



Opening Prayer for Trinity Sunday

God of wonder and mystery, energy and motion,
draw us to yourself, sweep us up into your fiery dance,
immerse us in your ever-flowing rivers of justice,
soak us with the rushing waves of your love,
fire our hearts and imaginations with your hope,
and lead us into fullness of life. **Amen**

'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

What comes to mind when the word 'Trinity' is mentioned, and why might we find this aspect of who God is hard to grapple with?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise

You're invited to take a few quiet moments to bring your prayers of thanksgiving to God.

Psalm of the Week – Psalm 8 (Singing the Faith 801)

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants,
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars that you have established;
**what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?**

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour.

**You have given them dominion over the works
of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.**

**O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.
Amen

Prayers of Renewal

God of relationship and overflowing love,
we've come knowing there's much in our lives
and in the life of the world
in need of your renewal and restoration,
which we bring to you now in prayer:

We bring to you those things for which we are sorry:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the times we've failed to love one another:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the burdens we carry and sorrows we bear:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the injustices and oppression in our world:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the failings and disunity of your Church:
Restore us and heal us.

Silence is kept for a few moments...

God of transformation and hope,
you sweep us up into the movement of overflowing love,
setting us free from the past, to flourish in the future.
Thank you that you forgive, restore us, and transform us.
Amen

Reading Matthew 28:16 – 20

Sermon

How do you conclude a Gospel? Each of the four accounts we have of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus took a different approach to bringing their story to its end. The earliest Gospel comes to rather an abrupt ending, at least in the earliest manuscripts we have; Mark leaves us at the empty tomb, with those women who first witnessed the resurrection but yet were too terrified at that point to tell anybody of what they had seen. Luke concludes his efforts by paving the way for the second volume of his two-part work, setting the scene for the events of Pentecost which launch the Acts of the Apostles. It seems the author of John's Gospel needed to have two goes at it; the story of the forgiveness of Peter upon the shores of the Sea of Galilee, in John 21, is a later addition with the original ending basically claiming that we would be there forever if everything that might be said about Jesus was included! Matthew's approach is to end on something of a cliffhanger, with the giving to the Eleven left after Judas's betrayal of the Great Commission to go out and make disciples of all nations, baptising in the name of Father, Son and Spirit, and teaching others. It reminds me of the trend in a good many books these days to bring the manuscript to an end with a taster of the next book by the author

as an encouragement to read yet more of their work. The difference here is that the book is yet to be written, and we are its authors.

The threefold calling given to Jesus's 'core group' of disciples is one of several glimpses we get in the New Testament of the approaches taken to mission and discipleship by the early Church. Matthew was part of a predominantly Jewish faith community facing internal strife and external pressure, and needing a sense of direction and calling, which the Great Commission provided. In Jesus's earthly life, Israel was the principal focus of his ministry (see 15:24, for example); now the scope is universal, with a call to go out to people from all nations and make disciples. Baptism is the response to becoming a follower of Jesus, but it means more than making a public commitment, even as that is clearly important. Recalling John the Baptist's words about Jesus coming to baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire (3:11), it is clear that baptism for Matthew is about a transformed life – a transformed identity, in which an intimate relationship with God-in-Christ is at the heart of everything. Finally, there is a call to teach others, and hence to pass on the commandments of Jesus so that the faith of disciples in future generations may be robust enough to cope with the trouble and trials which life inevitably brings.

Now, it is important to recognise the various ways in which the Great Commission has been used to justify oppression and violence down the centuries, especially given the links between nineteenth century colonialism and evangelism which led to the systematic annihilation of African cultures and the imposition of Western values in the name of bringing 'civilisation'. If our making disciples involves abusing and exploiting other people, it is not evangelism but domination. It is also important to note that Matthew is not documenting an early Doctrine of the Trinity in this passage; that would come about only after years of wrestling and learning and arguing, and even then the two historic Creeds offer more of a 'holding formula' than a definitive statement. The baptismal formula of 28:19 is an important stepping-stone upon

the way towards that, however, pointing to God's desire for a loving relationship with every one of us. This may take various forms within differing contexts, but the core of genuinely holy approaches is love. As such, teaching is about more than passing on instructions to later generations; it is about embodying the life of the Kingdom of God.

So, as we seek to write the next chapter of the story of God's people as part of the Body of Christ in this present age, we do need to keep in mind that we can never fully capture the mystery of the Trinitarian God in the 'net' of our words, ideas and doctrinal statements, though poetry and art brings us the closest. However, we can trust that God does not say 'Over to you!', and leave us to move the story onwards alone. The promise here is that God-in-Jesus will be with us always, to the end of this age (28:20). This gives us a sound basis and solid foundation from which to put Jesus' Great Commission into practice and make our contributions to the ongoing story of Christianity; what is more, the fact that some of the disciples doubted even though it's the second time they had encountered the risen Lord (28:9 – 10) is, in my view, encouraging because it shows that faith and doubts are not opposites, but bedfellows. Taking up this calling does not mean leaving our brains at the door, even while we can never satisfactorily 'explain' the Trinity. With this in mind, may we go forward boldly and with trust, to make disciples, baptise and teach, so that more people may know of the infinite love of God. Amen

Recommended Resource of the Week

Catherine Mowry Lacugna's *God For Us* (2000) remains among the best expositions of the doctrine of the Trinity available.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray:

God of overflowing love, Three-in-One and One-in-Three, we bring to you our prayers for the world you create:

We light a candle as we pray:

For the dark places of your world,
where light and love are in short supply:
hear us, we pray.

We place a stone into water as we pray:

For all those seeking renewal and refreshment,
in a world blighted by pandemics of disease and inequality:

We hold a cross in our hands as we pray:

For those people who suffer for what is right,
when injustice, hatred, dishonesty and division seem to rule:

We rub earth/soil through our fingers as we pray:

For the planet you sustain and which we share,
in the face of the climate emergency and bad stewardship:

We break apart a slice/piece of bread as we pray:

For those in need of nourishment and sustenance,
where hunger for food and for you is rife:

God of overflowing love, Three-in-One and One-in-Three,
we hold before you the people we are worried about today,
in the quiet and stillness of this time...

Lord's Prayer

Blessing – Collect for Trinity Sunday

Father God, you have created all things
and through Christ revealed your salvation in all the world.
Give us a vision of your glory, and by your Holy Spirit,
fill us with life and love that we may praise and serve you
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen**