authority over heaven and earth, and about his eternal presence with us until the end of the age; and finally he refers to himself on a level with the Father and the Spirit, in whose three names new believers are to be baptised.

This would have been surprising stuff for the Jewish listeners to whom it is thought that Matthew's Gospel may have been directed. They were not unaccustomed to the idea of God's Spirit, but to hear someone who was demonstrably a man place himself within the Godhead, would have been novel to say the least.

It's not surprising that there was doubt. All the Gospels record doubt about the resurrection among the disciples. In John, we have doubting Thomas. In Luke 24, the women run from the tomb to tell the apostles, but we are told that "these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." The longer ending of Mark's Gospel says the same of Mary Magdalene, "but when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it."

It is natural to doubt a miracle. If you doubt that there were or are miracles, then you are no worse than the twelve apostles. Why do we doubt? Because God has made us a perfectly ordered world, in which predictable laws enable us to predict what might happen next and make it possible to order our lives. When we find miracles hard to credit, we do no more than believe and trust in what God, the Creator of all things, has made. We are trusting in the Creator of whom Isaiah speaks, who needed no direction or advice. But as Isaiah says, even the scope and the multitude of Creation is small in comparison with its Creator. We need to take the fractional further step and believe in the Omnipotent God, whose

understanding is unsearchable, who can do all things. This is the God of miracles, outside the physical realm and yet always with us.

The Holy Trinity, which we celebrate and worship today, is a miraculous idea. The idea of one God in three indivisible persons is not something comprehensible by the standards or laws of the physical, temporal world. Here it is an impossibility. But God is prior to creation, existing outside and before what he has made. With God nothing is impossible. Accepting this is not the same as completely understanding it. Not the same as having no doubts about it. The Trinity is mysterious; it is a mystery, a sacred mystery.

In anthropology and ancient history, the concept of a sacred or holy mystery has two meanings. The first refers to mystery cults: systems (usually religious) in which some beliefs and practices are kept secret from the public, from those who have not been initiated. Mystery cults were very common and very popular in the ancient world. It makes us feel special to belong to something, an exclusive club, and it isn't easy to feel that we belong except by defining those who do not belong. And because, by definition, not everyone could belong to every cult, there had to be a great many cults to belong to.

The second meaning of mystery is almost the opposite of this: a fact that is completely public, completely open, known to all, but which lies outside the capacity of rational explanation. The Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, and indeed all miracles, are a mystery in this sense. The Holy Trinity, how God can be one yet also three, is perhaps the most important, the most sacred, the mystery at the heart of all these mysteries.

Many Christians wrestle with the Doctrine of the Trinity as if it were not a mystery at all, as if sufficient thought might crack the problem and explain, in physical or linguistic terms, how one God in three persons is possible. That is an attempt to reduce God to the level of the creation, and it will of its very nature be fruitless and doomed to fail. We just have to accept a Holy Mystery by faith, on trust. The Trinity is not a question demanding an explanation, it is an answer that has already been given, by the writers of scripture, by the early church. It is the best way that they could find in human language to explain how God was manifest. We realise from all that He said and did that Jesus was God. And yet we also know that He prayed to God, whom He addressed as 'Father'. Jesus also promises the Holy Spirit, who is God in us and who is sent by the

Father. And yet we are absolutely clear – and scripture is absolutely clear – that there is only one God. How can all this be? The only answer, as far as our language and understanding can express it, is The Trinity: one God, three persons, in perfect relationship and community. How such a thing is possible is a Holy Mystery, but that is what we see.

The second of Matthew's themes is what we now know as the Great Commission, Jesus' commandment to go and make disciples of all nations. So why is this commandment the focus of Trinity Sunday?

In truth, the Great Commission is as inextricably bound up with following the One, Trinitarian God, as the three persons of the Trinity are bound up with one another. Let us return to the idea of the sacred mystery. Faith in the Trinitarian God is not a secret mystery cult. It is available to all. Its beliefs, practices are known to all. When you are baptised, when you are confirmed, when you are licensed as a lay minister or ordained as a priest, there is no moment when the Bishop takes you aside and whispers some secret knowledge. Each one of us is permitted, nay encouraged, to know all that the others know of God. Faith is a divine mystery of the second kind, totally open, and yet embracing everything, up to and beyond the bounds of rational analysis.

As Christians, we don't live life in a fantasy world: on the contrary, we should be defined by our clear-sightedness about the world. We see that it is good, but we see its faults, and we see our own faults. We see that things could be better, could be closer to what God intends, could be closer to the perfection of God. Most particularly, we see that relationships between human beings, between individuals and between groups and nations, could be better; that they fall short of the ideal relationship, which is that between persons of the Godhead, so close that they are not divisible but one. And so we are called to speak of that relationship, and all that follows from it, to everyone. Such perfection of relationship, such perfect love, wants to welcome all, to draw everyone to it. It is the opposite of a mystery cult: without compelling anyone, it wants everyone to be a member, everyone to participate in the relationship, as fully as possible, as fully as they wish.

It is important, and apposite at present, to note that Jesus sent his followers out to make disciples of all nations, not just their own. We too are called to cross cultural boundaries, to remember (as St Paul said) that in a world of perfect relationships, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are

one in Jesus. You only have to listen to Paul's words to the Galatians to appreciate that he had got the Trinitarian message. All are one. Jesus is recorded as praying for this in John 17, that all his followers may be one, just as he and the Father are one. Jesus wants to draw us into the perfect relationship that subsists within the Godhead. And he calls us to model that relationship in our own relationships.

This is an apposite lesson as the United States is riven by protests over the failure to ensure that the relationship of nationhood crosses all cultural and racial boundaries. Let's remember in our prayers all those people of faith, and leaders of faiths, who are seeking peacefully, but firmly and courageously, for equality. They are on the stepping stones toward the perfect relationship of the Triune God. They are witnessing to it. As we know, Jesus never said the path would be easy. Faith in God is not about our own edification or comfort, although those things may sometimes be the happy incidents of faith. True faith in Christ, being drawn into and towards the Triune God, is about the sort of self-giving love which Christ modelled on the Cross. Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you, because of me."

As you go out into the world anew this Trinity Sunday, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. Amen.

PLEASE PRAY FOR

The family and friends of Margaret Read, whose funeral will take place in St Mary's Churchyard, Broughton, on Monday at 2pm. The cortege will pass through Broughton from High Keppleway prior to the service, if you wish to pay your respects. Please observe social distancing carefully.

NOTICES

If you need help that you can't get elsewhere, no matter what your age or circumstances, you can email duddoncommunity@outlook.com In Kirkby, you can phone Stephen Tudway (01229) 715259 or Linda Dean (01229) 889630. In Broughton and the valleys you can phone Stephen Tudway (01229) 715259 or Selwyn Wright (01229) 716797.

CLOSING PRAYER

*Almighty and eternal God,
you have revealed yourself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
and live and reign in the perfect unity of love:
hold us firm in this faith,
that we may know you in all your ways
and evermore rejoice in your eternal glory,
who are three Persons yet one God,
now and for ever.*

Amen.

Andrei Rublev's famous icon of the Trinity dates from the 15th Century. It depicts the three angels who visited Abraham at the Oak of Mamre (Genesis 18:1-8). Rublev has not depicted Abraham, or Sarah, or the slaughter of the calf. He concentrates instead upon the Angels, who represent the Trinity. Their unity is emphasised by their arrangement in a circle; their restrained gestures speak of effortless communion. They are the same size, sit on identical thrones and carry identical staves, expressing co-equality. All wear blue, the colour of divinity. The Angel on the left is God the Father, to whom the others incline their heads. Abraham's house stands behind this figure, indicating the creative power of the Father whose heavenly kingdom has many rooms. The central figure represents God the Son. Behind him stands the Oak of Mamre, recalling the Tree of Life and Jesus' death upon the Cross. He wears gold-edged crimson (symbolising incarnation and kingship). The Angel on the right stands for the Holy Spirit. Behind him stands the mountain, where one encounters God on earth. The green portion of his robe symbolises new life, but is also the Orthodox liturgical colour for Pentecost.



AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

You may wish to set aside a space for prayer in front of a cross and/or candle, in a part of the house which is calm and comfortable.

The Act of Spiritual Communion is best used at the time of normal church services, or as a personal response after listening to a broadcast or livestreamed service.

Guidance appears in italics. You may wish to say aloud the words in bold type.

Introduction

Begin by making the sign of the cross and thinking of those who might otherwise be sitting around you in church.



**In the name of the Father,
And of the Son,
And of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Reflection

God the Father forgives us in Christ and heals us by the Holy Spirit. Let us therefore put away all anger and bitterness, all slander and malice, and confess our sins to God our redeemer.

Father, you come to meet us
when we return to you:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Jesus, you died on the cross for our sins:
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

Spirit, you give us life and peace:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

May the Father forgive us by the death of his Son and strengthen us to live in the power of the Spirit all our days. Amen.

The Word of God

Read one or more passages of scripture, perhaps the readings set for the day. Today's readings can be found listed earlier in this Sunday Supplement. You may wish to read the sermon.

Prayer

Begin with the Collect. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to the needs of the world, our community, family and friends and to the prayers you ought to offer for them.

Spend time in silence to reflect on the issues raised in the readings or the sermon and apply them to your own life.

End with the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven... or

Our Father in heaven...

Prayer for Communion

This prayer may also be used at the appropriate point while watching a live or recorded service of Holy Communion.

**Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day.
Amen.**

(After the prayer of St Richard of Chichester)

Closing prayers

The Lord God almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
the holy and undivided Trinity,
guard us, save us,
and bring us to that heavenly city,
where he lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

**The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life. Amen.**