



Weekly worship resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

Available in printed form and online at:
www.longniddrychurch.org.uk

Issue number 11: Sunday 24th May 2020

Today's reading

Mark 1: 1–11 (“The baptism and temptation of Jesus”)

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight” ’,

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’ Amen. *(NRSV)*

Today's hymns

Here are some hymns appropriate to this special day in the church year, Trinity Sunday:

God the Father of Creation, source of life and energy (CH4: 113)

God of great and God of small, God of one and God of all (CH4: 174)

You are before me, God, you are behind (CH4: 96)

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here (CH4: 189)

Glory be to God the Father, glory be to God the Son, glory be to God the Spirit (CH4: 110)

In the Name of the Father and of

You might like to try out this little game: ask a minister of your choosing (though obviously not me) which theological topic they least like to be questioned about, and see what they come up with. I would wager that their answer would most likely be: “the doctrine of the Holy Trinity”. It’s a topic which is notoriously hard to preach about, because it is filled with so many different considerations and concerns and confuddlement.

More than this, the subject of God being “one”, but also being in some sense “three”, really does not fit with our understanding of life, the universe and everything. Of course it’s possible for God to be one. And it might just be possible for us to imagine God as three. But, as the saying goes, “three in one and one in three”? That just ties us up in knots.

It is often said that the Church’s teaching on the nature of God really only came into its current form in the centuries after Jesus of Nazareth, as deep thinkers struggled within themselves (and more often than not struggled among themselves) to get some kind of handle on what “being divine” actually means.

Christian thinkers took as their starting point the notion of God being the great “I AM” of the Hebrew Scriptures. The God of the Old Testament was one God, indivisible, and reckoned to be largely beyond our worldly realm. This was the God who was enthroned on high, authoritative, and often portrayed as authoritarian.

Sadly, folk all too often tried to rebel against this God who defied our imaginings. Indeed, so much of the Old Testament concerns people who departed from the true teachings of the faith to set up idols of human making: golden calves, stone statues, poles stuck in the ground. And as the Old Testament progresses from book to book, we see the people turning away from God on so many occasions.

God is one. And that’s the true message for the true believer ... at least in Hebrew terms.

The Earliest Church of the first century was a community that looked back to the faith of their forebears. Of course, this was the faith of Christ himself. Yet shortly after that very first Easter Day it became clear that folk also looked towards the Risen Christ as being more than simply a messenger, more than just a prophet. The people came to see Jesus as Lord, Son of God. Or, put another way, the divine in human form.

The day of Pentecost brought with it a fresh approach to this new Christian faith. As we will hear next Sunday, people from far and wide were gathered in Jerusalem when God’s Holy Spirit came among them, firing them up with courage and with a sense of community, making each realise that she or he was part of something vital.

Though the word “Trinity” never once appears in the Bible, we see signs of God’s threeness in the Christian scriptures. Take today’s reading for example. In Mark chapter 1 we find God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit all present in quite different ways. Just read the passage again and I am confident you will see what I mean.

That said, it took centuries for the Church’s top thinkers to come to a common mind on what God’s nature is actually all about. But, in time, agreement was reached and the doctrine of the Holy Trinity became a central foundation stone of what it is to be Christian. As the years went by there would be fractures and schisms, as different denominations went their own way, yet whether you were Roman Catholic or Lutheran or Calvinist or Baptist or whatever, of this you could be sure: mainstream Christian faith would remain doggedly Trinitarian.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

We could try to reconcile the threeness of Father, Son and Spirit with the oneness of God. Water, we might very well argue, is water, whether it is frozen hard, or a tepid fluid, or boiling hot steam. Solid, liquid or gas, it's all still the one substance, though undeniably in three forms. Alternatively we could take a different angle, neatly shifting our focus away from God's unfathomable mystery and towards our own personal perception of the divine.

