

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH**  
**Handout for Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2020; Trinity Sunday Year A**

***Order of Service:***

**Introduction:**

In the present circumstances of the Coronavirus pandemic, when we are unable to hold our Church services, we think of other Christian people all over the world, and especially family and friends who are separated from us. I invite you to use this service in whatever way is best for you. You may like to look up the hymns and read – or sing them.  
God bless you all.

**Gathering Words and Prayer**

Today is Trinity Sunday. Today we think of the Trinity, God in three persons, and we hear Jesus's Great Commission.

First, let us take a few moments to be quiet in the presence of God.

**Gathering Prayer:**

God is one and God is three.  
God in you, and God in me.  
God in trust, and God in doubt.  
God draws us in, and sends us out.  
God with us now, and will always be –  
God, the Holy Trinity. Amen.

**Call to worship**

Gathered in our separate places, yet united in our Christian fellowship, we join our voices with the whole church, across the world and across time.  
Let us worship God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

**Hymn (1) 111** Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!

**Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer**

God the Holy Trinity,  
three in one, one in three, ever-present mystery,  
be present with us as, in separate times and separate places,  
we offer you our worship, our wonder and our praise.

Lord God,  
all around us and within us, intimately close,  
yet greater by far than our imagining,  
we praise you for your great glory.  
Help us to be still before you, as we worship and adore.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in mysterious relationship,  
help us to allow ourselves draw us deeper into the wonder and mystery of your nature.

Father God,  
you have called us to be your people,  
but we acknowledge that there are times  
when we are not the people you would wish us to be.  
Help us to know that, despite our faults, you look upon us in love and compassion.

Draw us deeper into relationship with you.

Jesus, Son of God,  
you have chosen us to be your friends.  
You understand, and accept, our shortcomings, our failures to love you as you love us.  
Draw us deeper into relationship with you.

Holy Spirit,  
you long to lead us into the truth that sets us free,  
yet too often we behave as though  
we would rather be kept safe from challenge and encounter.  
Help us to embrace the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
in this time of uncertainty and anxiety in the face of Coronavirus,  
help us to accept the advice offered to us,  
to be guided by our own concern for others as well as for ourselves,  
that we may play our part in bringing the pandemic to an end.

Assure us of your continuing presence with us, and with all those whom we love,  
and set us free to love and serve you with heart and soul and mind,  
and all to your glory.

All our prayers we bring in the name of Jesus our Lord  
who taught us to pray, saying:  
*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in 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, and the  
power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

**Hymn (2): 4** How excellent in all the earth

**Readings:**

**Psalm 8**

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**

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.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

### **Contemporary Reading:**

***Finding Christ*** by Heather King.

You'll find that Christ spent most of his life healing, teaching, and hanging out with those who wanted to be called to a higher way of life. He got a kick out of all the things we do — eating, drinking, swapping stories, telling jokes—and he got the right kind of kick because he was utterly united to the Father in prayer.

He made himself available to all kinds of very unpromising people—just as we are called to do. He had a special heart for those so desperate that they were willing to make holy fools of themselves in their hunger and need.

Christ reveals himself in the deeply messy, profoundly awkward world of face-to-face human interaction with people in trouble, conflict, doubt, hunger, thirst, and pain.

The real encounter with Christ takes place not when we are all dressed up and polished and nicely groomed and brandishing our résumés, but in our broken humanity. Encounter with Christ happens in our longing for a kingdom that is not of this world, and that we must search for and work for with all our might in this world.

**Hymn (3): 528** Make me a channel of your peace

### **Gospel Reading**

**Matt.28: 16-20**

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.

**Message:** *In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

St. Matthew's gospel tells the story of Jesus and his life and ministry. It begins with a promise, the promise of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, and it ends with a promise: in the closing verses, God in the person of Jesus, promises to be with us always.

In the time immediately after the wonder and the fear of the resurrection, the remaining eleven disciples worshipped Jesus, though we are told that 'some doubted.' Understandable. Faith is seldom a path of assurance and belief and commitment, with no doubts along the way. Even without all the present upset and worry about the Coronavirus, we would not be human if we did not admit that, even in 'normal' circumstances, we all have our times of doubt and darkness and discouragement.

In these few verses from Matthew's Gospel we see the developing Church, and the Christians, the people of the Church, called upon to respond to Jesus. We look into ourselves and we see the transformation that our faith has made, and continues to make, in our lives, and we renew our commitment by putting that faith into action.

Here we have the commissioning of the disciples. Here Jesus gives them their contract of employment. However much they may have been lacking in confidence, worried about how they were to manage without him, here is the job to be done, and the reassurance of help to do it.

Jesus tells them to go out into the world and *make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. 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. When Matthew invokes the Trinity he seeks to link together the three names of God. Some theologians think that these words were added later by Matthew or by the early church to reflect their developing beliefs.

