

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH,
Sunday 4th June 2023, Trinity A
Morning Service 1100
Transcript**

Ed 08.06.23

Welcome and Intimations

Good morning. Wherever you come from today, whether you come regularly, or occasionally, perhaps even for the first time, you are welcome to our worship. Your presence enriches us in this time of celebration together.

Today is Trinity Sunday, and we think about God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the Holy Trinity.

Let us take a moment to be quiet and know the presence of God among us.

Pause

Gathering Prayer:

Living God,

as we come to worship you, may we know your presence with us.

Raise us up that we may find strength when we are weary and energy when we are faint; let us never fail to praise your holy name. Amen.

Call to Worship:

The grace, love and fellowship of God surrounds us today and always.

So, come, let us journey together in the wonderful adventure of worshipping God, the holy 'three in one'.

Let us worship God:

1st. Hymn 111 Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!

First Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Our God is a God of wonder, forever beyond our grasp, yet, by his love, always within our reach. We approach him with confidence.

Jesus Christ our Lord is forever ahead of us in wisdom and love, yet, by his love, always beside us. We come to him with eagerness.

The mysterious, wonderful Spirit is forever larger than the whole universe, yet, by love he lives in our hearts, and we approach him with delight and with joy.

May our Triune God work in us and enable our worship to rise far higher than our intellect, and may our love go much deeper than our feelings.

To your praise and glory: To God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, ever to be loved, adored and served, we bring praise and glory. Amen!¹

O God, Holy Trinity,

even though sometimes we have doubts and fears,

on this Trinity Sunday, we come in worship, to honour you,

for, without you, life has no purpose.

Holy Trinity, you meet us and greet us; you support and uphold us;

you provide for us and equip us, wherever we are on our journey in life.

Into the known and unknown, we travel with you, believing, trusting, knowing,

that you will always be with us to the end of the age,

and we offer our thanks and praise.

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Blessed God,
we know that, in thought and word, in deeds done or left undone,
knowingly and unknowingly, we have wandered, we have been side-tracked;
stepped out on our own, taking no heed of your Word and your map of life.
We remember with regret times we have disappointed you,
and we give thanks for the assurance that, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
when we repent, we are forgiven, cleansed, renewed, released.

We give thanks that, with you and the Holy Spirit Jesus lives with us and among us.
In his name, and in his words we pray:

*.....Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy Name,
Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead
us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom the Power and the Glory for ever Amen.*

Readings: Nicol will read for us:

Psalm 8 (NRSVA)

O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

2 Corinthians 13: 11-13: (NRSVA):

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. *Amen.*

2nd. Hymn 4 How excellent in all the earth

Gospel Reading: Matt.28: 16-20 (NRSVA):

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. *Amen. Thanks be to God.*

Message:

A short reading from St. Matthew's Gospel, but a very important one. The commissioning of the disciples; the instruction to baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus's promise: "I am with you always, to the end of the age".

St. Matthew's gospel tells the story of Jesus and his life and ministry. Matthew begins with a promise, the promise of the coming of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, and it ends with this great promise: that God, in the person of Jesus, will be with us always. Notice too Jesus's words as he sends out the disciples: "*Go [therefore] and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" Matthew is trying to link together the three names of God, and here is the beginning of what the Church later developed into the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, one of the most difficult concepts in the New Testament, and an idea widespread throughout the Bible, even if not called by that name.

Some theologians think that these words were added later by Matthew or by the early church to reflect their developing beliefs. Never mind about that – it doesn't really concern us. What we do know is that the idea of God in Three Persons was part of the belief and teaching of the Christian Church from the very earliest times, but it has always been very difficult to try to explain. I'm not going to get bogged down in it, but here's a brief outline.

In the time immediately after the wonder and the fear of the resurrection, the eleven remaining disciples worshipped Jesus, although we are told that 'some doubted.' Understandable. Faith is seldom all assurance and belief and commitment, with no doubts along the way. We would not be human if we did not admit that, even in the best of circumstances, we all have our times of doubt and darkness and discouragement.

Paul also was writing before there was any formal definition of the Trinity, but in the final verses of his Letter to the Christians at Corinth, Paul talks about the three persons of God. He tries to explain the mystical relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the way in which the three different persons of God relate to each other and to the world. Paul is motivated by the grace of God. He learns to live by the love of God in good times and bad. He celebrates the Spirit through whom he, and also his very diverse, and often very difficult, congregations, learn to see Christ in one another. Paul's words, and those last few verses of Matthew's Gospel, are the only two direct references to the Trinity in the New Testament, but they help us to understand the ideas of the early church about the grace of Jesus; the love of God; and the communion or fellowship of the Holy Spirit, all bound up into the single Person of the Triune God.

From very early on, the disciples and the growing fellowship worshipped Jesus. Fine: except that the basis of the Jewish faith, carried over into Christianity, is the belief in *one single God*. 'You shall have no other gods before me'. (Exodus 20:3). When people began to worship Jesus, did that mean there were two Gods?

But Jesus had said: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), so maybe that was OK. Then along came the Advocate, the Helper, the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised. Where did he come from, and where did he fit into the scheme of things?

There was a big falling out. What we now know as the 'Eastern' Church said that the Spirit originates and proceeds from The Father alone, whereas what we know as the Western Church insisted that the Holy Spirit originates and proceeds from both the Father and the Son. It may not seem a big issue to you and me, but it led to endless discussion and argument and eventually to the separation of the Eastern and Western Churches in the Great Schism of 1054². Maybe these guys didn't have enough to bother them.

The doctrine of the Trinity has always been difficult to grasp and worse to explain.

² The 'filioque' controversy

Over the years, teachers have offered various explanations of the Trinity, but they all fall down for one reason or another. Even St. Patrick's analogy of the shamrock – or the clover leaf – a single leaf with three elements - is better, but still divides God into 'parts'. And now there are some more recent challenges to our way of thinking of God:

God as Parent – as Father *and* Mother;
and the nature of Jesus (both fully human and fully divine);
and the nature of the Holy Spirit – we could go on for ever!

For me, the bottom line is that most theologians accept that it is quite beyond us as humans to understand the concepts of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. It's not for us to try to solve the puzzle about the nature of God, but rather to stand in awe of him. We have to accept the fact that God is transcendent, and some of his qualities are unknowable (*Isaiah 55:8-9*). That's where I leave it today.

All very interesting – or maybe you think all very boring, and with no relevance to our everyday living – but, in either case, we content ourselves today with celebrating God's unconditional love for men and women, which he shows us in three ways:
the creating love of God the Father;
the saving love which is God the Son,
and the sanctifying love which is God manifested in the Holy Spirit.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit: not just a formula to be used in a church service, but a way of life for us to experience and share with others in the power and the peace and the presence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God in three persons is love. God loves us so that we can have eternal life. God does not force his love upon us; he gives it freely and abundantly.
Imagine this love of God being given to you right now. Is there anything in your life that is preventing you from receiving the unconditional love of God?

Whoever lives in God lives in love, and continues to demonstrate God's love to other people. The Trinity reminds us of the ways in which love enables us to open up our hearts to other people to help bring them closer to God and show them that new and fuller life is to be found in him.

The bottom line?

Here, in his last meeting with his disciples, Jesus did three things.

1. He assured them of his power.

Nothing was outside the power of him who died and conquered death. Now they were servants of a Master whose authority on earth and heaven was beyond question.

2. He gave them a commission: the 'Great Commission' of Jesus - to win all men and women for himself. He sent them out on a mission 'to all nations' - to make all the world his disciples. To get out there and do things. Earlier in his ministry, Jesus told his disciples to avoid the Gentiles and Samaritans, and "go only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt. 10:5-6). Now, in the light of his death and resurrection, the scope of his mission becomes universal. The Gentiles are included – and that means us.

The community of the Trinity is inclusive.

The disciples are to baptize, and they are to teach the people to obey Jesus – to follow his teaching. (Theologians may argue that the instruction to baptize in the name of the Trinity is a later development of what Jesus actually said, but that is not our worry.)

Mission: there was a lot about mission at the General Assembly this last week.

There were some dismal figures. The Church of Scotland has lost over half its membership since 2000. The average age of worshipper is 62. Before the pandemic, about 88,000 people worshiped in person. Since then, a growing number of people are choosing to worship online or in "other ways", and numbers have fallen to about 60,000. The outgoing moderator, Dr. Iain Greenshields, told us we need a 'decade of evangelism' to recover confidence in God: that we need to take risks of faith, and get out and do things. The General Trustees told us that the priority for buildings and facilities is that they be a meaningful resource *for the mission of the Church*.

3. Finally, Jesus promised the disciples his presence. The hearts of these eleven ordinary men from Galilee must have failed them when they heard this staggering instruction to go out and conquer the world for Christ. But no sooner was the command given – and it is a command – than the promise followed. They were sent out – as we are sent out – on the greatest task in history, but strengthened and encouraged by the awareness of the greatest presence in the world, the presence of the risen Christ.

Look what has developed from the work of these eleven ordinary men.
What has developed from our work?

What might there be for us to do?

Amen. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

May God bless to us this word preached in his name, and to his name be the glory and the praise.

During the next hymn please bring the Offering to the Chancel

3rd (Offering) Hymn 528 Make me a channel of your peace

Dedication of Offering:

God of Love,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you know us, and you love us.
you surround us, and you envelop us, in your power, grace and truth.
As we bring to you these offerings, tokens of our gratitude,
asking that they may be used for your purposes,
we praise you with all that we have, and all that we are. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Our intercessions today centre on the theme of community, and we pray today for our communities, large and small.

Let us pray.

Holy Friend, we think of that small community we call our family, with its strengths that nurture, and with its faults that hurt and inhibit its unity, and we ask for a special blessing upon it.

Holy Friend, for that community we call the Church universal, with its good works and its failures, we ask for your blessing.

God in three persons, please help your people to put aside differences of custom and dogma, and to work together as Christians.

Holy Friend, for the community we call the church in Orkney, in these challenging times of change;

for our congregation and our circle of friends, in times when things go well,
and in times of misunderstanding, we ask your blessing.

Holy Friend, for those communities we call health centres and hospitals;
for hospices for the dying;
for medical teams in their skill and compassion, we ask a special blessing.

Holy Friend, for those communities we call schools and universities,
where much knowledge is imparted, but where love is not on the syllabus,
we ask your blessing.

Holy Friend, for our country, for this community of many races that we call our nation,
and for those who rule over us, nationally and locally, we ask your wisdom and blessing.

God in three persons,
for the teeming community we call the world,
rich in resources and achievements meant for the good of all,
yet riven by greed, hatred, intolerance, by injustice, arrogance, corruption;
in the many places torn apart by war, thinking especially of Ukraine and Sudan,
we ask your blessing.

God of Love,
We think again of the communities we call our own families,
especially for those unwell, or sad, or worried.
We ask for them your peace and your loving care,
especially for those we hold in our thoughts today and bring to you now.

Pause.

Gracious God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Hear all our prayers. Amen

4th Hymn: 113 God the Father of Creation

Choir: Amazing Grace.

Afterthought:

From a short item in *Seasons of the Spirit*:

Are you someone who sees the glass as half empty or as half full?

Are you someone who sees the good in people,
or do you become fixated on one flaw, one misdeed?

Are you someone who sees something wrong and works to fix it,
or who shrugs and figures, what's the point, it's not going to change anything?

What do you see?

Vision isn't just the physical sight we have –

it's also our values, and our personal plan for what is most important in life.

This applies to each of us as individuals, but also to all of us as a community of faith –
our common values and our common plan for what is most important as followers of Jesus
living in the 21st century.

Just as the season of Lent asks us to look inside ourselves and to reflect on how we are living,
so the season of Pentecost reminds us that we are disciples of Jesus,
in a world that needs more of Jesus,
and asks us to look around ourselves and see how our living affects others.

Nothing changes if we refuse to see.

Systems don't change; revolutions don't happen;

Jesus doesn't fulfill his promise if we refuse to see, if we choose not to act on our vision – our common values and our common mission:
which is, as always, to love one another through justice and mercy and kindness and peace.
(excerpt from *Alphabet of Faith* by Sarah Jewell, quoted in *Seasons of the Spirit*, 29.05.23)

5 Closing Hymn: 448 Lord, the light of your love is shining

Closing Words and Benediction:

God of adventure,
thank you that no matter where the journey may take us, you will always be by our side,
giving us renewed strength, vision and hope.

Stay safe in the way of Christ,
And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you, and remain with you,
now and always. Amen.

Doxology:

(Hy. 786) May the God of peace go with us as we travel from this place;
May the love of Jesus keep us firm in hope and full of grace.

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