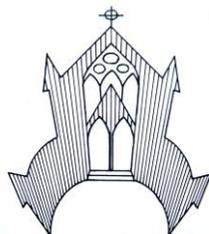
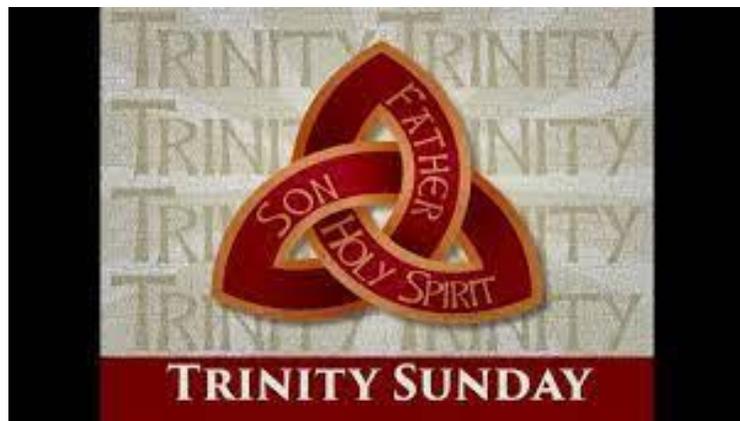


Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 12th June 2022



A Gathering Prayer from the Roots resources

God calls us in this moment. Jesus welcomes us to this moment.

The Spirit unites us in this moment. Come and worship!

Loving God, as we gather in this moment,
we celebrate your welcome.

Speak to us; challenge us; reassure us.

Take what we offer in worship and praise
that your name may be glorified now and for ever.

Let us share now in praising the majestic name
of the Lord God and delight in his glory.

Amen

Lectionary Readings:

Proverbs 8 v1-4, 22-31 (p641) Wisdom's Call

Psalms 8 (p546) O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Romans 5 v1-5 (p1132) Peace and Joy

John 16 v12-15 (p1084) The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Unfolding Truth

This week our focus explores the importance of 'now' in our relationship with God.

The reading from John's Gospel is part of a longer passage where Jesus explains the work of the Holy Spirit to his disciples. There is much for the disciples to understand, but Jesus reassures his friends that they know enough for now, and the Holy Spirit will come to guide them into a greater understanding in the future.

What was true for the disciples is true for us too. Our experience of God grows and develops, it is informed by the past, and we will always have more to learn and understand. But we live in the now, and the Holy Spirit will give us what we need to do that.

In the Bible's wisdom poetry, God's wisdom is often personified as a woman, and this offers us a fuller picture of God's ways of engaging with and ordering the world.

In the first part of today's poem, Proverbs 8, wisdom meets people in the 'now' of everyday life & invites them to accept her knowledge rather than the ways of evil. Her promise could hardly be more appealing: 'My fruit is better than fine gold' (v19).

The poem's second part is another of the Bible's creation stories. Wisdom is a heavenly being, the divine consort who rejoices and delights in the goodness of the inhabited world – even the human race with its capacity for carelessness & destruction.

Israel's wisdom poetry has influenced several New Testament writers, and in particular the Gospel of John, and has been an important building block in the construction of the Christian understanding of God as 'Holy Trinity'.

When you are outside after dark, perhaps camping, or just taking a walk with friends, do you look up and see what is happening in the sky? On a dark, cloudless night the stars seem so close and more beautiful than you can imagine. It is impossible to count how many stars are in the universe and did

you know that the light from a star takes millions of years to reach the earth? Then there is the moon that always fascinates us. The light from a full moon is especially beautiful.

When you look at a night sky, how big and wonderful it is, perhaps you've felt quite small. In the Bible we learn that David felt this way too. Listen to what he wrote in Psalm 8: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man, that you are mindful of him?"

We are surrounded by beauty and that beauty makes us want to sing and dance and thank God. Our world, the universe, is big and wonderful & also mysterious. We cannot begin to understand it, but we must remember that we are also one of God's beautiful creations.

God created us, loves us, and has placed us in a world full of many wonders – animals and forests, fish and seas, birds in the sky, stars and the Moon. Look for something beautiful each day and you will find it, and when you do, give thanks to God.

Paul wrote to a racially mixed church at the heart of the empire, to set out his conviction that the gospel of Jesus Christ reveals God's power to repair a damaged world. Have you ever had a chance to watch someone build something using nuts and bolts? Nut and bolts hold or bond things together. The bolt is threaded or screwed into the nut. If you want to hold two pieces of wood together you drill a hole through the wood, place the bolt through the hole and screw it into the nut. When the two are tightened the wood is quite secure. But what happens if the bolt is too large? It doesn't fit into the nut. And what if the bolt is too small? It fits into the nut, but the two don't hold together.

Many nuts and bolts are used to make cars. It is important that those nuts and bolts be exactly the right size so that the car works well and is safe. When we talk about bonding something together using nuts and bolts there are very exact requirements for their use.

In the Bible we learn about being bonded to God and we find that there are no requirements other than accepting God's love. God does not require that we be a certain shape or size or know how to do special things. We are loved for who we are, just the way we are, and nothing more is expected. The Bible tells us that "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit,

whom he has given us" (Romans 5 v5). We fit, just the way we are, into God's plan.

In John's Gospel, Jesus starts to talk about 'going away' as early as chapter 7 v33. By the time we reach his farewell words to the disciples in chapters 13 to 17, it's clear what he means. His impending execution will take him from the disciples without leaving them desolate. He promises to be with them in a new way through the coming of the Holy Spirit. This week's short reading (16 v12-15) contains the last in the series of the 'Paraclete' (often translated as 'advocate') sayings. 'The Spirit of truth', which occurs in other contemporary Jewish writings, underlines the link with Jesus as the truth. Like him, the Spirit is sent by God to teach God's truth. This can only be a gradual, one day at a time process. 'I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear' (v12), such is the disciples' understandable anxiety over Jesus' departure. The Spirit as teacher and guide will enable Jesus' disciples to understand what he means when he calls them to 'love one another as I have loved you'. Those to whom the evangelist writes, interpret Jesus' call as being in the 'now' of the hostile opposition they experience, many years later, from local synagogues determined to exclude them from the family of faith. Linking each new generation of Jesus' followers is the Holy Spirit, the continuing presence of Jesus in the church's everyday experience, and the assurance of his enduring love, joy, peace and hope.

The Gospel of John provides further evidence of Christians using the language of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to tell their story, with its power to speak of God's sacrificial, healing love in a world so often fed by hostility and violence.

Sending Out Prayer:

Be in our homes that we may know your peace.

Be in our hearts that we know your love.

Be in our lives that we may take the challenges you present, day by day.

Amen