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 refers to the three persons of God, and 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.

In his work, 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.

These are the only two direct references to the Trinity in the New Testament, but the basis of trinitarian thinking is clear throughout the Bible. From these last few verses of Matthew's Gospel, and from Paul's words, we see that the early Church did attribute characteristics to each of the three persons:

**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.

The 'Threeness' of God nourished the early Church, although of course the controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries AD that worked out the complex doctrines of the Trinity were still far in the future.

The basis of the Jewish faith, carried over into Christianity, is the concept of one 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? Even worse when the idea of the Holy Spirit came along! All this led to endless discussion and argument. The dispute over the origin of the Holy Spirit led eventually to the separation of the Eastern and Western Churches in the Great Schism of 1054.

The western version of the Nicene Creed holds that the Holy Spirit originates from both the Father *and* the Son, while the Eastern Church insists that the Holy Spirit comes from the Father alone. Maybe it doesn't seem all that important to us, but it altered the history and the structure of the Christian Church.

Add to all these 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.

So what is it all about?

*Trinity* is the theological term applied to God to indicate his perpetual existence as three distinct Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), who nevertheless remain one indivisible God.

The doctrine of the Trinity has always been difficult to grasp and worse to explain. Over the years, teachers have offered various explanations: an **egg** consists of a shell, a yolk, and an egg white, yet it is one egg. But that doesn't work – God can't be divided into "parts." In the same way, the example of an **apple** doesn't work: the skin, flesh, and seeds that make up the apple, considered alone, are not the apple. The Clover Leaf – or St. Patrick's analogy of the **shamrock** – is better, but still divides God into 'parts'. All the explanations have defects, and some descend into heresy.

Many theologians take the view that the concept of a Triune God is impossible to understand, because we have nothing in our world that corresponds to it. One prominent theologian says simply: "*The fundamental problem here is the inability of human language to do justice to the transcendent*". In other words, it is quite beyond us 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.

Today we content ourselves 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 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 in order to bring them closer to God and show them that new life is to be found in him.

The bottom line?

Here we come to the end of Matthew's gospel story, and to the last words of Jesus to his disciples. Here, in his last meeting with them, 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*'.

He sent them out 'to all nations' - to make all the world his disciples. The community of the Trinity is not exclusive: it is *inclusive*. 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.

The fact remains that the Commission of Jesus is to win all men and women for himself. Notice too that, although 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 Jesus's mission becomes universal: the Gentiles are included – *and that means us*. The disciples are to baptize, and they are to teach the people to obey Jesus – to follow his teaching.

3. Jesus promised them 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, the presence with them, and with us, through Coronavirus and all the rest.

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

Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

**(Offering) Hymn (4): 113** God the Father of Creation

**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:**

O God, Three-in-One and One-in-Three,  
we pray for your Church in all its many forms and manifestations:  
for the churches throughout the country, and in our neighbourhood,  
especially at this time when our buildings are closed to us.

We pray for ministers and leaders,  
finding new ways of ministry during Lockdown;  
for those who are discerners and listeners, and those who are learners and workers.  
Weave us all together that, even in our separation,  
we may be strengthened in our witness.  
Help all those who have seen their employment or their source of income disappear.

We pray for leaders of nations and leaders of states;  
leaders of cities and villages and communities;  
for those who elect, and those who are elected,  
that they may act with wisdom and integrity  
as they decide and implement policy for the good of all.

We pray for our own community:  
for people we know, and for those who are strangers;  
for people of influence, and those who feel powerless;  
for the young and energetic, for the old and wise,

and for the weak and needy.  
Bring us together to serve one another.

We pray for all who are sick,  
especially at this time for those affected by Covid-19.  
O Lord, ease them in their suffering and bring them to recovery.

Bring the comfort of your loving presence to all who grieve for loved ones.  
We pray for doctors and nurses, and all who care for those who are ill.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
we pray for the reassurance of your presence  
wherever there is pressure and stress,  
in places where there is anxiety and fear;  
for your support to all who are exhausted or discouraged.  
We pray for your comfort and your strength  
in places where there is loneliness and regret,  
and where there is too much doubt, and too little peace of mind.

We pray for the reassurance of your presence, Lord Jesus,  
in our own hearts,  
and in the hearts of all those we love or care for,  
or for whom we bear responsibility.  
We ask your blessing on our work, our rest and our dreams.

Great God, Holy Trinity,  
Three-in-One and One-in-Three,  
to your strength, to your love, to your insight,  
we offer all our prayers,  
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Closing Hymn(5)** 448 Lord, the light of your love is shining

**Closing Words and Benediction**

May the grace of the Father be with you;  
may the love of the Son enfold you;  
and may the peace of the Spirit comfort you, today and always.  
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:**

May God's blessing surround you each day, As you trust Him and walk in his way,  
May his presence within guard and keep you from sin, Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.