

Trinity Sunday – Year B

Sunday 26 May 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Tommy MacNeil, Minister of Martin's Memorial Church, Stornoway, and Convener of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, for his thoughts on Trinity Sunday.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the Sanctuary First website:
<https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship>

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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Introduction

I'm delighted to share some worship materials with you for this week. This is even more so the case given that our focus are some of my favourite passages from the Bible. Of course, it's all good, but there are certain passages that leave their mark on you.

This is the week after 2024 General Assembly and it will no doubt have been a challenging week. Especially in terms of where we are as a Church right now. This is where the scriptures for this week are so timely for us. As we look to celebrate Trinity Sunday we see in remarkable ways the ministry of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and how they each have their own part to play in our knowing and growing in our relationship with them. And they all play their part in helping us live as the people of God who will reveal who God is to the world around us.

As individuals, as churches, as Presbyteries, as a denomination, and as a nation, we will at times find ourselves in the midst of the storms of life. Such times are meant to be seasons, but in recent times it's felt as though we have been going from one storm to the next. Living in an almost constant state of challenge, change, and uncertainty. Dealing with issues of death and disappointment; having more questions than answers. What should we do at these times? The Psalmist will encourage us to look at the God of creation, who is all-powerful. Isaiah will encourage us to look afresh for God, that in seeing who and where God is, and what God's desires are, we'll have fresh vision and energy to walk out God's purposes. Nicodemus will encourage us to seek for Jesus afresh, and in finding Him we will be reminded of Jesus' love for us and for the whole world. He'll also help remind us that God's Spirit is already at work in the world. We don't have to start anything; we just need to partner with God in what is already being done. And Paul will encourage us that all of this and our hopes and dreams for the future will flow from our awareness that we are children of God. The Holy Spirit specialises in helping us with this identity.

So let's look forward in faith to the exciting week of worship ahead of us as we celebrate the fact that this is Trinity Sunday.

[Isaiah 6:1-8](#)

You may be familiar with the phrase, 'Before resurrection, death is required!' John Ortberg put it like this: "Death is the prerequisite to resurrection; the new life God intends!" I find this helpful and reassuring, given the challenges we currently face as a Church. We've been focused on, and in some ways consumed by issues of decline for years. Some of that decline is as a result of death experiences: the death of hope, dreams, and visions; the death of

churches and ministries. What I want us to see in the experience of Isaiah the prophet is that his experience of death and all of the uncertainty that went with it was what ultimately prepared him for a fresh encounter with God and a fresh revelation of who and where God was, and what the longing of God's heart was.

All was well in Isaiah's life. King Uzziah was in the minority of his predecessors in that he was a godly and righteous king. With that, some historians reckoned him to be a relation of Isaiah's. Uzziah welcomed who Isaiah was as a prophet of God and what he had to say. So when the king died, Isaiah could no longer take his present position and future proclamations for granted.

I want to suggest that as the Church of Scotland we've tended to rest on our history and taken our future for granted. We're committed to parish ministry in every part of Scotland, we are the national Church after all. We tell ourselves we have the right to be here and have the right to be a prophetic voice. I'm sorry, but the enlightenment, post modernity, and the ongoing rise of secularism means that this is no longer the case. Whilst we deal with and look to respond to challenge and change, I believe our present experience of death is part of God's plan to prepare us for a resurrection.

Isaiah is mourning an earthly king but has a vision of a heavenly King, one who is eternal and unchanging. This King is on His throne and the train of His robe filled the temple, indicating God's presence filling His Church.

The angels are continuing to worship God for who God is. We would do well to learn from them. We will at times hold God to ransom – hear and answer my/our prayers and we'll worship You. The angels teach us we should never limit or restrict the worship of God for what God does or doesn't do. God is ALWAYS worthy of our worship!

The angels sing to the holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty. The God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As they spend time in God's presence worshipping, they begin to see the longing of God's heart. Whereas I might be content with a temple, a church filled with God's presence, God's vision is that the whole earth be full of God's glory. Please Lord, let it be so! In order to see this vision of God realised, heaven needs some help. Verse 8 asks, whom will WE send, and who will go for US? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, looking for some help on earth.

Encountering God's presence and glory can be costly, just ask Isaiah. He felt undone and ruined. Having experienced death externally, Isaiah now experiences death in his own heart. He sees his own sin and owns it before he sees anyone else. As he experiences death,

life comes from heaven in the form of an angel holding a live coal. As this live coal, life coal, touches Isaiah's lips he is cleansed, forgiven, and resurrected in an instant.

Having felt useless a moment ago, and having heard a cry and call from heaven for help, Isaiah is now ready to step up to the challenge. So, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you're looking for some help? I'm your person. Here am I, send me. I'm up for the task. Having experienced death, I've now experienced life, resurrected life, and I'm ready to bring the greatest prophetic revelation of the coming of Christ to the world. Just as Isaiah was called from death to life and brought the revelation of the first coming of Christ, may God's life touch our lips and hearts so that we too make ourselves available to Him. That we become part of the answer to our own prayers, and we share the Good News of Christ so that the earth is filled with God's glory and presence, and so many more are ready for Jesus' second coming.

[Psalm 29](#)

When we face challenges that are bigger than us, one of the natural consequences of this is that we forget who God is. The scriptures encourage us time and time again to open our eyes, to look up, to see who God is, where God is, and what God is doing. In this psalm, God has opened the eyes of David, the man after God's own heart, and invites him not so much to look up, but to look around. That in looking at the wonder of creation we are left in awe of our Creator. This is a hymn of praise that reminds the people of God that in light of the world we live and the power of it and the sounds it makes, we would do well to guard our hearts from the worship of all false gods so that we worship the One True God. The phrase, "The Voice of the Lord" is repeated seven times. I always find it reassuring as a preacher to learn that repeating a point isn't a modern phenomenon! With that, the Psalmist wants to remind us to prioritise the voice of God about every other voice.

The Psalmist begins with an audacious call to worship to all of creation to bring a worthy offering of worship to God. As we acknowledge God's glory and strength, we will be confronted with God's glory afresh and in encountering Him who is holy, we will bring a holy offering to bless Him.

The Psalmist invites us not just to open our eyes to see God's greatness, but to open our ears that we might hear God's greatness. You hear God's voice in the rivers, seas, and oceans; in the thunderclap of the storm; and even in the breaking of the mighty cedar tree that can be broken apart by the breath of God. God is to be heard in lightning flashes, and in sandstorms that disturb the desert. God's voice will even shake the mighty oak, and when He moves in such a way, even a forest will sing glory to God.

Encountering God in these ways will lead us to remember that there is none like Him or beside Him. That God is King forever, and to know Him is to benefit from God's strength in us and His peace around us. With creation we need to sing "How great is our God!"

Romans 8:12-17

Life leaves us with a lot of choices to make, which will, to a large degree shape our experience of life and the people we are. To put it into biblical language, we can choose to live according to the *flesh*, or we can choose to live according to the *Spirit*. We can choose to live to please ourselves, or we can choose to live to please God and so our life will be a blessing to others.

St Augustine got into trouble in his day when he encouraged people to 'Love God and then live as you please!' It was thought he was encouraging licentious and promiscuous living. The fact is, he called it exactly right. By prioritising our love for God, every decision we make in response will be pleasing to God and so will be a blessing to others. This is the ultimate in living by the Spirit and not the flesh.

The Apostle Paul clearly agreed with St Augustine. If we live by the Spirit, if we give priority to living for God and loving God, then we will live as the children of God. This is life as God intended. This is what it means to be fully alive and free to live our best lives. It's good for us to be reminded of this, as many people wrongly think that living for God is to live a limited or restricted life.

Loving God, living by the Spirit, leads us to experience God's love in its fullest form, which means we know God as our Abba – a remarkable term for God that speaks of His great love for us and longing for us to know Him and His love in an intimate way. It is in knowing and receiving God's love for us, that we are fully alive as the children of God. This is God's greatest desire for us.

It is also worth remembering on this Trinity Sunday that the Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and specifically ministers to us to bring God's love alive to us, so that we know that we only love God because God first loved us. God loves us to the same degree as God loves His own Son, and what God has to give to His own Son, God gives to us. What a remarkable gospel we believe in and share with others. This is truly Good News!

[John 3:1-17](#)

Standing by the River Thames since 1878 is the great monument of Cleopatra's Needle. It was built 3,500 years ago for the Pharaoh. When this great structure was planted on British soil they decided to put a time capsule in the base, containing aspects of life in Victorian England that would speak to future generations. It included a set of coins, some children's toys, a city map and directory, a razor, 12 photographs of the most glamorous women of the day. With all of that they put a verse from the Bible – John 3:16. They did this just in case the world in the future would lose sight or forget the message of God's love for the world.

If our world needs to hear anything in our day, it is that God loves us all.

