

A Podcast for North Coventry Group – June 7 2020 (Trinity)

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. This has been prepared for Trinity Sunday, 7 June 2020.

Details of music and sources are in the online transcript, and I would like to thank Erica and Janet for joining in the preparation of this week's edition.

Introductory Music: Brahms' *Violin Concerto (2nd mvt, part)*
performed by Nigel Kennedy
The London Philharmonic Orchestra cond. Klaus Tennstedt

Call to Worship: Words from Psalm 31

In you, Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame;
deliver me in your righteousness.

Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue;
be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.

Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God.

A hymn for Trinity Sunday – 'Thou, whose almighty Word...'

Musicⁱ – *Thou whose almighty Word*, sung by the Choir of Norwich Cathedral
from the album *Complete New English Hymnal, Volume 5*

Thou whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard
and took their flight;
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel day
sheds not its glorious ray
let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love,
lifegiving, holy Dove,
speed forth thy flight;
move o'er the waters' face,
bearing the lamp of grace,
and in earth's darkest place
let there be light!

Thou who didst come to bring
on thy redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind,
O now to all mankind
let there be light!

Blessed and holy Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might,
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride,
through the world, far and wide,
let there be light!

Words: John Marriott (1780 – 1825) and Thomas Raffles (1788 – 1863)

Prayers and Lord's Prayer

Lord God, with the Psalmist and with all of your people in all times and places we want to express our confidence in you as a fixed point, our rock, our protection. We rejoice that you are our God, though we struggle to articulate even the partial understanding we have of your nature and your being.

We thank you for your three-fold revelation of yourself to us.

In you we all have our origin, even when we do not understand how Creation came to be.

Through your Son we all have a guide to right living and the reassurance that humanity is reconciled to you.

Through the Holy Spirit we are inspired to live up to our potential and act as channels of your love and your peace.

When our circumstances seem to change so quickly, we look to you for stability.

When we lose our trust in others, we look to you for faithfulness.

When human rights are under threat, we look to you for guidance on what is just.

We want to respond as we ought, and to apply the teaching of Jesus even to the confused and troubled times in which we live.

Forgive us when we fail. Re-direct us when we stray. And when we seem forever to find fault with one another, remind us that all humanity has the potential to love and care for each other – in your image, and following your uncomplicated laws of living.

We offer this worship and all our prayers to you in the name of Jesus, and share his words as we pray...

Our Father, who 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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Scriptureⁱⁱ: Psalm 8

LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory
in the heavens.

²Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

³When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

⁴what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?

⁵You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honour.

⁶You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:

⁷all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,

⁸the birds in the sky,

and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹ LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflection (1)

This is Trinity Sunday – the First Sunday after Pentecost, when preachers are invited or expected to have yet another stab at exploring or explaining the nature of God.

Historically the Church used this opportunity not just to explore but to **declare** the nature of God. Some arms of the Church still make use on this day of the so-called Athanasian Creed, a statement of belief in the late fifth-century church that focusses on the Trinity and runs to nearly 700 words.

Here's a flavour of it:

... the catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one.

I wouldn't dare to try to sum up the message of the Athanasian Creed, other than that it insists we have one God and not three, and yet God is in each aspect we think of as the Trinity.

We have heard a hymn that looks at each person of the Trinity, verse by verse. *Thou whose almighty Word chaos and darkness heard* – God the Father and creator. *Thou who didst come to bring... healing and sight.* God the Son. *Spirit of truth and love, life-giving holy dove* – explicitly the Holy Spirit.

I like this hymn and I have made use of it all year round, not just on Trinity Sunday, when I wanted to begin worship with a reminder of how all-embracing and all-involved in human life God is. And to use trinitarian language. So often it is easier to define God by what he does than by what he is.

Our ministers and elders when they are ordained, adults when confirmed, received into church membership will be expected to reply in the affirmative when we ask the question,

*Do you confess your faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
maker of heaven and earth,
redeemer of the world,
giver of life?*

It is what God does. Each person of the Trinity given a part in the creation, the reconciliation with creation and the ongoing inspiration of God's people.

Hard as it may be to define God, it is good to be able to rationalise what God does in this threefold way. And God's people have been observing his power and love and reacting to it through all time. That's what the Psalmist is getting at. He marvels that God, who has concerns for the whole of the universe, nevertheless cares and provides for humanity. And also entrusts the natural world to human care.

We too can look at the night sky and wonder at its immensity and we know better than the psalmist what a small part of creation we occupy. And we too can wonder, what have we done – what can we do – to deserve this? Our God, as the children's hymn goes, is a great big God. How should we respond?

Regular listeners will recall how, two weeks ago, we made use of the closing paragraphs of Luke's Gospel to consider how Jesus left his disciples after his earthly ministry. Here is how Matthew brings *his* Gospel to a close:

Scripture: Matthew 28.16-20

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Music: Lo, I am with you to the end of the world
[John L Bell, sung by the Wild Goose Worship Group
and taken from their album *There is one among us*]

Lo I am with you to the end of the world.

Lo I am with you to the end of the world.

Lo I am with you. Lo I am with you.

Lo I am with you to the end of the world.

Lo I am with you when you leave self behind...

Lo I am with you when you suffer for love...

Lo I am with you in the changes of life...

Lo I am with you in the darkness of death...

Lo I am with you to the end of the world...

