

St Mary's, Barton-upon-Humber: Readings, prayers and notices for the week May 31- June 7

Collect for Trinity Sunday

Almighty and everlasting God,
you have given us 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 your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

or

Holy God, faithful and unchanging: enlarge our minds with the knowledge of your truth,
and draw us more deeply into the mystery of your love, that we may truly worship you,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Readings: Isaiah 40.12–17, 27–31; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13.11–13; Matthew 28.16-20

Meditation

OK, so we have the deep wounds of US society being exposed before everyone's eyes, a global pandemic which leaves our small island among the world leaders in the death-rate, sundry natural disasters, all sorts of unresolved conflicts and a continuing tide of human tragedy washed up on various shore, and I'm supposed to talk about The Most Holy Trinity? It smacks of the story of scholars in Constantinople debating fine points of theology while the Turks besieged the city. 40 years ago, a group of radical theologians suggested that the whole Trinitarian lark was stuff and nonsense (and a fair few of the group went on to declare that the idea of God in general had probably had its day, too), and perhaps they had a point. It's hard enough holding on to a nice, simple idea of One God without going all complicated.

We British tend naturally to be suspicious of 'clever', and so the image of grey-haired philosophical men (and it would be men, and *foreign* men at that, who probably also ate garlic, all sitting together 1600 years ago and constructing a very complicated diagram of God *guaranteed* to confuse ordinary mortals) leaves us cold. It smacks of those frightfully clever tax-advisers coming up with ingenious ways of ensuring their clients get concessions which lesser folk don't. 'Haha, that'll get 'em' they chortled, or whatever that was in fourth-century Greek.

The reality is a bit different, because it didn't start in 'cleverness', it started with a meeting with someone. And that Someone was Christ.

Try as they might, the first Christians couldn't fit Christ into the old patterns. Within 30 years of the first Holy Week, Paul the faithful Jew is quoting a hymn to Christ as God; the very end of Matthew talks about baptism being in the name of the Trinity which, if it's an addition to what Matthew wrote, is a very early addition, and there's all sorts in John which show how the Christians were thinking. Plenty of other solutions were tried out, but none of them really worked. The Trinity was the only way of holding together all of what Christians had experienced, and it starts off, not in philosophers' brains but in the everyday experiences of ordinary Christians like us. It was the only way the jigsaw would fit together.

But there's another way of telling the story which isn't about the history of what the Church made of encountering God in the person of Jesus Christ. It turns that upside down, and asks, 'If this is what God is like, then where does it leave us?' And that is *far* more rewarding today.

If you ask a child to draw a picture of God, there's a fair chance that they'll draw an old, bearded, long haired bloke sitting on a throne (comparisons with the Vicar are not encouraged). And that's all he does. He sits. Oh, and he tells people off, and sends the occasional plague of boils (I've been reading the book of Job, does it show?). It's all a bit static.

But it's harder to draw the Trinity without putting little arrows in to show how it all fits together. There's movement. There's vitality. There's relationship, as something – love – flows between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Not for nothing do people talk about the dance of the Trinity. And I'll bet anyone who has ever been in love knows at least an echo of the steps of that dance, where we constantly want to give everything that we are to the one we love.

If God's like that, and if that echoes in our hearts – what does a torn, broken and suffering world start to look like? How does a people caught up in the whirling dance of the Trinity look upon the world?

A people of the Trinity will start to ask questions about division and injustice, not on narrow party-political grounds, but because we see the outpouring of love as being the very dynamo of all creation. A people of the Trinity will see God in every healing act, in every conflict resolved, in every life made whole, as, even falteringly, the broken know themselves to be adding to the dance. And a people of the Trinity, recognising that the heart of God lies in self-giving and self-sacrifice will be suspicious of those who command, but at no cost to themselves, or glibly talk of 'prices worth paying'.

In his sermon for Pentecost, Pope Francis said:

"The world sees us only as on the Right or on the Left, with this ideology, or that one. The Spirit sees us as sons and daughters of the Father, and brothers and sisters of Jesus. The world sees conservatives and progressives. The Spirit sees children of God."

There, in a nutshell, is what the world of the Trinity looks like, the whole of us caught up in relationship, not division, and relationship not just with ourselves and one another but with God. What would the world of racial division, and poverty, and invisible suffering start to look like if we actually believed that were true?

Fr David

Next Sunday – First Sunday after Trinity

Exodus 19.2-8a Psalm 100; Romans 5.1-8; Matthew 9.35-10.8

Those in need. Please help us keep our intercessions up to date and leave requests for prayer – either by email to david.rowett@lincoln.anglican.org, or the phone, or even a note through my door, and encourage others likewise.

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For your prayers

Church: On Trinity Sunday we give thanks to God the creator, Christ the Saviour of the world, and the Spirit of truth and love, for creating us to live in community. Chaplains in the NHS. The Church in Mexico.

World: Health workers, all those involved in keeping essential services running. Our own political leaders. Those charged with peace-keeping and peace-making. The governments & peoples of China, Syria and the Middle East, North Africa. All seeking to resolve the issues surrounding protection of the environment, of infection control and of migrancy. For the people of the United States (and perhaps ourselves), facing hard questions about their society.

Our Community: The Parish Clerk, Administrator and all who assist in parish administration.

Those in need: Those whose lives or livelihoods are endangered by Coronavirus. Those who fear the prospect of isolation. All who live in areas of conflict or tension; the homeless, the poor, the sick, the enslaved, the hungry and the abused. Victims of terrorism.