Someone who needed to know and experience this love was Nicodemus. A deeply religious man, he was frustrated by his efforts to please God. Such efforts left him discouraged and disillusioned.

As part of the Jewish Ruling Council, Nicodemus' devotion led him to be promoted above his peers. He was in an honoured and trusted position, and it made him fearful. Fearful of what? What would others think if he showed any interest in the man called Jesus, who some were regarding as the Messiah? In light of this he went to see Jesus in secret at night. Jesus still has secret seekers today, those who look to be secret followers. This is an oxymoron – you can't truly follow Jesus and be ashamed of Him at the same time.

For Nicodemus the fruit of the life of Jesus authenticated the message He preached. Oh that we would live in such a way. Nicodemus recognised that Jesus' life could not be explained without God. In response Jesus related to this deeply religious man by using spiritual metaphors. You need to be born again. How does that happen? Surely I don't enter my mother's womb again? Of course not. Your mother gave birth to you naturally, you were born of water. Born of humanity. What's needed is for you to be born by the power of the Holy Spirit. We see here that John was in good company with Paul in what he wrote to the Romans.

Nicodemus is beginning to get his head around things. He likes his religious knowledge *and* experience to be ordered, neat, and tidy. Then Jesus informs him that, by the way, no-one can control the Holy Spirit, who is like the wind, working wherever, in whomever and whichever way the it chooses. You will see the effects of the Holy Spirit's work, but you cannot control the Spirit.

We all enjoy having religious knowledge and understanding. The will and ways of God can never be fully understood by our limited minds or tamed by our anxious hearts. This was a challenge for Nicodemus when Jesus spoke prophetically of His death and said that all people need to look to Him and trust in Him, both for abundant life on earth and eternal life in the world to come.

This was the context for the most famous bible verse in the world. And whereas Nicodemus would often have felt condemned by trying to live a faithful religious life, Jesus didn't come to condemn, rather He came to save... to save us from ourselves and our best efforts, our religious practices, and to call us into a relationship with Him. Truly living as God intended.

Sermon ideas

Focus on Isaiah 6:1-8

Verse 1: In the storms of life we need to remember where God is and who God is (on His throne, and God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

Verses 2-4: In the storms of life we need to remember God's longing for our world (not just the temple/church, the whole earth full of God's glory).

Verses 5-7: In the storms of life we need to remember God is holy and we are not.

Verse 8: In the storms of life we need to remember heaven needs our help and earth needs us to love and serve God. We need to be the answer to our own prayers.

Focus on Psalm 29

The overall theme is that if you're struggling or discouraged, open your eyes and ears to the world around you and you won't stay in that place for long!

Verses 1-2: Giving God the glory God is due.

V3-9: Listening for God's glory in creation.

V10-12: Bring glory to God by receiving His strength and peace.

Focus on Romans 8:12-17

Verses 12-13: You have a choice to make: living for self leads to death, living by the Spirit leads to life.

Verses 14-16: Live as a child of God – Only the Holy Spirit enables us to do that.

Verse 17: The blessing of God's choice of us – co-heirs with Christ, who will share in His glory.

Focus on John 3:1-17

Verses 1-3: Being religious is not enough.

Verses 4-9: We need to receive the Holy Spirit to be born spiritually.

Verses 10-15: The revelation of Christ's death is the basis of our faith.

Verses 16-17: The reach of God's love. A love that needs to be received, a love that takes us from religion and what we do, to relationship and trusting in what Christ has done for us.

Prayers

Written by some of the members of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team

Gathering prayer / Call to worship

O Holy God,
like Isaiah the prophet, we stand in awe of Your glory,
feeling tremendously small and polluted by our sin,
and the sin of others.

Even so, as You touch us with Your burning presence,
we rejoice that we are made clean and whole.

O God, our Creator, continue to build this household of faith into what You want us to be.

O Christ, our Saviour lead us to do as You will.

O Spirit, our power, strengthen us for the work of Your Kingdom.

O Blessed Trinity, fill this place and these people with Your presence.

Lead us into the world You love, so like us it will be filled with Your glory.

For Yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory, now and always. Amen.

Confession / Repentance

Living and loving God,

We acknowledge that in our experiences of death, it is so easy for us to lose sight of You.

We know much about earthly things, but so little about heavenly things.

We stand in Your presence, O God, and become all too aware of our sins and shortcomings.

In confessing them, we thank You for the remarkable provision You've made to touch our lips and cleanse our hearts.

