

## TRINITY SUNDAY

30/5/21

### CAVES BEACH

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

Gracious God, Creator of the universe, source and giver of love,

**we worship you.**

Jesus Christ, Chosen One of God, defeater of evil, founder of faith community,

**we are your disciples.**

Holy Spirit, Inspiration to the world, influence for good, hope for the future,

**we will work with you.**

#### Opening Prayer God: who comes

Come to us quietly, gently, O God.

**Enable us to hear your still small voice as we pray.**

Come to us in all the wonder and diversity of creation, O God.

**Enable us to respond with heartfelt praise and thanksgiving.**

Come to us in the person of Jesus and his saints of the ages, O God.

**Enable us to follow with faith and responsibility.**

Come to us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, O God.

**Enable us to bring light to the dark places. Amen.**

**HYMN 132** Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SHDNs7Dt5M>

#### PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Praise to you, loving Creator,

you are the source and origin of all things, all we see and all we cannot see,

thank you for life and everything that joins with us in our living a full life.

Praise to you, Son, flesh like our flesh, Word and light,

you provide us with the image of the Creator

and reassure us that we are loved.

Praise to you, Holy Spirit, wisdom and beloved friend,

in you we find peace and the strength to grow into people of grace and mercy.

Praise to you, loving Trinity,

as we delve into the mysterious knowledge

that all things are sacred

that all things are loved.

If we're honest it is a weird thing that you love us,

God, with all the wisdom that is on hand

for us to tap into we can be such foolhardy creatures,

we are careless with our words and the people with whom we live and work,

we get annoyed and lose patience,

we can be snooty and selfish and easily distracted from doing good,

and there are days when we stumble from one foible to the other

and struggle to live an examined and thoughtful life.

Yet your words to us are clear –

in you we find salvation.

**WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

God is not in the business of condemnation,  
Through the example of Jesus and work of the Spirit  
we are reminded that God's work is forgiveness and mercy,  
and as we step into the light of God's loving kindness,  
we can be assured that we will always receive grace.

## READINGS

- **Romans 8:12-17**

<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—<sup>13</sup> for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

- **John 3:1-17**

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." 3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about

earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

**HYMN 351** Lift high the cross

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ephp3TVkPVY>

## **SERMON**

How many of you realise that the Sunday after Pentecost is called Trinity Sunday? The Trinity is a theological construct that came about in order to try and explain the close presence of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit to each believer, so that we do not just pay lip service to some other worldly deity.

Today is a chance to deeply think about the nature of the God we serve and love.

How often have you heard the phrases of God the Creator, the Word and the Holy Spirit?

God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost?

And there are more!

How do you explain this group of three?

This has been a conundrum since the start of the Christian faith.

- How can one God be three Persons?

Great and insightful thinkers have laboured earnestly throughout the ages to try and expound this concept. They, and ourselves, can be tied up in knots trying to put the Trinity into succinct words. We can try and use analogies like me being a parent, a husband and a minister. However this sort of approach falls far short of the reality of God. In fact they can end up being confusing and divert our attention from the central issue.

Instead of trying to work out the **how** of God being Creator, Son and Holy Spirit we might have more success looking to the **experience**. That is what the Trinity is, experience.

- I experience God as my loving parent and creator, loving me for who I am, supporting me and guarding me.
- I also experience God as the Son, forgiving me, praying for me and giving me an example to follow.
- Then there is God the Holy Spirit, empowering me to be able to live out my faith in God and giving me the guidance to live my life for others.

For me the intricate doctrine of Trinity is of less relevance than the how.

- How do I experience God in my daily life?

It is that experience which gives me the connection to my faith that I seek to share with others.

For many years I tried earnestly to sort out the theological knots around the Trinity but now I simply choose to celebrate all that the Trinity can offer both you and me. God is part of our everyday lives.

- God the lover,
- God the forgiver &
- God the empowering force.

If we reflect on the experience of Nicodemus from John's Gospel this morning, we have an example of a person making the transition from theological debate to lived reality. Poor Nicodemus was struggling to comprehend the full nature of Jesus and his relationship to the Creator. Jesus circumvents this debate by calling on the learned academic to simply experience God.

Let's now look at the passage in more detail. To do this we need to immediately address the almost overused quote from verse 13. "You must be born again." How often have you been asked; 'Have you been born again?' Or challenged with a statement from another that they are a 'born again Christian.' It is almost like they seem to think that there are different levels of Christians. The King James version says: 'Born again.' However more accurate translations talk of 'being born from above.'

For many people being 'born again' has been used to refer to an instantaneous moment which accompanied an intense emotional experience as a sign that they truly accepted Christ as their personal Saviour. This has evolved into some traditions to the point that people to have experienced such an event in order to fully accepted as 'saved.' For them there are two levels of Christians and the higher one must have been 'born again.'

How many times have you been challenged by someone wanting to know if you are a true Christian because you have been 'born again' if you are a true Christian. If I had a dollar for every time that I have been asked that question I would a lot better off financially!

Some people look down on the Roman Catholic and some Anglican and other churches because they don't believe that their members are real Christians as they do not claim to be 'born again.'

In some traditions there is some sort of 'second conversion' when someone is 'born again.' The first stage is to decide to follow Christ and the second when you are 'filled with the Spirit' and start speaking in tongues, etc. Quite often these churches will perform baptism and/or re-baptism as a symbol of reaching this new level of faith.

There is only one major problem with this. Jesus did not say simply that you must be 'born again.' What Jesus said was: "If someone was not born from above, they are not able to see the Kingdom of God." This passage is not an instruction to be 'born again,' rather it is an invitation to an ongoing seeking of God's presence in their lives.

Let's now return to Nicodemus. He came to talk to Jesus under the cover of night. He is only mentioned in John's Gospel, none of the other Gospels refer to him. As a Pharisee he would have been a well educated leader in the Jewish community. Having witnessed the miracles and teaching that Jesus has openly shared he is unsure of how to react. By Chapter 7 we have Nicodemus asking his compatriots to allow Jesus a fair hearing. By Chapter 19 he is accompanying Joseph of Arimathea to collect Jesus' body for burial in a tomb.

For John, Nicodemus represents those who are on the periphery of Jesus followers. They witness the events and teaching but don't quite get to the point of making any full and public commitment.

How many people are there like that today?

How many of the people watching us on-line today might fit into this category?

There are so many people in our world today who will look at things, especially on-line but never take the next step to make any commitment to pursue an active and worshipping faith.

And what does Nicodemus say about Jesus in verse 2? “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God...” Again, there is respect there: he calls Jesus ‘Rabbi’. He even recognises the special nature of Jesus’ ministry: “We know that you are a teacher who has come from God”.

And yet Jesus knows Nicodemus’ heart and he knows that respect and affection and a partial rational understanding is not enough. “If someone is not born from above, they are not able to see the Kingdom of God.” What does he mean by this? I think there are three things here:

**ONE; It is not enough just to be a religious observer.**

Nicodemus knew about Jesus ministry, he listened to Him, he had witnessed His miracles and yet he had not yet understood the wonder of the Kingdom of God. There is a simple reason for this lack of understanding. Christianity is not an observable event, it is a way of living and being present with God.

This is where the ‘new begging’ or ‘new birth’ comes in. The participant needs to discover a new way drawing from God above.

Connecting with the Kingdom of God is not an event to be observed like some sort of spectator sport, it is a fully involved immersion into the Holy Spirit. In verse 5 Jesus says: “No-one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit”. He has said before that; “No-one can see the Kingdom...” now he qualifies that: “No-one can enter the Kingdom...except by water and Spirit”.

**TWO: Our faith calls us into active participation in the world.**

As Christians we are drawn into active participation in our community of faith. This is symbolised in the water of Baptism referred to by Jesus in the passage.

We are included into the whole Christian family in this sacrament. Like any family we need to contribute in whatever ways we can. We can come here and be part of that wonderful and sometimes wacky group of people known

as Caves Beach Uniting Church or we can link in through our Face Book page and connect from wherever we might be.

In view of this family connection we equally need to contribute in whatever ways we can. It is not a matter of what I can get out of this experience, but rather what can I contribute to it. After all it is as we connect with one another and spur on one another in whatever ways we can that we grow closer to God.

### **THREE: We are all included in the resurrection of Jesus.**

“No-one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.”

Nicodemus in verse 9 asks Jesus: “How can these things be?” In verse 10 Jesus responds simply: “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?”

Here is a man who has devoted much of his life to the study of scripture but he is like the ‘old bones’ in Ezekiel 37:5: “Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord to you: ‘I will cause the spirit to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put the spirit in you, and you shall live.’”

This is where the being ‘born again’ comes in. It draws on this Old Testament concept which was born out in the Resurrection of Jesus. So we come to verse 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

It is in the Crucifixion event that we source our salvation and Paul points out that we are united with Christ in both His death and resurrection.

So where are we in this discussion about being saved in the sense of the Trinity?

Nowhere does it include level one and level two Christians. It is not a matter of infant baptism verses adult baptism. We don’t need a separate baptism after experiencing the descent of the Holy Spirit on us. We don’t need to speak in tongues.

It is much more simple than that. “Unless you are born from above, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

The connection to the Trinity of Creator, Word and Holy Spirit is a matter of participation, not observation. We need to engage with the resurrection of

Jesus, who died and rose for us. We need to give our whole selves to God. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to be fully absorbed by us so that we live in humble service and prayer. Being born from above like this leads to a radical transformation that gives us new life.

This is what we celebrate in observing Trinity Sunday. We are celebrating our joint connection with God lived out in our every-day life. It is not so much a theology and a whole of life experience.

**HYMN 631** Father, Lord of all creation

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyquLv5A\\_b4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyquLv5A_b4)

### **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

May the Spirit of Christ, our saviour and friend, and the love of God our maker, travel with these gifts so they might be a blessing to all who receive them. Amen.

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Does God answer your prayers the way you expect?

There are quite a few of you here this morning who used to join in our Celebration of the High Tide each February. It was held on the waterfront at Black Ned's Bay, Beryl would come early to be first through the mangroves in our little aluminium boat with a frog decoration on the side.

However COVID prevented this activity for two Februarys which meant we had become two years older and it was becoming more difficult for Jeff to winch the boat and motor in and out of the water.

So the last time we struggled to put the boat and motor into the water suggested to Jeff that our boating times were over and he agreed that we should sell the boat.

So we were going to go for one last ride. While Jeff got everything ready I put the boat on Gumtree for a very reasonable price.

However when he started the motor the water pump did not work - he rested - restarted - but no water came out of the motor.

We wondered what to do - we prayed - Jeff asked that the water pump would work. He started the motor again and again but the water pump did not work- we were stunned and said nothing to each other. Then the phone rang - a man from the Central Coast wanted to buy the boat. - we had to

explain that the boat had no trailer and its water pump had stopped working. He said the water pump did not worry him and he would bring a box trailer to pick up the boat. He offered to pay over the phone but we said we would wait for him.

There were at least six phone calls from potential buyers while we waited. Our buyer parked his car and trailer in the park further up the bay. He and his wife sat in the boat and putted off to the park. - He did not use the oars.

Later we saw the aluminium boat with the frog on the side upside down on the box trailer being towed by the happy couple waving goodbye. This whole story took about two and a half hours from beginning to end.

That afternoon the man rang Jeff to say he had repaired the water pump and the motor was performing beautifully.

Does God answer your prayers the way you expect?

Let us pray.

Lord we think of all the little and big things we pray for in our lives which have been answered over time - in Your time - often in an entirely way.

Let us now give thanks for our own individual private prayers which have been answered recently.....

Lord there are so many things we want to talk to you about, to ask and to thank you - we know you are never busy to listen.

We thank you that our church services are almost "normal" again - are well attended by a happy and healthy congregation

We thank You that the Bible Study and Crafty Chat groups have recommenced so joyfully.

We thank you for all the talent that resides in our Church - for all the work that is done so efficiently and well - all the obvious things and those done behind the scenes to make our Church function like a well oiled machine.

We thank you for Wendy's ability to produce such an attractive and well organised "Church Chatter" - for Dorothy and her team of helpers in the kitchen and the presentation of the Church for special days, communion and also of overseeing of the Church Roster.

We thank You for the involvement of so many of our Church goers in our Sunday Services with the music — in the call to worship—Bible reading—prayer & preparation of morning tea. We pray You will bless each one and give them confidence.

We thank you for Mark Watt our minister for his enthusiasm and dedication to Caves Beach Uniting Church and Jan who holds all the Church organisation together.

We are so aware of how fortunate we are in NSW Australia - we give thanks for our relative freedom from the horrors, distress and inconvenience of the Covid Virus - this makes us so conscious of the needs of most of the world as they are suffering so deeply in every way - we bring them to you with immense concern asking for help in their horrific situations.

We are aware of all the world wide conflicts and wars - the unrest of the masses - and the planet earth's hiccups in disasters of all kinds even the dreadful mice plague in western NSW - we pray for solutions for all of these problems.

We thank You - and ask blessings on - the dedicated work of our political and health leaders in Australia and for those involved in the vaccine rollout.

We bring before you all of our church goers - the healthy and happy ones, the one who are suffering illness - pain- stress - conflict - doubt - criticism - loneliness. Lord you know our secret and hidden problems and difficulties which we bring before you in this time of silence .....

Let us worship with the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and for ever. Amen.

**HYMN 155** O Lord my God

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdE\\_NKyY\\_o0&t=8s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdE_NKyY_o0&t=8s)

### **BENEDICTION**

We have been given a vision of what our world is and what it can be when we hold on to the love of God our Creator, redeemer and friend.

As you move into the world, keep this vision in front of mind and heart and let it influence all your living.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhiG-Vj8CGU>