**COVENANT COMMUNITY ONLINE SERVICE**

**Presenter: Revd Dr Calvin T Samuel**

**Trinity Sunday**

**Sunday 07th June 2020**

**~ What’s the point of the doctrine of the Trinity? ~**

**WELCOME & INTRODUCTION**

Good Morning. Welcome to this covenant community online service on Trinity Sunday, the traditional designation for the Sunday following Pentecost. My name is Calvin Samuel and I’m Methodist minister for the towns of Rochford and Rayleigh in the County of Essex.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

**HYMN : Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty** (StF 11)

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty

Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty
God in three persons, Blessed Trinity!

﻿Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,

casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;

cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,

who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee
Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see
Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee
Perfect in power, in love and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty
All thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty
God in three persons, Blessed Trinity *﻿*

*Reginald Heber 1783–1826*

**PRAYERS** Let us pray.

Almighty and everlasting Father,

you have given 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 our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

**Prayers of Confession**

Let us confess our sins to God.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;

the whole earth is full of his glory:

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Woe is me, for I am lost: I am a person of unclean lips:

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven:

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

**SCRIPTURE**

Trinity Sunday is that rare beast in the Christian calendar. It celebrates a doctrine rather than an event. The revelation of God as Triune, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is a distinctive of Christian faith. In the centuries following the events of Easter and Pentecost the Church struggled to express this revelation in the doctrine of the Trinity. Simply expressed, God has been revealed as Three in One and One in Three in an eternal exchange of love.

In our scripture lessons today, we encounter something of this Triune God, in the creation story of Genesis 1 and the Great Commission of Matthew 28.

**Genesis 1.1**

*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

*God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” So God made the dome and separated the waters ... And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.*

*God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.*

*God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years… And it was so. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.*

*God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply….” And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.*

*God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. And God saw that it was good.*

*Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness…. So God created humankind in his image,*

*in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

*God blessed them, and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth … and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”*

*And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.*

**Matthew 28.16–20**

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped 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.”*

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

**Hymn : Our Father everlasting,**

Our Father everlasting,

The all creating One, God Almighty

Through Your Holy Spirit
Conceiving Christ the Son
Jesus our Saviour

*I believe in God our Father, I believe in Christ the Son
I believe in the Holy Spirit, Our God is three in one
I believe in the resurrection, that we will rise again
For I believe in the name of Jesus!*

Our Judge and our Defender
Suffered and crucified
Forgiveness is in You

Descended into darkness
You rose in glorious life
Forever seated high

*I believe in God our Father…*

I believe in You, I believe You rose again
I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord

*I believe in God our Father…*

I believe in life eternal, I believe in the virgin birth
I believe in the saints' communion
And in Your holy Church
I believe in the resurrection, When Jesus comes again
For I believe in the name of Jesus

*I believe in God our Father…*

*Ben Fielding & Matt Crocker*

**The Sermon**

The idea of the Trinity is one of the most complex Christian doctrines, and most Christians, I suspect, simply park it to one side. We accept that God is three in one, just as we accept we’ll never really understand it. And we’re OK with that. It’s not like there’s going to be an entrance exam on the subject of the Trinity for getting into heaven.

Nonetheless, the idea of the Trinity is fundamental to Christian faith. It’s a statement of Christian understanding of who God is, a reminder that God as Creator is categorically different from creation, and teaches us vital truths about relationship and community.

To say that God is Triune is a complex undertaking, for to say that there is One God, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is also to say at least 7 things all at the same time:

* + 1. There is only one God
		2. The Father is God
		3. The Son is God
		4. The Holy Spirit is God
		5. The Father is not the Son
		6. The Son is not the Holy Spirit
		7. The Father is not the Holy Spirit

The doctrine of the Trinity is not three individuals who together make one God, nor three Gods joined together, nor three properties, or faces of God. There are three distinct Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each of whom is the One God.

Now I know what you’re thinking. Why in the world would Christian theologians adopt such a complicated doctrine as the Trinity? No other world religion has such a complex belief in God.

Christian thinkers developed this complex understanding of God because it was the only way they could make sense of the God revealed in salvation history and scripture.

Over the course of history and in scripture God was encountered in three different Persons.

First, we encounter God the Father: revealed in the Old Testament as Creator, Lord, Father and Judge. We see something of this in our Old Testament reading from Genesis.

Second, in the New Testament we encounter God the Son, who lived among us as Immanuel, God with us, born as we are born, lived as we live, and died as we all shall die. But he was the first fruits of resurrection and is ascended into heaven. Our New Testament Lesson, from Matthew, depicts Jesus at the point of ascension.

Third, we encounter God the Holy Spirit, supremely revealed at Pentecost who filled Church with new life and power. The Acts of the Apostles, in particular, tells stories of God the Holy Spirit at work in the early Church.

These encounters from salvation history together with the revelation in scripture that the Lord is One left the Church with a puzzle. The doctrine of the Trinity solved the puzzle by stating that God must be simultaneously both Three and One.

Let me acknowledge, from the outset, that this makes no logical sense. To be Three is not to be One. To be One is not to be Three. So, to say that God is simultaneously both Three and One is logically inconsistent, if not impossible.

But God cannot be understood only by means of logic. For logic is based on a set of assumptions. God as Creator is so different from creation, that the assumptions upon which our logic is based quickly begin to break down when we try to apply it to God. We eventually have to accept that the self-revelation of God leads us to an understanding of God that is more complex than some of the assumptions of our logic will allow. Moreover, our language is not adequate to the task of expressing our understanding of God either. But it is the only language we have.