Those for whom our prayers are asked: Melissa Milbourn, Julie Newton, Penny Archer, Kate Eaton, Mike Page-Chestney, Juliet Large, Stephen Wilkinson, Joyce Gibson, Janet Petch, Sally, Abby,, Nell. Thanks for progress: Jan

Departed: Pauline Fields Kathleen Mellor, Brian Pearson, Paula Taylor. Those who have died as a result of COVID-19, especially those who work in the caring and medical communities.

Updates

'Why are we waiting?' I'm not entirely sure where the song comes from (though the tune, I suppose, might just get a chance of being sung this year), but I am aware of an increasing sense of frustration that we're not allowed yet even to open up for private prayer or for the same sort of funeral as is permitted in crematoria. It's not just us, either – I know that the [RC] Archbishop of Westminster has commented not-particularly-privately that it's strange that the Cathedral bookshop on one side of the *piazza* will be open but the actual cathedral won't, and others have observed the peculiarity by which people can meet outside in small socially distanced groups but outdoor services are still a no-no. Given that we have the perfect space for outdoor worship in Saxby's amphitheatre, in this benefice we find it especially galling.

On Friday we received the latest update from Lincoln, including 7 *documents* about preparing for re-opening, some of which had to be just 'best-guesses.' We have done essential marking-off to maintain Social Distancing and the hand sanitiser (no naked lights) is here, we've got signs all over the place and I have a good idea of how we'll work things when we can – in the meantime, I share with you the sense of loss and even incomprehension, and promise that there's a lot of other folk at all levels of all the Churches who feel the same.

It's not about wanting to take risks with public health, far from it, but from tomorrow week we'll be able to catch the Hull bus to wander round Waterstone's and (if you can find one) buy a prayer book, but not go into a Church to read it....

Daily Hope phone line

A Church of England initiative, Daily Hope offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a telephone line. The line – which is available 24 hours a day on **0800 804 8044** – has been set up particularly with those unable to join online church services during the period of restrictions in mind. It's an 0800 number, so landline calls will usually not cost you anything.

Foodbank is still operating, but unable to take donations in the usual manner. We are accepting cash donations to help run things slightly differently during the present situation.

Do keep in your prayers Juliet Large, who is very unwell at the moment.

This week...

The Thursday after Trinity Sunday has for centuries been observed as **Corpus Christi** or as the Church of England's calendar puts it '**The Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion**'. You might be surprised to learn that it's thought to have been a woman, the mystic Juliana of Liège who campaigned back in the Middle Ages for a day to be set aside to celebrate the gift of the Sacrament. Maundy Thursday does rather concentrate on the New Commandment and the foot washing, and though there is a reading of the I Corinthians account of the institution of the Eucharist, the day is part of the Great Three Days. Given a chance to develop a life of its own as a festival it became an occasion for the performance of the Mystery Plays and for processions in decent weather. Though it dropped out of our calendar at the Reformation, it got back in and is observed in many a parish in various ways. I have memories of one Corpus Christi procession not so long ago where the hymn singing clearly upset a local dog which howled an accompaniment until we went back into Church....

Also on Thursday is the celebration of **Barnabas the apostle**, companion of Paul, but there are more interesting ones (waits for thunderbolt) to be found.

Monday celebrates the **Thomas Ken**, C17 bishop of my old diocese of Bath and Wells. Famously he refused to house Charles II's mistress, Nell Gwynne, when the court visited Winchester, but when the following year the See of Bath and Wells fell vacant, Charles appointed him as the new bishop, allegedly saying, "*Where is the good little man that refused his lodging to poor Nell?*" He had difficulty with James II's religious position and was tried (and acquitted) on a charge of high misdemeanour. Having then sworn the oath of allegiance to James, he felt unable, after the '*Glorious Revolution*' of 1688 to revoke it and swear allegiance to William of Orange. He, along with several hundred clergy, including nine bishops, are referred to as the 'non-jurors'. For most folk, though, he's most famous for his hymns ('*Glory to thee, my God, this night 'Awake my soul and with the sun*'). He is buried in St John's. Frome, Somerset.

On Tuesday we remember **Columba**, *probably* the founder of the Celtic religious community on Iona, from which the Celtic re-Christianising of northern Britain began (Lindisfarne was an Iona-founded community) is celebrated on Tuesday. Iona, of course, is still a wellspring of Celtic Christianity. His sailing to Iona from Ireland was a form of exile, as he went to a place where he could no longer see his homeland.

And also on Tuesday, someone of whom I bet you haven't heard, **Ephraim the Syrian**. It's often forgotten that the Christian Church flourished in Palestine for centuries, and spoke (and still worship in) neither Latin nor Greek, but a version of Jesus' own language, *Syriac*. Ephraim was a deacon in the fourth-century Church in Edessa, which Kingdom may well have been the first to embrace Christianity. A theologian and hymn-writer ('*Strengthen for service, Lord*' is one of his) his poetry is remarkable for its depth and skill. Had he written in Latin or Greek we'd have heard much more about him. His sermons were so highly thought of that several were written on a copy of the Bible from which the original text had been erased - *Codex Ephraimi Rescriptus* is one of the great four ancient manuscripts of the Bible, like the British Library's *Siniaticus*. Can't see anyone thinking one of my sermons is worth doing that for....