

TRINITY
26/5/24
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

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

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzM9P_Gqw-s

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Awesome God, your creative power, your glory and holiness are beyond our imagining, yet, you chose to reveal yourself in the person of Jesus Christ, who graciously showed us the human face of your love. He stretched our imaginations once more over the lengths he was prepared to demonstrate the depth of your love for us. And, as if that was not enough, you breathe new and everlasting life into our very beings, through the power of your Spirit. Triune God, Source of our lives, we worship and adore you.

God, creator of all the wonders which make up this world...

Forgive our failure to care for and protect this lovely land, its oceans,

rivers and lakes, and the air that we breathe each day.

God, bearer of our humanity in Jesus Christ...

forgive us when we fail to live out Jesus' commandment to love one another as he loves us.

God, giver of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us into all truth...

forgive us when we betray the truth of the gospel through our lack of integrity and our abuse of ethical and moral principles .

God, Creator, Redeemer, Life-giving Spirit, fill us anew with your creative power that we may be reborn in your image, glorifying you in and through who we are and what we do and say in Jesus' name. As Jesus' disciples and in his name we pray. Amen

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

"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. 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." So, hear the good news: "Those who believe in him are not condemned." (John 3 :16 - 18 NRSV)

Thanks be to God.

TALK

If the image of God that we heard about in our reading today reading was our only image of God, we might believe God to be too far removed from us to really care about us. But God's love for the world - for you and me - was so great that God decided that that love would be recognisable in a way we could all understand - and so God's love was born just as we are born - as a baby who grew up to adulthood. God's love took on human form in Jesus. And God's love did not die with Jesus, but was born in a new way - as Jesus' life and love within us is power we know as the Holy Spirit. So, while there is still one God, we experience God's love in many different ways - but perhaps in three very special ways: as awesome love; as tender love, and as personal love.. So, today, known as Trinity Sunday, emphasises again just how much we are loved by God.

READINGS

- **Romans 8:12–17**

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are obligated, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

- **John 3:1–17**

3 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 unless God is with that person.” 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 the 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 147 To God be the glory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU>

SERMON

Just before the readings I did a quick summary of some of the ideas of the Trinity. Not being based in any particular passage from the Bible the idea of the Trinity has always been a bit of a conundrum to describe. Being a Doctrine it is attempting to describe a concept which comes from the Bible but is not nailed down to any particular passage.

This morning I want us to explore the idea of the Trinity without being restricted by words. This is why I have this Iconoclasm on the screen for us to reflect on. I will bring this picture into the sermon shortly.

All the other special days and events on the liturgical calendar relate to the life of Jesus. The Trinity is trying to describe to us what God is like. It goes to the questions we might have about whether God is remote or intimate, vengeful or merciful, angry or offering generous love.

Some people like to think that the doctrine of the Trinity can be looked at as a scientific hypothesis. That is there is only one God but that God exists as a communion of three persons. This is not a theory that can be proven by scientific measurements. An hypothesis is simply a theory which is put forward to try and explain something that has been observed or experienced. This is used when what is being looked at does not fit with what was previously understood about the world. This is what the doctrine of the Trinity is addressing.

Early in the life of the first Christian churches there was a difficulty with just seeing God as one person. Equally they did not see that there were many gods. When they sat back and considered the issue the concept of the Trinity was the best way that they could describe the phenomena. It still is the best way of describing the God of the Bible today.

Like many of the theories which scientists struggle with today it is not easily put into words. In the past preachers have tried to explain it like water, steam and ice all being the same but in different states. Trying to simplify Einstein's theory of relativity to a tea cup is just as confusing. However the trouble with a simplistic explanation of the Trinity is that the deeper we get into it, especially as we move through life, the more mysteries there are to bring into the equation.

The Trinity is a mystery compared to a puzzle which can eventually be solved. Every year we come to the same conclusion on Trinity Sunday. That is, the realisation that the Trinity is more than just words.

Since very early in the life of the Christian church there have been discussions about ways of engaging other parts of the brain to describe the deeper mysteries of God. This has caused a lot of debate.

To help bring the words alive some communities developed icons. These were used as a support for prayerful reflection on different aspects of faith. For those who adopted this idea along with the written word, these objects put things onto colours and shapes which moved beyond words. It is not a matter of either one or the other, rather the icons can help to put depth and a reference point into what has been written.

Now looking at the icon on the screen today we have a masterpiece which was originally done by a Russian monk called Andrei Rublev over 600 years ago. While most references which we look to when speaking of the Trinity are in the New Testament, Rublev looks to the story of Abraham when he welcomes three messengers into his home next to a tree near a place called Mamre. If we look carefully we can see that tree in the background.

Abraham addressed the visitors by simply saying 'My Lord' in the singular. This is perhaps the earliest reference available to us in the Bible of the idea of a triune God. This icon of the Trinity is generally seen as one of the greatest of the Russian icons. One commentator in a 'tongue-in-cheek' manor referred to it saying: "There exists the icon of the Trinity by St Andrei Rublev; therefore, God exists!"

I doubt that this is correct but it goes to show how powerful this image can be for some people. What this image does is to raise the truth of the Trinity beyond simple logic or mere words and points to an expression of worship.

Looking at the icon we see three identical faces. There is no indication as to which member of the Trinity each figure represents. Some have tried to find differences in their clothing, but nothing is conclusive. To me this means that each member of the Trinity reflects the others and is equal.

Recently our reading from John's Gospel has Jesus saying that people who had seen the Son have also seen the Father. To me this brings out the idea that anyone who sees the love and the mercy in Jesus' message also sees the Father's grace. The Son is not some foil for an angry Father. Whatever we see in one member of the Trinity is equally true in the others.

For me these three figures are about love coming from the complete connection of the three. Each seems to be looking at the others with a loving expression, showing mutual reverence and deference. Where we have this level of connected communion there is no room for the rivalry which can so easily drag us apart. The connection flows around them like a circle.

In our study of the Trinity we can recall the Bible telling us that God is love and that love started before time and it is never going to leave us alone. In the Trinity there is a constant sharing and receiving of love that is complete in itself.

Building on this circle is the fact that this icon indicates that the love does not just remain in a closed circle. Looking back at the early chapters of the Old Testament we can see a constant theme of the ongoing creative love of God. In the same way we see the three figures bearing love in this icon so that each carries the flow of love and trust from God.

These images are not remote images. In Jesus we have one of the members of the Trinity taking on human form. In this process Jesus invited us to share in the divinity and the ongoing relationships with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Looking at the icon we can see that there is a place at the table for us. This is not a closed circle but a table that is open to each of us. Our presence completes the picture as we are invited to share in that radical hospitality.

In looking at this icon Henry Nouwen said: "It seems to beckon. It seems to say, 'Join us. Join us in the circle of true love, where there is joy for evermore.'" As we accept this invitation we are opening ourselves to all sorts of changes. We do not go ahead unchanged.

Suppose that we decided to regularly have a meal with another family who have welcomed you to their table. As time progresses you would be gradually drawn into the flow of their conversation and feel connected to their lives. To start with you might not be aware of all the idiosyncrasies of that family but as time progressed it would become second nature. It is so much more the case as we regularly gather for worship and our monthly communion followed by the fellowship of a cuppa after church.

If we can see the love and invitation into community in this icon we can see God beckoning us onward to be a welcome member of His family and we are invited to live in this world as people who follow Jesus.

With one member of the Trinity becoming human here on earth the whole Trinity also was drawn into the suffering of our broken human world. Into this ongoing suffering and death the divine Trinity also suffers. This is combined with the divine calling us into the divine love beckoning us constantly to a place of healing in the Christian community.

In the Trinity all our suffering is poured into the cup that Jesus holds. Consequently we see a cup on the table where Jesus offers Himself so that healing can be offered to our human woundedness. In this icon we are reminded that we are partakers of that cup of hope. That circle remained unbroken while the Son was in the world and ever since with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In our reading from John's gospel today we are sent like a seed on the wind which does not know where it is going and why. We are connected with that circle of love around that table in the icon. That table feeds our deepest hunger and heals our wounds from this world. It has no restrictions because of where we have been or where we might go.

As we are drawn into this communion of love that is the Trinity we, as followers of Christ and as a community of people who gather around that table, are called to be what this icon is, a beautiful, beckoning, inviting

revelation of the self-giving love and mutual submission and radical hospitality of the God who is known to us in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God and mother of all creation, as in the beginning, so now, and forever.

HYMN 693 Come as you are

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0cbQS55RTM>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

As we share in the offering together, let us remember our oneness with each other and with all of creation.

God of all that is,
even in our small lives,
in our small ways,
we participate in your great world
of love and generosity.
We dedicate what we have here
and who we are
to the wholeness that is your desire
for the world.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Good morning my brothers and sisters in Christ!
I have a lovely verse for you to enjoy!

Mountains and trees in layers unfold
like a misty ink wash tale be told,
God's brush strokes tranquil and bold.
Emerald blades of green in vibrant array
whispering tales of a sunlit day,
The Lords orchestra is in full display,
So we will all have a wonderful day
With God's blessings and love we pray. Amen.

John 3: 16-17, 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.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

There are many unavoidable challenges and trials in life and we invariably have to go through pain and suffering but God's reassuring arms wrapped around us, we will be able to bear our crisis and circumstances, and let Him strengthen our faith as we grow through them. Amen.

From this weeks Hunter Presbytery Prayer Diary 2024 is The Desmond Park Uniting Church.

Desmond Park Uniting Church is an active community of 40 - 50 regular worshipers with an age range from young children to elderly adults. Our 9.30am Sunday services take a variety of formats from traditional to a more modern and informal cafe church. Regular activities include Happy Feet (walking group), Faith@5 (young people's church on Saturday evenings run in conjunction with the New Lambton Uniting Church), Stitch and Chat, Meditation Group and a high school youth group (also run in conjunction the New Lambton Uniting Church). We have just committed to combine with the Shortland/Wallsend Uniting Church's to create a single Church Council while retaining two separate congregations. At present we are without a minister but are ready to embark on the process of finding a suitable person who will work with both congregations.

Lord we pray for the continuing development of a working relationship with Shortland/Wallsend Uniting Churches as both congregations learn to operate in a new era of joint governance and cooperation. We also pray for our growing relationship with the New Lambton Uniting Church as we journey together along the path of young people's ministry through Faith@5 and youth group ministry. We seek wisdom and discernment as we further develop our mission plan and begin developing a Church Profile with the aim of finding a Minister who will help develop our ministry here. Amen.

Loving Lord, we pray and lift up to you those who are suffering in body, mind or spirit. So many people are facing all kinds of trials due to ill health, conflict, poverty, injustice and living in war torn countries. Lord, we bring before you all those who have had to flee their homes due to persecution, conflict and war. Lord in your Mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord, we pray for all who are affected by natural disasters and issues of climate change that are having such a detrimental effect on people's livelihoods and putting many lives at risk. We pray that people living through such difficult times will find comfort and hope in you. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

We pray for world peace, political stability and bring wisdom and integrity to world leaders so that they will work for the good of the people that they govern and serve with compassion, apathy and understanding of their needs. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

In the precious name of your beloved son, our amazing Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus. Amen.

Please join me in singing 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 351 Lift high the cross
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ephp3TVkPVY>

BENEDICTION

We are children of God.
We are friends of God.
We are children of Earth.
We are friends of Earth.
We are one community.

We are one creation.
This is true.
This is reality.
Let us live this day in the oneness of all that is
and ever was.
Let us live as one community.
Go in trust and in hope.
Go in joy and in love.
Go in peace.
Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oqiFenpWxY>