So let's get personal:

When *you* think about God, what is it that you focus on most of all? Is it perhaps God in time and eternity, God in space and infinity, God the cosmic source of all that is, God the very sustainer of the universe in all its huge mystery? This is the God theologians call the "ground of being", in whom we find authority and a sense of wonder.

You look at eagles wheeling overhead against a backdrop of mountain tops. And you think: "My God! How great thou art." That's God the Source, God the Father.

Or when *you* think about God, do you focus perhaps upon the God you read of coming close in that astonishingly human way as a tiny baby born in a manger? God in human form, God in *our* form, God who puts on the cloak of death itself and yet who comes back in new life, Lord of all the earth and Lord of hearts made new.

You read the pages of the gospels and you take in the full enormity of redemption: what it is and what it means. And you think: "My God! How great thou art." That's God the human, God the Son.

Or when *you* think about God, is it perhaps the God you know deep within yourself, around you, comforting and strengthening and leading you day by day? God as Spirit, vital in our Church, active in our world, guiding our steps to places we never imagined we would even set out for, far less reach.

You feel an indwelling presence in your soul and you know that you have something unspeakably special; that you are becoming something new in the company of this unpredictable, surprising life-force. And you think: "My God! How great thou art." That's God the Up-builder, God the Spirit.

Maybe then, the Holy Trinity is less about understanding how God can be one and three, all at once. Maybe instead the idea of the Holy Trinity invites us to focus on our own faithful searching after God, and who God is. Could it be that this is not really about complicated doctrine at all, but is actually about exploring the many facets of an all-loving, self-disclosing, out-reaching God?

Source, Redeemer, Up-builder. . . . Father, Son and Spirit. Which one do *you* relate to?

Actually, no. Don't answer that. Just listen to what the theologian Kaji Douša has to say: *The thing about the Trinity ... is that it incorporates aspects of the divine life that are not easily explained. There's no need to be in any particular camp, because they all work in concert. I don't know about you, but there are times I need to call on a source ... while evoking a concrete image ... whilst drawing on a strength of spirit. In other words: I'm not prepared to choose. This is the beauty of the Holy Trinity. It provides in ways that push past definition. May we receive beyond definition, too.*

Amen.

Praying for others

Let us pray:

God of confidence and care,

At this time of great suffering and uncertainty we turn to you,
remembering all those people who are in deep need today:

those people of our world who are so unwell on account of Covid-19;

those family members and friends who are filled with such terrible fear
as they hope and pray for better news;

those children who do not understand the current restrictions
but who have to bear them anyway through days of closed confinement and frustration;

those people who are struggling with anxiety or depression,
for whom these times are hard indeed;

those residents and staff of care homes,
doing their very best in such hard conditions.

Bring your blessing, Lord, we pray, and may your presence be known
in the midst of all this suffering.

In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.

And finally ...

Abigail Morrison considers adaptability:

Confining so many millions of people to their homes and removing or limiting their ability to work has posed many challenges. But, as usual, such difficulties bring out the best in folk.

I have been struck by how many people are turning their hands to new tasks. They are using their existing skills to do something rather different from what they had done before. The wardrobe department at Scottish Opera have turned 2.2km of fabric into hospital scrubs for NHS staff.

Recently there was a piece on the television news about Preston Lodge High School's CDT department making visors for healthcare workers near and far.

A friend of mine has been showing off her face mask which has been made by a firm that normally makes ladies underwear!

I've mentioned before about Formula 1 team Mercedes developing and building ventilators instead of working on high performance parts for cars.

School teachers across the land have learnt how to develop teaching material that pupils can rustle up themselves at home. And they have learned how to teach via video link rather than in a classroom. Restaurant owners have turned from Michelin-starred food served at tables to offering carry out meals or food boxes delivered to your door. There was even a rather nice tale of owners of a pub who converted a van into a mobile bar so customers could get a carry out pint. I think they may have fallen foul of licensing laws. (I liked their ingenuity though!)

Adapt or die, as Darwin almost said. I think we can all agree many in our communities have shown just how adaptable we are.