

Morning Prayer 30th May 2021

Trinity Sunday

Morning Worship with Tini Horning



Personal preparation before the service begins.

Please take time to remember where you are,
and why you are here.
Give thanks and become still
in the presence of God

Prelude

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with us.
This is the day that the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Let us pray with words from Psalm 29

Ascribe to the Lord, you powers of heaven, ♦
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the honour due to his name; ♦
worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.
The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;
the God of glory thunders; ♦
the Lord is upon the mighty waters.
The voice of the Lord is mighty in operation; ♦
the voice of the Lord is a glorious voice.
The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees; ♦
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon;
He makes Lebanon skip like a calf ♦
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
The voice of the Lord splits the flash of lightning;

the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; ♦
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
The voice of the Lord makes the oak trees writhe
and strips the forests bare; ♦
in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'
The Lord sits enthroned above the water flood; ♦
the Lord sits enthroned as king for evermore.
The Lord shall give strength to his people; ♦
**the Lord shall give his people
the blessing of peace.**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit,
**As it was in the beginning,
is now and shall be for ever.**

ACF 42 Peruvian Gloria

Glory to God, glory to God, glory to the Father.
Glory to God, glory to God, glory to the Father.
To him be glory forever.
To him be glory forever.
Alleluia, amen.
Alleluia, amen.
Alleluia amen, alleluia amen.

Glory to God, glory to God, glory to Christ Jesus.
Glory to God, glory to God, glory to Christ Jesus.
To him be glory forever.
To him be glory forever.
Alleluia, amen.
Alleluia, amen.
Alleluia amen, alleluia amen.

Glory to God, glory to God, glory to the Spirit.
Glory to God, glory to God, glory to the Spirit.
To him be glory forever.
To him be glory forever.
Alleluia, amen.
Alleluia, amen.
Alleluia amen, alleluia amen.

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The Collect for today, Trinity Sunday

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.
Amen.

The reading is taken from Romans 8:12-17

Let us prepare ourselves for the word of God
Our hearts and our minds are open

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

The reading is taken from John 3:1-17

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

Glory to you, O Lord

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Homily

There is a lot to unpack in these texts and many angles from which we could look. Altogether, I see four main players or characters- God, Jesus, Nicodemus, and us. Let's start with a spotlight on Nicodemus and Jesus, our Gospel text. Who was Nicodemus?

He was a pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin (the highest tribunal in Jerusalem), which gave him lots of authority among the Jews. His name is Greek and meant "conqueror of the people." You could say he was an influencer in his day – someone to whom people looked to for wisdom and answers.

Before we meet Nicodemus in the Gospel text, Jesus (our second player) has been busy. Even though it was relatively early on in His ministry, we read in John that Jesus had already caused a stir in Israel by turning water into wine at the wedding in Canaan, clearing out the temple in Jerusalem and promising to destroy and rebuild it in three days. During the most recent Passover feast, he also performed miraculous signs. Nicodemus might have missed the water to wine episode, but he surely heard about the temple incident and the miraculous healings. Maybe he even saw them firsthand. How did he react? Was he in awe? Was he curious? Did he feel threatened in his leadership?

I haven't always believed the best in Nicodemus. We know from John 3:2 that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Why was that? I think I always assumed that while he was curious to know who this Jesus was, what he was planning and how he performed miracles, he

was too concerned about his own reputation and what others would think and, therefore, went to Jesus at night, instead of in the day when his fellow Pharisees might see him.

This week, however, I sensed the Spirit challenging me to look deeper into the scene and think through other possible scenarios. What if Nicodemus was so captivated by Jesus, so eager to learn from him and get answers, that he just couldn't wait until daylight? Or maybe he knew that Jesus was so busy and that during the day he wouldn't have a chance for an uninterrupted conversation with him.

Let's assume one of the latter motivations- that Nicodemus was captivated and perhaps perplexed by Jesus' words and actions. He just HAD to go to Him and he starts out the conversation by conveying upmost respect for Jesus by calling him (next slide) "Rabbi," which is a title of honor, given to great teachers. (Remember that name. We will talk about it later.) He not only calls him by a respectful name but also recognizes that Jesus must have come from God because there is no other way that the miracles Jesus had done would be possible. Between the lines, Nicodemus might already be going so far as to question him being Messiah, the Son of God. Although maybe I am getting ahead of myself.

Jesus' response to Nicodemus' respectful beginning is somewhat confusing. He starts talking about seeing the kingdom of God and being born again. I really wish I could have been a fly on the wall in this room. I would like to know if Nicodemus asked a question before Jesus answered or if he was in mid-sentence and Jesus interrupted him to start talking about what might seem like a totally unrelated topic- the kingdom of God and being born again! I wonder what kind of facial expression Nicodemus had.

Jesus often tended to speak in metaphors, to answer questions with other questions and to, in so doing, stump his listeners, which I don't think was his main intention, nor was it to evade the initial question asked

(which is often what I might assume). This passage is certainly packed with pictures and terminology that could lead to confusion and has led to many hours of discussion and strong opinions amongst theologians. Here we read of being born of the flesh or of water and the spirit, being born again, and then there is the Spirit with a capital S.

Let's look at how Nicodemus reacts to Jesus. Being a teacher, a VIP within the Jewish community, he could come with a "know it all" attitude and/or not want to act as if Jesus words were in the slightest bit hard to understand. Instead, he counters Jesus statements with questions- one after the other, "How can a man be born when he is old (v.4). "How can this be (being born of the Spirit)?" (v.9). He even dares to share his skepticism about rebirth, stating the obvious impossibility of entering a mother's womb a second time, maybe even as an adult. (v.4b).

Nicodemus' behavior required humility, a deep sense of respect, and strong desire to comprehend. After all, what would his students and those he led think of him once they found out he didn't have all the answers. How would you have reacted in his place? (Don't worry, you don't have to answer out loud.)

Ironically enough, earlier on in my faith journey, I would have probably reacted differently than I would now. The more I get to know Jesus, the more I feel like I do not know about Him- the more I sense that His words have an incredible depth to them of which I have only scratched the surface. This can be incredibly frustrating on one hand. At the same time, it can give you a hunger and a desire to dig deeper and to understand more. Maybe that is how Nicodemus felt?

How do you think Jesus reacted to Nicodemus' questions, his puzzled face or even his skepticism? Was he annoyed by the questions? I truly don't think so. In Matthew 19,14 (later in His ministry) Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Children ask a LOT of questions. One study I

found said that a four-year-old asks as many as 200-300 questions a day! I can imagine that Nicodemus asked a few more questions that didn't make it into the Bible, but I doubt that he reached 200 and I will go out on a limb and say that Jesus welcomed these questions and was even pleased that Nicodemus wanted to know more about Him and the Kingdom of God.

Children ask specific questions to piece together information to further their knowledge and makes sense of the world. They don't hesitate to think about if their question is silly, if they should already know the answer or about what others will think of them if they admit that they don't understand. And....by so doing, they learn, they grow, they gain understanding.

In this way, I would like to be more "childlike." This would have definitely helped me in first learning German. Many of you can probably relate to this struggle. You come to a phase where you can understand maybe 50% of a conversation. You are proud that on the surface, you seem to get by in most everyday situations. Then a friend starts sharing from her heart about a new topic that is somewhat unfamiliar. You don't understand everything, but have the general idea and, instead of constantly stopping the person to ask a clarifying question or what a word means, you smile and nod and hope that you can piece things together and figure out the main idea.

Then the person stops talking and you must respond. Hmmmm...You are stuck. Either you say something very superficial or give a blanket answer or, you admit that you are lost and ask the person to explain what they mean.

How often do we read the Bible in a similar fashion-skimming over the parts that we don't really understand with a general idea and then at times surprisingly realizing that we are lost? I know I have done that at times.

Luckily my German has improved considerably. I understand most things relatively easily and have learned the value of asking when something is unclear. Like children, I want to gain in my understanding of the language and feel more comfortable and/or see the need to ask what a word means in order to completely understand what is going on around me or what someone is trying to say.

In the same way, but to an even greater extent, is my desire to know God's Word more deeply. What would our faith look like if we were like Nicodemus, running to Jesus with our questions, sharing our doubts and/or uncertainties and trusting that He will answer them? Or, to a more extreme, what about bringing 200 questions to Jesus....a DAY!

Here is great place to connect with the first reading in Romans (8:12-17) and even last week's sermon from Martyn's mom about the Holy Spirit. Margaret talked about how the Holy Spirit, Jesus in us, empowers us to serve Him. This same Spirit brings us and leads us to walk in God's ways. What's more, verse 14 also says that "those who are led in the Spirit are sons (and daughters) of God." As children of God we can call him a new name. (next slide) We are not limited to "Rabbi" like Nicodemus or even LORD as mentioned in Psalm 29, which means Jehovah יהוה. This name is the superior name of God (Yahweh), for which the Israelites so much awe and respect had, that they didn't even dare to speak it. As sons and daughters, we can call God Abba, Father, which is Aramaic for "Daddy."

Take that in for a minute. You and I have the privilege of calling the Creator God, the one who Psalm 29 (next slide) says "has a voice over the waters, breaks cedars, splits flashes of lightening and shakes the wilderness. The one who is enthroned as King forever and is holy. That God we can call Daddy! We can come to that God with all our questions, our doubts, and our fears. And...we don't even have to wait until nighttime or until we can catch Him alone. We can talk to Him all

the time. We can ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom, comfort, and direction all the time.

Does this sound too good to be true? Are you waiting for the catch? Well, I am sorry to disappoint you. There really isn't one. There is just one prerequisite, only one thing required to receive this Spirit and thankfully it is not being able to explain Jesus' words and metaphors in detail!

(next slide) John 3:16 tells us, "For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever BELIEVES in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. We need to believe. That's it! This belief can be any size- you can have questions and doubts and struggles along the way. I know I have had them. But in it all, we bring them all to our Rabbi, to the LORD of all creation, to our Abba and ask Him to navigate through them.

Important here too, is to remember that this promised eternal life doesn't start when we die or when Jesus comes back to Earth. It is HERE it has already started! One of first things Jesus said when he started His ministry here on Earth was (next slide) "The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near" (Mk. 1:15). With the help of the Holy Spirit we can see glimpses of this Kingdom, God's working in us and in His creation. At the same time, it is not entirely here. I know, this brings about a whole LOT of other questions that I will not be able to answer. But let's seek to understand and find it. Let's bring our questions to Jesus, just like Nicodemus or like children would do.

In closing, I want to invite you to join me in thinking through how we identify to God and Jesus: is it more as LORD (supreme God), as Rabbi (our great teacher) or as Abba (Daddy). (next slide) What questions do we have for Him? May we all remember that as His children we have not a spirit of fear, but one of Son- and Daughtership! We can come to Him. He welcomes us! Amen!

ACF 86: May the peace of God

1. May the peace of God our heav'nly Father,
and the grace of Christ the risen Son,
and the fellowship of God the Spirit
keep our hearts and minds within His love.

*And to Him be praise for His glorious reign,
from the depths of earth to the heights of heav'n.
We declare the name of the Lamb once slain:
Christ eternal, the King of kings!*

2. May this peace which passes understanding,
and this grace which makes us what we are,
and this fellowship of His communion
make us one in spirit and in heart.

*And to Him be praise for His glorious reign,
from the depths of earth to the heights of heav'n.
We declare the name of the Lamb once slain:
Christ eternal, the King of kings!*

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The Blessing

May God keep us in all our days.
May Christ shield us in all our ways.
May the Spirit bring us healing and peace.
May God the Holy Trinity drive all darkness from us
and pour upon us blessing and light.
Amen.



The Conclusion

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life.

Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Look forward to our next service

with Revd. Peter Widdess

6th June 2021

The Second Sunday after Pentecost

11:30 hrs, Zoom link see website