So, the doctrine of the Trinity is our best attempt to provide a sketch of something of the mystery of God's being, rather than a full description of who God is, for ultimately God remains mystery

Here’s another question that I hear you ask: Does any of this matter? Is the doctrine of the Trinity not simply a playground for theologians? What difference does any of this make in real life?

The fact that the Church chose to mark a special Sunday as Trinity Sunday suggests that Trinity is just for theological weirdos, and Local Preachers. It’s for us all.

The point of the doctrine of the Trinity is not that we learn some facts about God. No, the point of the Trinity is that it emerges from the self-revelation of God. It’s God’s attempt to make herself known. When we’re getting to know people, we share something of ourselves. We tell our stories. The point of the exercise is not that you know facts but that you know me.

If I want you to know me, I can’t simply share the airbrushed, Instagram filtered, nice and simple version of me. If I want real relationship that’s not an option. I’ve got to share who I really am, and if who I really am is complicated, If I come with a messy back story, with a set of pre-existing relationships, if getting to know me is actually going to take some work on your part, I’ve just got to put it all out there.

And it’s a risk. If I put it all out there, there’s a risk that some people will just say that’s too complicated. I don’t want to deal with that. But unless you take the risk of putting it all out there, no one will ever get to know you.

The doctrine of the Trinity is God putting it all out there, as far as we limited humans are able to understand. A nice and simple version, a less complex version, would not help the situation if the object of the exercise of self-revelation is to enable genuine relationship.

Here’s the most beautiful part though. By learning something of that God revealed as Triune in an eternal communion of Love, we learn something of the nature of Love itself and what it means to be community.

By contemplating that God revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit we rediscover approaches to unity that do not require uniformity and reminded that power needs no hierarchy.

By opening ourselves to the mystery of that God of whom seraphs simply cry Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty we are reminded that life is not often improved by simplification. To every complex question there is a simple solution, which is almost always wrong. Complex questions require complex responses. In an increasingly complicated world wouldn’t it be wonderful if our leaders spent time in the presence of the mysterious One before whom rulers shall stand in silence, as a much-needed antidote to delusions of grandeur and an incapacity to stand in the shoes of another?

God has chosen to reveal something of God’s very being and that revelation has been expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity. That self-revelation of God, as Th,ree in One is an act of grace by means of which we discover not only something of the Creator, but also something of what we and all God’s creation are meant to be. Amen.

**Hymn : Father of kindness you have poured out grace**

Father of kindness you have poured out grace

You brought me out of darkness, You have filled me with peace

Giver of mercy, You're my help in time of need
Lord I can't help but sing

*Faithful, You are.*

*Faithful, forever, You will be
Faithful, You are.
All Your promises are Yes and Amen
All Your promises are Yes and Amen*

Beautiful Saviour, You have brought me here
You pulled me from the ashes, You have broken every curse

Blessed Redeemer, You have set this captive free
Lord I can't help but sing

*Faithful, You are…*

I will rest in Your promises
My confidence is Your faithfulness (x2)

*Faithful, You are…*

*Katie Torwalt & Bryan Torwalt*

**Prayers of Intercession**

Let us pray.

We come boldly to the throne of grace,

praying to the almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

for mercy and grace.

**We plead before your throne in heaven.**

Father of heaven, whose love profound

a ransom for our souls has found:

We pray for the world, created by your love,

for its nations and governments …

Extend to them your peace, pardoning love, mercy and grace.

**We plead before your throne in heaven.**

Almighty Son, incarnate Word,

our Prophet, Priest, Redeemer, Lord:

We pray for the Church, created for your glory,

for its ministry to reflect those works of yours …

Extend to us your salvation, growth, mercy and grace.

**We plead before your throne in heaven.**

Eternal Spirit, by whose breath

the soul is raised from sin and death:

We pray for families and individuals,

created in your image,

for the lonely, the bereaved, the sick and the dying …

Breathe on them the breath of life

and bring them to your mercy and grace.

**We plead before your throne in heaven.**

Thrice holy! Father, Spirit, Son,

Mysterious Godhead, Three in One:

We pray for ourselves,

for your Church, for all whom we remember before you …

Bring us all to bow before your throne in heaven,

to receive life and pardon, mercy and grace for all eternity,

as we worship you, saying,

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,**

**God of power and might,**

**heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest. Amen.**

We draw all our prayers together in the prayer that Jesus gave us in its modern form. The words will appear on screen:

**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.**

**Save us from the time of trial**

**and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,**

**now and forever. Amen.**

Our final hymn is a song of praise, proclaiming the majesty of our triune God.

**Hymn : Praise God from whom all blessings flow**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow

Praise Him all creatures here below

Praise Him above, ye heav’nly host

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

Praise to the Father praise the Son

Praise to the Spirit Three in One.

Praise to the most high God we sing.

Praise to our Saviour, Lord and King.

*Praise our God, praise His Name,*

*Praise our God, for our God saves.*

Let every mouth the Lord proclaim.

Let earth and heaven sing His praise.

Let every knee before Him bow

Great is our God, the Lord of all.

*Praise Our God, praise His Name…*

Praise, God from whom all blessings flow

Praise Him all creatures here below;

Praise Him above, ye heav’nly host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

*Louis Bourgeois and Thomas Ken*

*Additional Chorus and Words for verse 2 & 3 by Michael Schroeder*

**THE BLESSING**

The Lord God almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

the holy and undivided Trinity,

guard you, save you,

and bring you to that heavenly city,

where he lives and reigns for ever and ever. **Amen.**

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