



PERSONAL SERVICE – 30TH MAY 2021

Hymn STF 39, H&P 484, MP33 “Angel voices ever singing”

Prayer of adoration

We praise you God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We praise you, God the Father, creator of the universe. You made the world and all that is in it. You created humanity in your own image. You have revealed your purpose and your love, above all in your son Jesus Christ. We praise you, God the Father.

We praise you, God the Son. You came to earth to reveal the Father. We praise you for your humble birth and your ministry of preaching, teaching and healing. We praise you for your death on the cross and your glorious resurrection and ascension. We praise you for your continual prayers for us and for the gift of the Holy Spirit. We praise you, God the Son.

We praise you, God the Holy Spirit. You are the source of all goodness, beauty and truth. You are forever with us, guiding us, guarding us and leading us into all truth. You are with us now as we worship. We praise you, God the Holy Spirit.

So we praise you God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one in three and three in one for ever. Amen.

Reading: Isaiah 6:1-8

Many years before Jesus, Isaiah went into the temple and was overcome with awe by the experience. As with all the visions of God in the Old Testament stress is laid on the mystery that surrounds him with seraphim and clouds of incense. The purpose of the vision is not to destroy Isaiah, as he feared, but to purify him and commission him as a prophet. God the Father may be a mysterious being but he allows himself to be known through Jesus and the activity of the Spirit at work in the hearts of Christians giving them a personal task to fulfil.

Reading: John 3:1-17

In Genesis God breathed life into Adam and enriched that life with human companionship. Both life and companionship need to be renewed by God if we are to know and live out the purpose of creation in a world marred by humanity's belief in its own self-sufficiency. To be born anew means both to

become a member of the new people of God and to have our mind and heart illumined by the truth of Christian teaching. For some the illumination of the heart and mind is gradual, while for others it is sudden. While the failures of the church and its members are perhaps only too obvious, the fact remains that through the church, God wills to fulfil the purpose of creation.

Hymn STF 53, H&P 8 “How shall I sing that majesty”

Sermon

Today is Trinity Sunday when we remember the mystery of the trinity. The trinity really is one of the most difficult parts of the Christian faith to understand. God is three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but he is not three but one. There aren't three gods, there is only one God and he cannot be divided. It defies our arithmetic, we can't understand how God can be both one and three at the same time. In our arithmetic one cannot equal three. It isn't easy to understand and it's impossible to prove.

The trinity is the way in which the church tries to express its experience of God. The three persons each reflect an important truth that we have discovered about God.

First of all there is the element of mystery. There is something deeply mysterious about God. In one sense a mystery is anything that we can't understand. There are plenty of things we can't understand but that doesn't make them truly mysterious because often there are others with greater knowledge than us who can understand.

God is a mystery in the truest sense of that word. A true mystery is something that lies beyond human understanding and intelligence. That is true of God. We cannot see God. We cannot touch God. There is a deep sense of mystery about God, he is beyond what our minds can take in.

God is always present with us, he never leaves us, but he is with us in a way that is mysterious and elusive. We can't see him beside us, we can't touch him, we can't prove that he's there, we just know that he is. We may sometimes wish that we could prove that God is with us, but we cannot. We may wish we could understand why God allows things to happen the way they do, but we cannot. There is this mystery about God that is beyond what our minds can understand.

How do we know anything about God? There is one conviction that is central to all the New Testament writers. The clearest idea of God can be seen in Jesus.

The life and death of Jesus give us an insight into God. We still have to admit that God is mysterious and elusive. But the disciples were convinced that when they looked at Jesus they saw something of God. The life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus revealed far more about God than they ever knew before.

Paul spoke about the light of Jesus that has revealed God to us. It's interesting the word that Paul uses. He uses the Greek word *photismos*. That is the word from which we get the English word photograph or photo. We could say that in some ways the life of Jesus can be compared with the action of a traditional camera taking a photograph. When you take a photograph on a traditional camera, the shutter opens allowing the light to come in, the light hits the film and a picture is engraved on it. We could say that in the life of Jesus for a short time the shutter opened onto the mystery and wonder of God, the light shone through and left a permanent record for us in the life of Jesus.

If we want to know what God is like we should look at Jesus. We won't see everything, we won't know everything, God is too deeply mysterious for that. But we can see enough, we can see as much as we need to. We can see that God is loving, we can see that God is caring, that he cares for each one of us. We can see that God shares in the sufferings and the problems of the world, he isn't a distant God cut off from us, he is involved in everything that happens on earth.

We can know about God through the life of Jesus but we also know about God through our present experience, through our experience of the Spirit. We can meet with God, we can experience the presence of God with us in our daily lives. We can be aware of the presence of God as we see the beauty of the world he has created, we can be aware of the presence of God in our relationships with other people, we can be aware of the presence of God as we spend time being quiet. It is the Spirit working in us who produces this awareness of God.

When the Spirit came on the first disciples at Pentecost they suddenly became aware of the presence of God and the power of God in a new way. They knew that God was present with them in the Spirit. Jesus had gone, Jesus had been taken from them, but when the Spirit came upon them they knew that this was an experience of God.

When we speak of the Spirit dwelling in us, we mean that God is dwelling in us. We can explain the Spirit in terms of God dwelling in us. God works in our lives through our experience of the Spirit working in us. In that way God helps us, he

offers us guidance and strength to live our daily lives. But he also expects us to commit ourselves to him in return, to be willing to work for him and serve him in the way that we live.

The trinity is the way the church has tried to come to terms with our experience of God. When the disciples met with Jesus they were convinced that they were meeting with God. The church has always seen the experience of the Holy Spirit as an experience of God. But we need to be very careful in all that we say about God. No-one knows for certain who God is. The best we can do is to say what God is like. When we talk about God being our heavenly father, we mean that God is like a father in the way he loves us and cares for us, in the way he treats us as his children.

We can talk about knowing God, but there's always so much more we don't know about him. The more we come to know God, the more we realise just how much we don't know about him.

Hymn STF 707, H&P 776, MP456 "Make me a channel of your peace"

Prayers of Intercession

Lord God, three in one, we thank you that our individual lives become complete as we live in community with others. We thank you that together we can do so much more good than we can separately. Yet together we also do evil things that we would never dream of doing as individuals. We exclude some from our community life, we forget others because no-one draws attention to their needs. We pray for all those who do not feel that they belong.

We pray for those who are ill. We remember all those facing illness and pray that the burden of loneliness may not be added to the burden of illness.

We pray for the elderly. We pray that they may not be cut off from others by their reduced mobility.

We pray for all minorities separated from the wider community by differences of race, religion or language.

Father of all, help us to love and accept others as inclusively as you do. Amen.

Hymn STF 673 "Will you come and follow me"