We're sorry for settling for a temple filled with Your glory,
when it's Your desire to fill the world with it.

Help us not to limit or restrict the reach of Your all-embracing love.

As we ask for Your help, we hear the cry of heaven for our help.

In response, we gladly say, 'Here am I, send me!'

May more and more people see that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son.

And in so doing, He didn't come to condemn, but to save.

We ask all of these prayers in the name of the Son,
that we might know the love of the Father, and the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Thanksgiving / Gratitude

Almighty and everlasting God, we give You thanks that You revealed yourself as Father, Son
and Holy Spirit
and that You live and reign in the perfect unity of Love.

Lord, we worship You in the splendour of Your holiness.
You give strength to Your people and You bless them with peace.
We are ever mindful of the gifts You have given us and pray that we may use them to
advance Your Kingdom.
We thank You Lord, for the fellowship enjoyed at the General Assembly
and for the challenges that have been laid before us all.
We thank You for the knowledge that we may always come to You in prayer,
as we seek to do Your will, and that we are never alone.

We ask all of this in Christ's name and for Christ's glory.
Amen

(Liz Fox)

Prayer for others / Intercession

Heavenly father, we come before You now with our prayers for our world.

Creator God, look around the beautiful and bountiful world that You have created,
giving thanks for the good gifts that You have given us.
Remind each of us of the role we have in caring for Your creation
and change the hearts of those who seek to destroy the beauty of the earth for their own
gain.
Encourage those who seek climate justice and those who work to restore our land, rivers
and seas.
Creator God, help us work together to heal Your earth.

God of the sick, we think of all of those who are struggling with poor physical or mental
health.
Draw alongside them that they may know Your healing love.

We pray for all of those who work in healthcare.
Grant them strength and wisdom for every challenge they face.
Be with those who walk through the valley of the shadow of death.
Walk with them, comfort them and bring them Your peace.

God of peace, we look around our world and see war and destruction.
Bring peace to every situation that knows the torment and uncertainty that war brings.
Protect those who are fleeing from violence and conflict;
grant them safe passage and help them to find welcome and acceptance wherever they find
a home.

Eternal God, we pray for our churches locally, nationally and around the world.
Let them be a light in the darkness and beacons of hope in situations that seem hopeless.
As we give thanks for those who have nurtured us, help us to sow seeds of faith in others.
Help us to reach out to those in our communities who have yet to know you for themselves.

Living God, You know our every thought.
We bring before You now the situations that are known to us and the people that we love
most.
Be with us as we journey together, through highs and lows.
Grant us wisdom to speak into the situations that need to hear our voice
and be with us in the silence when words fail us.

We pray for all of these things in Your holy name. Amen

(Amy-Louise Scott)

Blessing / Closing prayer

Heavenly Father, what a great and magnificent God You are. You alone are holy.
Keep us looking away from the world to Jesus, who alone is our redeemer and provider.
Keep us looking to the world so that it may be transformed by Your presence through us.
Keep us looking to our own hearts so that we will say daily, 'Here am I, send me!'
And all for Your glory and honour's sake, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen

Musical suggestions

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of

recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

- CH4 63 – “All people that on earth do dwell”
- CH4 111 – “Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!”
- CH4 124 – “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation”
- CH4 127 – “O worship the King, all glorious above”
- CH4 137 – “All things bright and beautiful”
- CH4 153 – “Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father”
- CH4 160 – “Praise my soul, the King of heaven”
- CH4 180 – “Give thanks with a grateful heart”
- CH4 186 – “Father God, I wonder”
- CH4 458 – “At the Name of Jesus”
- CH4 485 – “Dear Lord and Father of mankind”
- CH4 512 – “To God be the glory, great things he has done!”
- CH4 583 – “Spirit divine, attend our prayers”

- MP 3 – “Abba Father”
- MP 18 – “All over the world”
- MP 139 – “Father we adore you”
- MP 142 – “Father we love you”
- MP 153 – “For the fruits of his creation”
- MP 367 – “Jesus is Lord”
- MP 442 – “Lord of the Church”
- MP 591 – “Seek ye the Lord”
- MP 673 – “There is a redeemer”
- MP 826 – “Father of creation”
- MP 843 – “He is the Lord”
- MP 1100 – “Open the eyes”

- “The splendour of the King” (How great is our God) (Chris Tomlin) – CCLI song #4348399

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different "Spiritual Styles"?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?

Did it function well as a whole?

How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?

- How balanced was the worship?
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/
community?
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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