



Opening words: The God of Heaven has made a home on earth. Come now all who thirst, come now all who hunger, come now all who seek – and be filled.

Hymn: *STF 139 Today I awake* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2uAGtJi00KE>

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Today I awake
and God is before me.
At night, as I dreamt,
he summoned the day ;
for God never sleeps
but patterns the morning
with slithers of gold
or glory in grey.</p> <p>2 Today I arise
and Christ is beside me.
He walked through the dark
to scatter new light.
Yes, Christ is alive,
and beckons his people
to hope and to heal,
resist, and invite.</p> | <p>3 Today I affirm
the Spirit within me
at worship and work,
in struggle and rest.
The Spirit inspires
all life which is changing
from fearing to faith,
from broken to blest.</p> <p>4 Today I enjoy
the Trinity round me,
above and beneath,
before and behind ;
the Maker, the Son,
the Spirit together —
they called me to life
and call me their friend.</p> |
|--|--|

Opening Prayer: A shade are you in the heat O God, A shelter are you in the cold.
Eyes are you to the blind O God A staff are you to the weak. An island are you at sea O God. A rock are you on land.
O my soul's healer keep me at evening keep me at morning keep me at noon. I am tired, astray and stumbling Shield
me from sin. O my soul's healer Shield me from sin.

Scripture: Genesis 18: 1 – 14 Three visitors and a promise. Hospitality and healing.

Sermon: At the top of the page is the famous 15th century Icon painted by Andrei Rublev in 15th cent. It's a painting of the 3 men at the oaks of Mamre and at the same time a painting of the Trinity. There has been plenty of debate about who is who but perhaps that's to miss the point .
Because this is not so much an image of the Trinity itself as an image of the theology of the Trinity.

The story tells us of Abraham dozing in the mid-day heat when three men appear from nowhere.
He doesn't wait for them to approach. He runs to them. He bows to the ground and asks if they'll do him the honour of bathing their feet and sitting with him. He orders his elderly wife, Sarah, to go and bake bread and cook a whole calf's worth of veal and then they dine under the trees.

Abraham exemplifies hospitality: if you see a stranger wandering in the desert, it's not enough to wait for them to ask for help. You go and meet that person, with enthusiasm. You beg them for the honour of a visit, no matter who they are, and you feed them the best of what you have. The Lord responds to Abraham's hospitality by giving him the most prized reward in Abraham's culture...Fatherhood and Sarah who cooked this lovely feast will have her disgrace taken away. She's going to bear an heir for her husband after all. There will be healing.

Look again at the picture. There is a space at the table on our side. We are meant to be drawn in to this fellowship. As we gather, whether in person or linked by technology, we are a part of the church universal – conservative and liberal, lively worshippers or given to introspection, a spectrum of different appearances different abilities and disabilities. Yet we are one church and we worship one God.
In the picture the different figures incline toward one another in an attitude of perfect harmony.
None dominates the other around this table.

We need to pay attention to that empty space at the table. It is an invitation to come to meet with God.
And as Abraham reminds us, that is about rolling out the red carpet for those who are strangers to you.

So not just maintaining our fellowship but out to greet others.

Henri Nouwen a priest, teacher and writer, wrote this "Hospitality . . . means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place"

He was writing from where he lived in a L'arche community. There's a branch in Ipswich and their work is undergirded by a culture of **shared lives** between people with and without learning disabilities, from which they can work **together** to build a more human society.

The hospitable space is not an easy place. It's more than a smile as you give out a hymn book and inviting new people to come through to coffee. It is costly. Physically spiritually and psychologically. It also involves us overcoming the very natural reaction of putting up barriers to those who are different from us.

We have had it brought to our attention in a forceful way in recent months with the floods of desperate refugees fleeing war that the practice of hospitality can be, literally, a matter of life and death. In truth we have seen it for years but many of those refugees struggling across seas and our channel didn't look like "us".

So in the first instance, hospitality involves offering food, drink and shelter to the stranger. But it is actually a much richer concept. It is an attitude, a habit of the heart, that we can cultivate and nurture and from which rich actions naturally flow.

Now that sounds like the kind of church I would be drawn to.
It sounds like the kind of church that could quietly change the town.
It sounds like a church universal that could transform the world.

And the first step is being drawn into the Triune God and accepting with gratitude all that God has done for you - then working with the church in its holy diversity to offer that relationship to a difficult and divided world.
Hospital and Hospitality, Hostel and Host all share the same root word and have the power to unite and heal.

Hold on my friends to those words from the book of Hebrews:

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares

Prayer: May those without shelter be under your guarding, O Christ. May the wandering find places of welcome. O son of the tears, of the wounds, of the piercings, May your cross this day be shielding them. Amen
Pray for the coming day, for refugees and those without a place of welcome.
Now join with Christians around the world in the words "Our Father ..."

Hymn STF 615 Let love be real <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZUo4gGaq2c>

Let love be real, in giving and receiving, without the need to manage and to own ; a haven free from posing and pretending, where every weakness may be safely known. Give me your hand, along the desert pathway, give me your love wherever we may go. <i>As God loves us, so let us love each other : with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.</i>	Give me your strength when all my words are weakness ; give me your love in spite of all you know.
2 Let love be real, not grasping or confining, that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free ; that helps us face the risk of truly living, and makes us brave to be what we might be.	3 Let love be real, with no manipulation, no secret wish to harness or control ; let us accept each other's incompleteness, and share the joy of learning to be whole. Give me your hope through dreams and disappointments ; give me your trust when all my failings show.

Michael Forster (b. 1946)

Blessing: On your heart and on your house, the blessing of God. In your coming and in your going, the peace of God. In your life and in your seeking, the love of God. At your end and new beginning the arms of God to welcome you home.

Picture can be found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity_%28Andrei_Rublev%29
Prayers from *Each day and Each Night* by J Philip Newell.