



Almighty God, people everywhere praise you because you are always far higher than our loftiest thoughts, much closer than our most intimate experiences, far more complex and awesome than our best creeds, and more grace-full than our most sacred hopes. You have shown by your actions that you provide for us like a Parent, you rescue us like a Brother, and you encourage us like an elder Sister. Beyond that point you are the Ultimate Mystery.

*As Christians, we name you Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Please, neither permit our partial knowledge to lead to arrogance, nor allow our ignorance to erode our confidence in what you have revealed. By the light you have surely given, let us walk with cheerful faithfulness. For yours is the kingdom of love, the power of love and the glory of love, now and ever more. **Amen!***

Hymn : Christ Triumphant STF 319

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdrcI26ppnw>

Christ triumphant, ever reigning,
Saviour, Master, King,
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,
Hear us as we sing:
*Yours the glory and the crown,
The high renown, the eternal name.*

Word incarnate, truth revealing,
Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing
By your humble birth: *Yours ...*

Suffering Servant, scorned, ill-treated,
Victim crucified!
Death is through the cross defeated,
Sinners justified: *Yours ...*

Priestly King, enthroned forever
High in heaven above!
Sin and death and hell shall never
Stifle hymns of love: *Yours ...*

So, our hearts and voices raising
Through the ages long,
Ceaselessly upon You gazing,
This shall be our song: *Yours ...*

Michael Saward

*Ever-loving God, you have disclosed yourself to us as a loving creator, redeemer, and inspirer. We have named you Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and we worship you as One God, the source and goal of all things seen and unseen. Please continue to give us your light, that we may walk in it without stumbling, to the praise and glory of your holy name. **Amen.***

Sermon

If you are following the printed order of service that goes with today's sermon you will notice that there are NO Bible readings included. That is quite deliberate because today it is Trinity Sunday... the only day in the calendar that focuses mainly on a doctrine of the Church. There is no part of the Bible that refers to God, the holy Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity comes solely from the mind of human beings... and it didn't really get a formal airing until the late fourth century.

When we look at the Bible, though, we can see evidence of the early church's experience of the Trinity. St Paul writes in his letter to the Romans (5:1-5), "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... (and) God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." And in the gospel of John (John 16: 12-15), Jesus says to the disciples, "All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that the Spirit of Truth will take what is mine and declare it to you." So, the ideas of God as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit were already present. But, for the first few hundred years, no one had grappled with how they fitted together in a way that made much sense. Jesus and the earliest disciples were faithful Jews, and their understanding of God was clearly monotheistic. There is one God to be worshipped. But very soon the first Followers of The Way were talking of *worshipping* Jesus, the risen messiah, and of being guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. And it is not until someone challenged that and said, "... you seem to be talking about three different gods", that they began having to try to put it all into words that made any sense. On the other hand, many of the early Christians, especially in some of the churches Paul was planting around Europe, were not traditional Jews. They were gentiles who came from a pagan background in the Greek and Roman world. And, as you know, the ancient Greeks and Romans were not **monotheists** at all, they were **polytheists**. They had whole pantheons of gods; a god of this... and a god of that... and a god of the other thing. So, for many of them, offering worship to Father, Son and Holy Spirit would have initially just seemed like switching to a smaller pantheon.

Anyway, it all comes to a head with a character called Arius. For four hundred years, it had been pretty much assumed among the followers of Jesus that Jesus was divine... that Jesus was in fact God in human form. But Arius sincerely and convincingly questioned this. Arius, who loved the Jesus of the gospels, argued that Jesus should be understood as an exemplary human being **ONLY**, because Almighty God is so far above us humans and is utterly independent of and complete in himself, the idea of Almighty God taking on a human expression of himself is an outrage. For Arius, the idea of God lowering himself to become personally involved with his creatures was demeaning and blasphemous. Arius argued powerfully that the idea was nothing more than a pagan vulgarisation of God. It made Almighty God like one of the gods of the Greek pantheon, a sort of superhero who ate and drank and fought, and occasionally dropped in for a sexual liaison which might result in fathering a human child. Arius insisted that this was a disgusting insult to Almighty God.

But Arius was opposed by the theologian, Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria. Athanasius argued that the essential defining feature of God was not utter independence, but self-giving love, a love that gives... and gives... and gives. And Athanasius argued that this self-giving occurs even within the Godhead — that between the Father and the Son and the Spirit there is total mutual self-giving. And then this self-giving looks outwards and expresses itself in a totally humble nearness to others, including us. God gets totally involved with us, loving, cherishing, nurturing, craving our response and our giving in return. God is the Spirit who moves through us with every breath, who whispers into our ear, who prompts us and cajoles us towards God-likeness, expressed in self-giving and love.

Athanasius accused Arius of having a sterile God who sits in isolated splendour, useless and irrelevant and passionless. The God made known in Jesus of Nazareth is dynamic, involved, always busy relating, cherishing, shining, revealing, expressing, giving; a God who can know joy and pain, a God who longs for us to return the love we are shown, a God who hurts when we fail to respond and who grieves when we damage ourselves in the process. The very earliest Christians experienced God in certain ways, and as they attempted to describe their experience the idea of the Trinity began to emerge. They began with their experience of the living God. The theology came afterwards.

At the end of the day, it really does not matter whether you agree with the doctrine of the Trinity or not, or even whether you understand it. What does matter is whether you have a personal relationship with God, and that you are journeying more and more deeply into that relationship with God. The doctrine is important, of course, but only as an attempt *to make sense of the experience*, and like falling in love, making sense of it is meaningless unless the experience is real first. The doctrine of the Trinity is an assertion that, despite appearances to the contrary, there is only one God.

Hymn : Father most Holy, merciful and tender

Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbrvNjohFt4>

The hymn begins at 4.11 on the YouTube timer

Tune: True Devotion

Father most Holy, merciful and tender;
Jesus our Saviour, with the Father reigning;
Spirit all kindly, Advocate, Defender,
Light never failing;

Trinity sacred, Unity unshaken;
Deity perfect, giving and forgiving,
Light of the Angels, Life of the forsaken,
Hope of all living;

Maker of all things, all thy creatures praise thee;
Lo, all things serve thee through thy whole
creation:
Hear us, Almighty, hear us as we praise thee,
Heart's adoration.

To the all-ruling triune God be glory:
Highest and Greatest, help thou our endeavour;
We too would praise thee, giving honour worthy,
Now and for ever.

Tr. A.E. Alston

All thanks and praise to you, O God,
as I join with the whole world
in declaring the greatness of your name.

In the beginning your Spirit brooded over the chaos
and brought to birth all the beauty and abundance of creation.
You created humankind in the image
of your own faithful love and desire,
dressing us in glorious splendour
and entrusting the care of the earth into our hands.

From our midst you brought forth your own child,
Jesus the Christ
— one with you, and the embodiment of your Spirit —
and through him you invited all people
to be baptised into your triune dance of love.

When he was killed, you raised him to life
and gave him all authority in heaven and on earth,
and in him, through the Holy Spirit,
you are with us always, even to the end of the age.

Holy Friend, loving God and Saviour, with your Church and all Christlike communities, I pray to you, both when we are at our wits end and on those days when we feel reasonably capable and competent. We ask you to bless our attempts in aiding all the lonely, suffering, bewildered, and grieving people on earth.

Yet our efforts, even at their best, towards loving our neighbours are piecemeal. Sometimes, despite our good intentions, our efforts are ill advised and ill directed. Please do for our fellow human beings all that we cannot do for each other. May no child of earth face distress or calamity on their own. Please guide and bless those who seem to have the knack of loving others in appropriate, practical ways. Give each of us the commitment and wisdom to express our compassion more wisely and lovingly.

And now, O God, engage with me in my personal considerations...

Loving God, to you all persons are precious. Teach us your ways. Let no person be forgotten, none neglected, none despised, and none judged as unworthy of the best care that is available. Bring the day nearer when your people on are a complete community of grace, mercy and peace. Through Christ Jesus. our exalted Brother and Lord. Amen.

Our Father in heaven,
help us to honour your name.
Come and set up your kingdom,
so that everyone on earth
will honour you,
as you are loved
and honoured in heaven.
Give us our food for today.
Forgive us for doing wrong,
as we forgive others.
Strengthen us to overcome temptation
and protect us from evil.
For the light, the vitality,
and the glory of life
are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn : Come and join the dance of Trinity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcucWaabVTo>

Come, join the dance of Trinity,
before all worlds begun -
the interweaving of the three,
the Father, Spirit, Son.
The universe of space and time
did not arise by chance,
but as the Three, in love and hope,
made room within their dance.

Come, see the face of Trinity,
new-born in Bethlehem;
then bloodied by a crown of thorns
outside Jerusalem.
The dance of Trinity is meant
for human flesh and bone;
when fear confines the dance in death,
God rolls away the stone.

Come, speak aloud of Trinity,
as wind and tongues of flame
set people free at Pentecost
to tell the Saviour's name.
We know the yoke of sin and death,
our necks have worn it smooth;
go tell the world of weight
and woe that we are free to move!

Within the dance of Trinity,
before all worlds begun,
we sing the praises of the Three,
the Father, Spirit, Son.
Let voices rise and interweave,
by love and hope set free,
to shape in song this joy, this life:
the dance of Trinity.

Richard Leach

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord, In the name of Christ. **Amen.**