

Trinity Sunday. 30th May 2021

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service set out below.

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, Almighty God, and King. You are glorious beyond our imagining. Thank you that you make yourself known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thank you that by your loving action on the cross and the work of the Spirit within us, you make us fit for your presence and welcome us into your family. Help us receive and know this today, living in company with you forever. **Amen**



Song:

When peace like a river attendeth
my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught
me to say
It is well, it is well with my soul

It is well (it is well)

With my soul (with my soul)

It is well, it is well with my soul

Though Satan should buffet, though
trials should come
Let this blest assurance control
That Christ (yes, He has) has
regarded my helpless estate
And has shed His own blood for my
soul

It is well (it is well)...

My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious
thought

My sin, not in part, but the whole
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no
more

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my
soul!

It is well (it is well)...

And Lord, haste the day when my
faith shall be sight

The clouds be rolled back as a scroll
The trump shall resound, and the
Lord shall descend

Even so, it is well with my soul!

It is well (it is well)...

Read: John 3:22-36.

God is greatest. *A summary of the talk given by Timothy James.*

How are we to understand this passage? And what should we do as a result of that understanding?

Understanding: This is part of John's gospel, which itself has a distinctive approach, different from the other three gospels. However, like the rest of the gospel, it is written for an explicit purpose, to provoke belief – see 20:31. As Richard Hays says in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, “Jesus is represented in John not as a teacher but as a relentless revealer of a single metaphysical secret: that Jesus himself is the one who has come from God to bring life.”

This passage is the end of the opening movement of the gospel: Howard has titled this “God’s new presence”. We have had the collection of the disciples, the first “sign” at Cana, the cleansing of the Temple at Passover and the conversation with Nicodemus.

We now return to the testimony of one of the key witnesses, John the Baptist. One of the ways to understand this gospel is to look for evidence, testimony and witnesses. They include his contemporaries, himself, the gospel writer, and the

“signs”. Try reading this gospel looking for these things! For example, in chapter 1 alone, there are at least four witnesses: John the Baptist (1:7-8 & 15-36), Andrew (1:41), Philip (1:45) and Nathanael (1:49).

There are six passages in this gospel about John, of which this is the third. Despite the major differences between the fourth gospel and the other three, they are completely consistent in their choices of what to tell us about the relationship between Jesus and John.

In our passage, it falls into two parts: (a) John’s testimony (vv.22-30); and (b) the writer’s reflection on this (vv.31-36).

The key point of the first part is quite clear: John and Jesus are not equal – Jesus is greater. John is the best-man; Jesus is the bridegroom.

This is perhaps not controversial for us, but the gospel repeatedly presents this message, from John’s own words and otherwise, in all six passages. The purpose of John’s testimony is the purpose of the whole gospel, that people should believe in Jesus, and it was successful – see 10:4-42. Indeed, it is at this point in his mission that Jesus’ following begins to exceed John’s (4:1-2).

This point is still important: Jesus is still often suggested to be a moral teacher or eschatological prophet like John. This gospel explicitly rejects that possibility.

The second part is a short example one of the gospels mystical, repetitive, meditative passages, expressing spiritual truths which we can struggle to comprehend. It presents things through two dichotomies:

Firstly, there are two levels of reality and two types of “he”; these are not equal realities but opposed, like darkness and light (see the conversation with Nicodemus (vv. 19-21), or like truth and falsehood.

And secondly, our response to this has consequences – life or death.

The one “from above” must be Jesus – nothing else makes sense in context, and we hear it again from his mouth at 8:23-24, “You are from below, I am from above” – and he is the source of reliable truth about spiritual reality. He has authority, he has the Spirit and, crucially, belief in him determines eternal life or God’s wrath (and hence death).

Action: So, how should we act? Obviously, we should believe in Jesus. This is the gospel’s express and unremitting purpose, and only a fool could miss the intent of v.36.

But what does this mean in practice?

That is what the rest of our studies in this gospel should make clear; the question we must ask ourselves every time we return to it. But one spoiler: look ahead to 15:9-17, and to 1 John 3:11-24 – **the sign of belief is love**. *“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us”* (1 Jn. 3:23).

So, unless you are a very new Christian, this passage tells us nothing new, but simply reminds us of the most fundamental doctrine of our faith: Jesus came from above, and we must believe in him, which means love. In fact, it is this infuriating and mesmerising gospel which is the source of what has become our orthodox Christian belief about personal salvation and about the life of the saved person. Its writer gave us every piece of evidence he could think of to provoke **belief**, and to inspire **love**.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give us the humility of your herald John, whose joy was complete when you became greater and he became less; and give us the clarity of sight to accept the testimony and believe in you, and to obey your great command to love as you have loved us.

Prayers: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:4-6)

- Pray for this day, and the coming week.
- Pray for justice, mercy, peace, and hope.
- Pray for individuals, for neighbours, for family and friends.
- Pray for the Church.



Collect: Trinity Sunday: 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.**



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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Blessing: Trinity Sunday: God the Holy Trinity make us strong in faith and love, defend us on every side, and guide us in truth, peace and power; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

The Notices: We are now holding ticketed and socially distanced services in the building on Sundays at 9.30am. Further information on our website or by ringing our vicar, Howard.

If you know of others who would like to receive this, or you would rather not receive it; or if you find yourself isolated and not able to get neighbours, friends, or family to help, then ring Howard, 01420 563344.

