

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 30 May 2021 - Trinity Sunday

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Isaiah 6.1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8.12-17; **John 3.1-17**

Homily

Today's homily has been written by Kate Pateman, LLM in the Leverington, Newton & Tydd St Giles Benefice

Today, in our Gospel reading, we meet Nicodemus the Pharisee for the first time. He is a learned and scholarly man, well versed in scripture, a member of the Sanhedrin and a leader of the Jews. He has come by night to question Jesus, to learn more about this man who has been doing amazing things in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival. People were beginning to follow Jesus and to believe in him because of these signs and Nicodemus, wanting to know more and understanding that Jesus must be from God (otherwise he would not be able to do the things he does) has come in person to question him.

In the reading, we are witnesses to what follows, a scholarly discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus about the Kingdom of God and the meaning of re-birth. Jesus doesn't speak to Nicodemus in parables, or simple stories, as he usually does when he teaches. In the presence of this learned man, he gets right in there with difficult theology and he challenges Nicodemus' scholarship and understanding. Jesus tells him that no-one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born from above (or born again). Nicodemus questions the literal meaning of being born again, asking Jesus to explain how it is possible for a man to enter his mother's womb and be born a second time. But that is not what Jesus has said and, as an intelligent and educated person, Nicodemus must know that this is not what he means. It is as if he is deliberately misunderstanding what Jesus is saying and repeatedly pressing him for a fuller explanation. And Jesus gives it, explaining that one must be born again of water and Spirit in order to gain entry to the Kingdom of God. When Nicodemus again questions his meaning, asking "how can these things be?", Jesus expresses surprise that, as a teacher of Israel Nicodemus does not understand.

Jesus refers to Moses and the serpent of bronze; a biblical reference which, as a Pharisee, who has spent his life studying scripture, Nicodemus would have recognised and understood. Jesus is calling on him to apply his deep biblical knowledge to their discussion. In his replies to Nicodemus' questions Jesus brings to the fore the power of the Father's Kingdom and of the Holy Spirit to bring about re-birth.

We understand that Nicodemus eventually became a follower of Jesus as he is mentioned twice more in John's Gospel. In Chapter 7 when the Pharisees try to have Jesus arrested in the temple, it is Nicodemus who argues in his defence. We meet him again after the crucifixion. In Chapter 19 we read of how he assists Joseph of Arimathea with arrangements for Jesus' burial. So, it is probably fair to assume that talking with Jesus that night had had a pretty powerful effect on him.

Today is Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost, when we give thanks for the Holy Trinity, the three Persons of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental to Christian belief and it is intrinsic to our worship. When we come to baptism, whether as children or later in life, we are baptised with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We declare our belief in the Trinity when we say the creed. We invoke the Trinity in prayer. Priestly blessings are made in the name of the Trinity, and it is glorified in liturgy and in hymns.

However, the word "Trinity" is not mentioned in the bible. In fact, the term first came into use in the fourth century after hundreds of years of study and debate. Despite this, there are many references, particularly in John's Gospel, to the three persons of the Trinity, including in our reading today. In the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus, we hear about God the **Father**, who sent his only **Son** into the world to save us, and about the **Spirit** through whom we are granted entry into God's Kingdom.

For centuries Christians have debated and tried to understand the nature of the Trinity. Questions about the identity of Jesus and his divinity, about the nature of the Holy Spirit and about the relationship between them and the Father, have exercised the minds of theologians for millennia. Hundreds of books and learned papers have been written and many great minds have been given over to deep theological discussions and theses on the doctrine of the Triune God.

But all of that is far too profound and complicated for a Sunday morning homily. As it is difficult for Nicodemus to understand “heavenly things”, so it is hard for us to understand the concept of the Trinity. However, just because something is difficult to understand doesn’t stop it from being true and of immense value. We don’t have to understand the mystery of the Trinity. We just need to have faith in the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and in the promise of new life in the Kingdom of God.

Theological debates about re-birth, the nature of God’s Kingdom, the Trinity and many other important matters are still happening now and will probably continue, quite literally, until Kingdom Come! Because, on that day we shall finally see clearly the nature of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in all their Triune Glory!

And therein lies the Good News of today’s Gospel. As we have read, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him ... may have everlasting life.” Therefore, let us rejoice that, through the life, death, resurrection and glorious ascension of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit working in in the world today, we may all share with them everlasting life in the Kingdom of God the Father.

Amen.

Suggested intercessions

Let us pray with faith to the blessed and glorious Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Preserve your Church in the true faith, to acknowledge with awe and reverence the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Fill our worship with adoration. Give us due humility and assurance as members of the Church which you have created, loved and sanctified.

[Specific petitions for Church, clergy, ministers, congregations]

Silence

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Open human eyes to the wonder of things unseen. Make all lives richer in the hope of blessings more than we can comprehend. Give clearer vision to those in positions of power and influence.

[Specific petitions for the peace of world, nations, governments, relief agencies, charities]

Silence

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant in our own lives a share in the mutual love of the Holy Trinity. May that unbroken harmony be shown in our families, in our work and in all our relationships.

[Specific petitions for local organisations, schools, clubs, etc]

Silence

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Have mercy on those whose lives are crippled by strain and anxiety in themselves and hostility to others. Release their tension, give them inward peace, restore them to the wholeness which is your will for all. Comfort and heal all who suffer illness, physical, mental or spiritual.

[Specific petitions for the sick in body, mind or spirit]

Silence

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the faithful departed who in this world held fast to the faith of the Holy Trinity and now adore you for ever. May their example strengthen and prepare us for the coming of joy made complete, and love made perfect in your heavenly Kingdom.

[Specific petitions for the departed, the bereaved, year's mind]

Silence

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

May our prayers be received in the unity of the Holy Trinity, three Persons and one God.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

Adapted from: *Leading Intercessions*, Raymond Chapman (Canterbury Press, 2006)

Suggested hymns/songs

- Angel voices, ever singing
- Christ is alive! Let Christians sing
- Father of heaven, whose love profound
- Holy, holy, holy! Lord God almighty
- How shall I sing that majesty
- Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
- My God, how wonderful thou art
- breath of God, come fill this place
- Praise God from who all blessings flow
- Thou whose almighty word

All-age talk idea

If appropriate in your setting, Trinity Sunday is a great opportunity to discuss 'who God is'.

Start by asking the congregation (particularly the children and young people) for words to describe God – maybe get the ball rolling with things like *loving, powerful, cares for us all*

Then ask for words to describe things that God has done, such as *created the world, created us all, died for us, rose again, (or even individual short testimonies).*

It's because of all of these things that we are able to know anything about God, and it's because of these things that we know God as *Trinity*, or, Three in One, we know God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We know God the Father created the world and all of us, that God came to live as a human as Jesus the Son, and that God remains with us as the Holy Spirit. But, through all of this, the most important thing to remember is that God loves each and every one of us.