(Words by John L Bell, b. 1949)

Reflection (2)

I never worry that there are different accounts of the very end of the life of Jesus. Human nature being what it is, some of this can be put down to a sort of Chinese whispers, affecting the oral tradition until things were written down. And then copied. And then summarised, and... well, you'll have heard this before. Matthew gives us a very full account of the death of Jesus and the surrounding events. Then seems to rush to round off the story. Think of how long John takes to talk of 'Doubting Thomas'. Here we have two words. *Some doubted*. And then on we go. The nearest that Matthew gets to a prediction of the coming helper, the Holy Spirit, is that last promise: *Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Lo, I am with you to the end of the world.*

But this brief, five-verse reading is full of meaning, full of message, and still remarkably full of relevance to us, even if this was a commission to the surviving disciples in that period while they still numbered just eleven.

The Church has always seen this as its marching orders – an instruction that, like Jesus' presence, will be with us until the end of the world.

While some would focus on this passage too as telling us something about God, and an unexpected just-in-time endorsement by Jesus of the doctrine of the Trinity, I would rather concentrate on what it tells us we should be doing **for** God.

Baptising and teaching. So bringing to people the advantages and the obligations of following Christ. The rights and the responsibilities that accrue to the Christian. But who are we bringing this to? **All nations**. Here in the last verse of the Gospel that above all has the reputation of being directed to Jews, replete with so many Old Testament quotations, we have an instruction from the lips of Jesus to broaden out the mission. *All nations*. Everyone. And as I have observed before this is more people in more places than these eleven men could dream of.

There is another word in there we ought to take to heart also – in that last verse. It's the word *always*. I am with you...always. This is actually a very big concept to grasp. It captures the spirit of Psalm 139, when the writer despairs of being able to escape from God, wherever he goes. In the ups and downs of life, asleep and awake, when life is treating you so well that you might think you don't need God. And when things are so dark you think even God has abandoned you. No. He is there – Jesus, identifying himself with God because he *is* God. With us always, to the end of the world, the end of the age.

Given that promise, that assurance, wouldn't we want to respond, in service?

Prayers of Intercession

We turn again to God in our prayers.

Jesus told his disciples, *I am with you always, to the very end of the age*.

God, forever is a very long time, whichever direction we look. Yet we cannot look forward or backwards to a time when you have not been, or will not be. Help us to understand that none of our words can describe how vast is your love and care, and to accept that you have a part in each of our lives. And each of us a part in your purposes.

Your prophet Isaiah was daunted by your greatness and yet offered himself: *here I am Lord, send me*.

Lord, we want to respond with love to your love. We want to accept the Great Commission and go forward in the company of Christ to do his work in your world. Help us to interpret your call to us; help us to see and take the opportunities to be Christ to our neighbours

In ancient times your exiled people felt unable to worship properly, or sing your songs.

Lord, your people feel cut off from normality and unable to function as a church. Inspire us and show us fresh directions we might take, how to remain connected and in touch and responding to you despite losing our regular meeting times.

The Psalmist wondered that Earth's resources had been put in human hands.

God, help us not just to accept your amazing generosity but to take responsibility for stewarding what is in the world, natural resources both living and inert. As we look to emerge from lockdown and slowdown, may we not rush to reverse the reduction in pollution the world has seen in recent months.

Jesus commanded his disciples to baptise and teach. He also said, love one another as I have loved you.

Lord, may we be Christ to others and give of **our** time and resources to help and comfort those who are ill, anxious and grieving. We ask you for healing even where there is sometimes no cure, for peace and calm where there has been upset and turmoil.

In this week we have seen anger and violence resulting from thoughtless action and needless death in the United States. Help us and all your children to see that we are bound through you with family ties that go beyond differences in skin colour, accent, ethnic origins and social position.

[Silence]

Lord hear us

Lord, graciously hear us

In Jesus' name

Amen

Hymn Love divine, all loves excelling
Sung by the St Michael's Singers, from the album
The best hymns album in the world... ever!

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Come almighty to deliver;
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee,
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.

Words by Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

Blessing

May God the Holy Trinity make you strong
in faith and hope and love.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father Son and Holy Spirit be with us and
remain with us always.

Amen

Music: *The Swan*, from *Carnival of the Animals* by Camille Saint-Saens
John Ogdon and Brenda Lucas (piano duet) and Hilary Robinson (cello)
from the *Saint Saens* album by the
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Louis Fremaux

Credits

Our opening music Brahms' *Violin Concerto (2nd mvt, part)* was performed by Nigel Kennedy with the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Klaus Tennstedt

Thou whose almighty Word, was sung by the Choir of Norwich Cathedral from the album *Complete New English Hymnal, Volume 5*

Lo, I am with you to the end of the world by John L Bell was sung by the Wild Goose Worship Group and taken from their album *There is one among us*

Love divine, all loves excelling was sung by the St Michael's Singers, from the album *The best hymns album in the world... ever!*

And you have just heard *The Swan*, from *Carnival of the Animals* by Camille Saint-Saens, played by Hilary Robinson on cello accompanied by John Ogdon and Brenda Lucas as a piano duet. This was found on the *Saint Saens* album by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Louis Fremaux

ⁱ All music included in this podcast is made available for download under the terms of the PRS for Music Limited Online Music Licence number LE-0019067

ⁱⁱ Bible quotations are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition.