

## Call to Worship

Be a rock of refuge for me,  
a strong fortress to save me.  
You are indeed my rock and my fortress;  
for your name's sake lead me and guide me. (*Psalm 31 .2a,3*)

Good morning and welcome to this morning's reflection on behalf of The Cotteridge Church. We're starting this reflection this morning right here at Dudley Castle and a thought for you, a pretty obscure passage of scripture I agree but, where is it in the Old Testament where you'll find a reference to fortresses or castles and wild animals. While you're thinking about that one we'll have our opening prayer.

Let us pray.

## Opening Prayer

Everlasting God,  
kingdoms of this world rise and fall,  
but your love is an everlasting love,  
a steadfast love in good times and bad.  
Guide us on our journey,  
help us to learn from the past,  
but to be bold in stepping out into the future,  
knowing that you walk with us every step of the way.  
Amen.

The early weeks of lock down were surreal. City and town centres were all but abandoned. It didn't take long for wildlife to take advantage. In Llandudno the mountain goats came down from The Great Orme to find fresh grazing. Even In London deer were seen frequently, taking the opportunity to forage where human activity would normally keep them away.

Three months of lock down and town centres and suburbs have, over the last few weeks, begun to get busy again. Urban wildlife, always not far away, is being discreet again. But when human activity had temporarily ceased it was surprising how quickly nature took over in asserting itself.

Nature often regains what human beings have claimed as their own. Even in those areas where humanities abuse of the planet has been most severe nature can take over again. The 1986 nuclear disaster at Chernobyl in Russia meant that the town of Pripyat and the surrounding area had to be evacuated. It's still an exclusion zone for all but the briefest of visits. Nature is reclaiming the concrete jungle there and, in time, will doubtless assert itself fully and the land is being healed as nature takes over, species by species, season by season.

In history, when great civilisations have come to an end, forest and jungle have often taken over. In Peru the great hilltop city known as Macchu Pichu was built in the 15th Century but later abandoned. Although known to a few tribes its extent was only made known internationally in 1911. Even older was the great rock fortress of Sigiriya, or Lions' Rock, in Sri Lanka. That dates from the 5th Century and at its peak also included extensive gardens at its base and is regarded widely as the earliest example in the world of organised urban planning. Closer to home is an even older ruined settlement. Skara Brae on the Orkney Islands dates from 3000 BC and only became known when storms stripped soil from a hillock in the 19th Century.

Dudley Castle was once overgrown too. Dating from the 11th Century it was abandoned after being gutted by fire in 1750. Soon nature took over the castle and much of the site was covered with vegetation until cleared to make way for the building of Dudley Zoo which opened in 1937.

A ruined fortress where wild animals dwell. Have you placed the reading yet? Some of you have possibly guessed Isaiah? You'd be right. Let's listen to part of Isaiah Chapter 34. This passage relates to the fall of the great cities and fortresses of the Kingdom of Edom which lay in parts of modern day Israel and Jordan. One of its cities was, and is today the ruins of, Petra.

**Reading:** Isaiah 34 ,

- 11 The hawk and the hedgehog shall possess it;  
the owl and the raven shall live in it.  
He shall stretch the line of confusion over it,  
and the plummet of chaos over its nobles.
- 12 They shall name it No Kingdom There,  
and all its princes shall be nothing.
- 13 Thorns shall grow over its strongholds,  
nettles and thistles in its fortresses.  
It shall be the haunt of jackals,  
an abode for ostriches.
- 14 Wildcats shall meet with hyenas,  
goat-demons shall call to each other;  
there too Lilith shall repose,  
and find a place to rest.
- 15 There shall the owl nest  
and lay and hatch and brood in its shadow;  
there too the buzzards shall gather,  
each one with its mate.

The words in that passage translated as "goat-demon" and "Lilith" seem to relate to evil forces sometimes referred to elsewhere as Satyr and "of the night". The passage is a picture of both chaos as an civilisation falls, but also of nature regaining what humanity has deserted, and I think that there's something comforting in the latter.

Thorns growing over strongholds and nettles and thistles in fortresses. They are common enough images today in ruined castles. Even though historic sites like Dudley Castle are immaculately cared for, nature still breaks through and green growth shoots from its rocks and stones.

Dudley Castle of course has other uses than just as an ancient monument. Since 1937 it's been the home of Dudley Zoo. Although not in the current collection, Jackels, Ostriches and hyenas have brought those words from Isaiah alive in the last 80 years. Isaiah didn't mention Meercats but they are there today, keeping watch as always.

But many ruined places are precisely that - ruins. The past frozen in time. There's nothing wrong with that - history is important and when we talked about Black Lives Matter in this reflection a fortnight ago, we spoke about how facing up to the horrors and guilt of history is particularly important.

But we can't live in the past. Over the next few weeks and months our church buildings will start to emerge from lock down. What are we going to do? Are we going to hack away the undergrowth of three or four months of disuse so that we can proudly present our buildings as they have always been. Are we going to go back to dated customs, liturgies, activities, traditions and ways of doing "what we've always done this way"?

During lock down church communities have been very active. Offering pastoral care and prayer, feeding the hungry, serving local communities and individuals in their need. When we get our buildings back surely we don't have to return to how it always was before?

A recent open letter the The British Methodist Church, but applicable to all denominations, has recently been signed by hundreds of people. One of the opening paragraphs reads as follows:

"We must build a future which is rooted in all that has been, but which seeks to be honest about where we are now and creative and courageous in offering a pathway into the immediate and forthcoming years. A future which prioritises justice above all things. By justice we understand deep listening and caring, partnership and co-operation, the showing of compassion and mercy, genuine inclusivity, honest transparency rather than soundbite and rhetoric, and a total re-evaluation of who and what is most important."

An Open Letter to the British Methodist Church  
Link to full text at [www.mjclaridge.co.uk](http://www.mjclaridge.co.uk)

The bricks and stones of Dudley Castle were re-purposed when Dudley Zoo was built. You may or may not agree with zoos, but the message I'm trying to convey is how we can re-purpose our bricks and stones. Our past as a Church in the widest sense is stately and historic. It's bricks, stones and influence speak down through the generations. But at this unique moment - as we emerge from the first time in 800 years that churches have been closed nationwide - now is the time and the opportunity to do something new. To let God re-create the Church as a dynamic community where:

Justice rolls down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5 .24)

Let us pray:

### **Closing Prayer**

God of all ages, in these changing times,  
be a rock of refuge for us.  
a strong fortress to protect us.  
God of the journey,  
as we seek the road you want us to travel,  
lead us and guide us.  
May your people be heralds of your Kingdom,  
of justice and righteousness.  
Amen.

### **Closing remarks**

If you'd like to read through the reflection we've shared this morning, you'll find a printable version on the resource site as always. There are links there to live worship too. There's also a link to the Open Letter that I mentioned, and if you want to know more about that have a word with myself or John Cooper about it.

Let us proclaim our faith in the days that lie ahead and let us pray that we may discern where God wants us to be, where God wants us to go, and what God wants us to do.

Take care, stay safe.

The best of all is that God is with us!

## Call to Worship

What I say to you in the dark,  
tell in the light;  
and what you hear whispered,  
proclaim from the housetops. *(Matthew 10.27)*

Welcome to this time of reflection for this the Second Sunday after Trinity. It's also Father's Day - which doesn't have a history in church tradition like Mothering Sunday - but is an important family day as we think of our own dads, but also reflect on our relationship with God; our heavenly Father. Let's start then with one of the oldest of Christian prayers, the one Jesus taught his disciples to pray. The Lord's Prayer, or the Our Father.

Let us pray.

## Opening Prayer

Our Father who art heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us  
and lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.

Many shops reopened this week. Just in time maybe for many to take the opportunity to buy a greeting card for Fathers Day. Father's Day cards will depict many themes but among the most popular are those featuring hobbies such as fishing, golf, football, and a fair few with foaming pint glasses too no doubt.

Hobbies and activities are part of life style choices. In a comparatively wealthy society such as the UK, we are privileged to be able to make life style choices. For many others in the world life is instead a daily battle simply to survive. Choice is a luxury we have.

I looked up life style choices and it came up with a list; Solo, Rural, Nomadic, Bohemian, Healthy, and Active. There are other choices too that make up lifestyle; Vegetarian or meat eater, drinker or teetotal, car or public transport, which team to support, which sport to follow or, for IT users, Mac or PC! Some are trivial choices in reality I know, while others are decided by circumstances, but there's a lot of free choice there too.

When we watch the television we are bombarded by adverts. The advertising industry is very clever, it targets certain programmes with certain products. Life styles do change as we go through life and it's life styles that the advertising industry targets. If your favourite

programme is interspersed with adverts for sports goods and exercise apps - you're in one category. A worrying number of the programmes I watch are interspersed with adverts for cruises and stair lifts!

All adverts are, of course, trying to sell the product. That's why they only portray the good things. Take cruises for example. Rob Brydon's cheerful face will tell us about sights and sounds, food and wine, singing and dancing. The gain of two inches around the waist, sea sickness and a ship's ability to be a floating petri dish of disease, pass by unheralded.

When Jesus was calling disciples he was brutally honest about what their choice would mean. He was calling them to make a life style choice. It was choice not of luxury or material goods, but of servanthood. 'Take up your cross and follow me' isn't on the face of it the most attractive sales line. But it proved to be one of the most effective.

Today we have a video for our Gospel. It's by Revd Phil Summers, a Methodist Minister in Gloucestershire, who I trained with at Queen's. This video, produced this week, is part of Phil's project to record all of the Gospels over the next few years. There's always a link on my resource site.

In today's Gospel Jesus continues the call to us to continue his work. He gives the good news that, in doing this, we are hugely valued by God, who knows every detail of our lives. But there's also that there will be a cost because we are called to proclaim from the housetops, what others prefer to whisper. It's a lifestyle choice of complete commitment. Our Gospel reading: (The Gospel video is at: <https://youtu.be/b8Oxj0pl1Dc> )

**Reading:** Matthew 10 .24-42

24 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a servant above the master; 25 it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the servant like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

26 'So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. 27 What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. 28 Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. 30 And even the hairs of your head are all counted. 31 So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. 32 'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; 33 but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

34 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

35 For I have come to set a man against his father,  
and a daughter against her mother,  
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

36 and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

40 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; 42 and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.'

Following Jesus is a lifestyle choice. We are to proclaim aloud that it is Jesus we follow. One life style choice is to follow a particular team. Some of those who do will wear that team's shirt. That will have rewards and hardships depending on that teams results.

But the commitment to follow Christ is deeper than that. It's more than proclaiming in word, it means proclaiming in deed too. The Gospel passage reminds us that can be as simple as a giving a cup of water to the thirsty, or as total as giving life in order to find life.

There are also hard words in that passage especially as it relates to our human families. A passage that speaks of divisions between family members sits uneasily with Father's Day. The message that Jesus is giving is that the choice to follow him is a total commitment, that requires us to love him at least as much as we love family members. That will involve rewards and hardships. Because a life style of proclaiming God's love is a total commitment. In all this, God our Father will help us through the hard times.

Today's closing prayer is by Revd John Proctor, General Secretary of the United Reformed Church.

Let us pray:

## Closing Prayer

### Secrets, sparrows and swords

Jesus, your word reaches for the light,  
for the public places, for a wide hearing,  
across the nations, stirring and summoning.  
It's not a secret that your kingdom is coming.

Yet those who live by that kingdom  
are called to places of conflict and criticism.  
Your values are resisted, your truth challenged,  
and it would be easier  
if we could be secret disciples.

So you remind us of the sparrow,  
seen from heaven, as it falls to earth.  
And you remind us that God sees  
the life of earth with the love of heaven.

Then you speak of a sword,  
dividing where we thought we were safe,  
destroying what seemed secure,  
splitting, severing, sundering.

Jesus, give us courage,  
not to seek secrecy for our faith,  
not to fear the sharp edge of truth  
and never to forget the loving eye of God.

John Proctor, General Secretary, URC  
(Taken from 'Prayers from the Heart', 2020 URC Prayer Handbook)

## **Closing remarks**

If you'd like to read through the reflection we've shared this morning, you'll find a printable version on the resource site. There are links there to live worship too.

Let us proclaim our faith in the days that lie ahead.

Take care, stay safe.

The best of all is that God is with us!



## Call to Worship

Let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. (Amos 5 .24)

We live in turbulent times. History is being made. What will future historians make of these days in which we live? Whose story will history tell? Whose story won't it tell? What will they make of the role the churches play? And why? And is that important?

## Opening Prayer

Let us pray:

Lord of all ages.  
Help us, who face the challenges of the future,  
to hear the voices once silenced in the past.  
Help us, as we live in the present,  
to listen and understand the grief and fear of those  
who face suffering, injustice and oppression.  
Help us together to work for your Kingdom Lord.  
Amen.

We live in momentous times. The challenges posed by Covid19 and its aftermath will have a long term effect on the way our lives will be lived in future. In this sense this is a new beginning. Things will not return to normal - if normal means how they were before. When we escape the grips of Covid19 we will still be just at the start of a journey.

Our first lectionary reading today is from Exodus and is set just three months after the Israelites have escaped slavery in Egypt. They face a journey, which will last a generation, to reach the Promised Land. Here, near the beginning, they put their trust in God.

## Reading: Exodus 19 .2 - 8a

<sup>1</sup> At the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. <sup>2</sup> They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: <sup>4</sup> You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup> but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.' <sup>7</sup> So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. <sup>8</sup> The people all answered as one: 'Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.'

Twenty years ago I was involved with an anti-racism campaign in Telford. Two young black men had been found dead in suspicious circumstances after facing racist abuse

and threats to their lives. It was only after our campaign had revealed that the initial police investigation into their deaths had been inadequate that new inquests were held.

I learnt something painful about the church I was serving in from the men's family. I knew that people from the Caribbean had faced racism from churches when they arrived here in the 1950s and 1960s. They were often turned away with comments such as "the black church is down the road". The family told me that the church I was serving in had been one of them. I was appalled.

Racism runs deep in churches. John Wesley was unstinting in his opposition to slavery, and called it "the sum of all villainies". But another of the founders of Methodism, George Whitefield, owned slaves. At the time of his death he owned 50 plantations in Georgia, and left all in his Will to the Countess of Huntingdon - the Methodist connection continued. The Church of England owned many slaves at its Codrington Estate in Barbados, 411 at the time of abolition in 1833 and had branded its owners mark on them.

The Black Lives Matter campaign is prominent in our news feeds at the moment and rightly so. What do we make of it? What do you think about it?

Some are saying "All Lives Matter". But that avoids the issues. Think of the Parable of the Lost Sheep. All of the flock are treasured but, at that moment in time, it was the one that faced danger that was the shepherd's concern. All lives will matter only when Black lives matter.

Last Sunday a statue in Bristol was toppled. Edward Colston was a slave trader. Is toppling statues an attempt to rewrite history? I don't think so. It's more a matter of facing up to the past atrocities that shape attitudes today. There is other history we need to hear. Accounts, written by the slaves themselves, tell of how those being transported who fell ill with disease that threatened the rest of the "cargo" - yes, the term used by slave traders for fellow human beings - were often thrown overboard into the sea.

Last Sunday a statue of a man who caused people to be thrown into the water, was thrown into the water. Is that really a big deal? Do you get angry about it?

One of my colleagues said this earlier this week in a pastoral letter:

"Black lives do not matter if we are outraged by 'violence' towards an inanimate object and not systemic racism and real violence against members of our communities and humanity at large".

*Revd Farai Mapamula,  
Pastoral Letter to Birmingham Methodist Circuit*

That letter is on my resource site and I commend its contents to you.

Facing up to issues in the past, including slavery, are important because history shapes present attitudes. The history of slavery is at the root of the institutional and individual racism that is experienced by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities today.

Last Sunday was also the retirement of John Sentamu as Archbishop of York. He's spoken in the past about being stopped many times by police while driving what they called "a nice car". I would suggest that the Archbishop of Canterbury hasn't had the same experiences.

Leon-Nathan Lynch is a Barrister who's been stopped and searched many times. When he arrives in court some people often assume he's the defendant. He was once handcuffed at gunpoint while on his way, with a hammer, to do some DIY for a friend.

This is the experience of many people simply because of the colour of their skin. Those experiences and worse are why we proclaim Black Lives Matter

A short passage from today's set Gospel reading:

**Reading:** Matthew 9 .35 and 10 .5-7

9. 35 Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.

10. 5 Jesus sent out (the twelve) with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." 8 Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.

The Kingdom of God is all embracing, but here Jesus only sends the disciples to their own community to start doing the work he's started. Healing, revitalising and cleansing. If we are going to play our part in Kingdom building we sometimes have to start with the Church first. Putting your own house in order.

The churches as institutions are still exhibit racism. The following quote is from a recent letter, sent by a Church of England Diocese, turning down an ordinand who had sought an appointment as Curate in a particular parish:

"the demographic of (the area) is monochrome white working class where you might feel uncomfortable"

*Recent letter from a C of E Diocese to a prospective Curate.*

While the slave trade was raging around the Atlantic, on the other side of the world the English East India Company was oppressing south Asia from 17th - 19th centuries. Where it was, the Church of England was too, but some passages were removed from the Book of Prayer Book. The Magnificat (Luke 1 .46-55) was removed from Evensong.

"(God has) brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1 .52,53)

We all want justice peacefully. But for peace there has to be well being and wholeness of relationships. We have to face up to the past in order to be able to journey together into the future. As we emerge from Covid19 'lock down' we are setting off anew on that journey, like the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai. Together let us seek our promised land where

“justice rolls down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”.  
(Amos 5 .24)

Let us pray:

### Closing Prayer

Go to serve; go to love;  
go to bring healing; go to bring peace;  
God to transform; go to bring justice;  
go in the strength of the Father;  
go in the example of Jesus;  
go united by the Spirit.  
Go – and know and proclaim his grace.  
Amen

### Closing remarks

If you'd like to read through the reflection we've shared this morning, you'll find a printable version on the resource site. There are links there to live worship too.

I don't apologise if today's reflection has left you feeling unsettled, uneasy or annoyed. Justice is a theme running throughout The Bible whose pages so often take us out of our comfort zones.

Take care, stay safe.

The best of all is that God is with us!

**Call to Worship**    *(From Psalm 8)*

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

Your glory reaches beyond  
the highest heavens.  
By the youngest to the eldest  
your praise is spoken forth.  
In sky, on land, and in water  
your creativity is seen.

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

Welcome to this reflection for Trinity Sunday. Today we think of the Christian idea that God is known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One God, three persons. A day that many a preacher loves to avoid. And others, while listening someone else preach, play “spot the heresy”. Enjoy playing - there’s probably going to be a few.

You will search the scriptures in vain if you’re trying to find the word ‘Trinity’. The word isn’t in either the New Testament or Old Testament. The Trinity is a a construct of the earliest years of the Christian faith. But you will certainly find it’s three components there; God as Creator, God as rescuer, God as sustainer. Three themes picked up in our opening prayer by Thom M Shuman.

Let us pray:

**Without You**

(from ‘Fire and Bread’, Wild Goose Publications)

Without you,  
weaver of willows,  
Spinner of sunrises,  
I would have no place  
to put my foot:  
stumbling face first  
into the mud puddles  
of my mistakes.

Without you,  
Retriever of the fallen,  
Mediator of the sin-splattered.  
I would have no place  
to put my soul:  
adrift in the stormy sea  
of seduction,  
at the mercy of  
the bedlam’s blows.

Without you,  
Whisperer of wisdom,  
Gift-bearing dove,  
I would have no place  
to put my heart:  
watching it shrivel  
in despair's  
bitter grasp.

In you  
I find my place,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit:  
Blessed Trinity,  
in you.

*Thom M Shuman  
Poet and Presbyterian Minister, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA*

The word Trinity is absent from our Bibles but, in some of the later passages of the New Testament the idea is firmly established. In, what is believed to be a late addition to the text, the Gospel of Matthew finishes with an instruction to the disciples:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (*Matthew 28 .19*)

Paul's writings pick up the model too, including the passage from the end of his Second Letter to the Corinthians, words that we know as The Grace - and that we will use at the end of this reflection. Both that passage and the one from Matthew are among the suggested readings for today.

The reading that we're about to hear is from the Old Testament, the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, that speaks of God as creator, and also as one who strengthens and sustains:

**Reading:** Isaiah 40 .12-17, 27-31

- 12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?
- 13 Who has directed the spirit of the Lord, or as his counsellor has instructed him?
- 14 Whom did he consult for his enlightenment,  
and who taught him the path of justice?  
Who taught him knowledge,  
and showed him the way of understanding?
- 15 Even the nations are like a drop from a bucket,  
and are accounted as dust on the scales;  
see, he takes up the isles like fine dust.
- 16 Lebanon would not provide fuel enough,  
nor are its animals enough for a burnt-offering.
- 17 All the nations are as nothing before him;  
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

- 27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel,  
‘My way is hidden from the Lord,  
and my right is disregarded by my God’?
- 28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.
- 29 He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.
- 30 Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;
- 31 but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.

Did you see the queues this week at IKEA at Wednesbury? It opened again on Monday and the queues were zig-zagging across the car park! I can't imagine why people are so desperate to buy a flat pack.

I sometimes think of the doctrine of The Trinity as IKEA theology. All of the components are there but you need to assemble them together. Images of God as a creative power and origin of all things, is the same as the weak and fragile God of the cradle and the Cross, and yet the same as the God known as wind and fire breathed into God's people. The hymn writer Graham Kendrick portrays this idea in the memorable line:

“hands that flung stars into space,  
to cruel nails surrendered” *(from The Servant King)*

One God as Three Persons is a difficult concept to engage with. Often our imaginations seem restricted to thinking in human terms - often in masculine terms too. Sometimes though it helps to think in feminine imagery too. It's there in scripture where Spirit as Wisdom is often referred to as feminine, in the Gospels where Jesus says:

How often have I desired to gather (Jerusalem's) children together  
as a hen gathers her brood under her wings *(Matthew 23 .37)*

Our next prayer, by Chris Polhill, picks up on different aspects of God's character as Trinity in feminine imagery.

Let us pray:

### **Knowing Her Blessing**

*(from 'Fire and Bread', Wild Goose Publications)*

Loving Mother,  
who with perfect timing  
knows when to push; to nudge; to shove;  
and when to wait,  
even though panting for change.  
Grant us the courage to name you;  
and the grace of your timing.

Sister Christ,  
who feeds us with warm breast milk  
when the heavenly feast is too rich a fare;  
and in whose death our own wounds find resurrection.  
Teach us also to play with you,  
that we may know the delight  
of your particular freedom.

Lady Wisdom,  
who nurtures and wills our growing.  
Lead us in your wild dance,  
that we may tread the unfamiliar paths  
singing gladly;  
and find fulfilment for the dreams  
that fit your knowing of us..

Chris Polhill  
Author of 'A Pilgrim's Guide to Iona Abbey' and  
an editor of 'Eggs and Ashes', Wild Goose Publications.  
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I love classic TV comedies. A shelf here in the my study is full of them; The Two Ronnies, Porridge, Allo Allo, Blackadder, Yes Minister and Only Fools and Horses. But one of my particular favourites is Dad's Army. There's an episode called 'High Finance' where the character Corporal Jones has found himself in financial difficulties. Captain Mainwaring, who is also Jones' Bank manager, sits him down to try and sort things out. Mainwaring says:

"Now, for the purposes of this discussion I shall be wearing three hats. One as your Commanding Officer, one as your Bank Manager, and one as your friend".

In our relationships with others we relate to the same individual in different ways. In the scene from Dad's Army, Jones' relationship is with Mainwaring as Commanding Officer, as a Bank Manager and as a friend. When we struggle with the idea of The Trinity; one God known in three ways, perhaps it's because we are trying to look too much at the oneness of God rather than our different relationships with, or experiences of, God.

In the scene from Dad's Army, Jones' friend Godfrey then asks Mainwaring:

"What sort of hat will you wearing as his friend?"

to which Mainwaring replies:

"It's a hypothetical hat"

There's a message for us there too. In all talk about Trinity we are using hypothetical language. We are trying to describe the indescribable. Or, to go back to the Isaiah reading, to quantify the immeasurable. Instead we can experience of God in our feelings and emotions. God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. This week let's try and encounter God as Trinity. The God of awe in sunrises and sunsets. God as Jesus who has journeyed through human life, and death, for us. God as the breath of life who strengthens, equips and sustains us, and who may be prompting us to serve in new ways. A prayer by Pat Bennett:



Let us pray:

## Wayfaring

(from 'Fire and Bread', Wild Goose Publications)

God be on the road on which you travel:  
He the mountains  
on which you are tested and challenged  
He the wells  
at which you find healing and peace.

Christ be the light by which you travel:  
He the vision  
which informs and enlarges you  
He the lodestar  
shining in your darkest nights.

The Spirit inspire you as you travel:  
she the restlessness  
driving you onwards  
She the stillness  
leading you to the heart of God.

The Trinity, the Three,  
go with you as you travel;  
and may your journey  
begin  
continue  
and end  
in Them

Pat Bennett

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She is an associate member of The Iona Community.

## Closing remarks

Thank you for spending time reflecting on The Trinity and praying with me this morning. If you'd like to read through the reflection we've shared this morning, you'll find a printable version on the resource site. There are links there to live worship too.

The Trinity as a concept emerged while Paul was writing his letters. One of his "sign offs" is the origin of the popular prayer, The Grace. Let us bless one another in it's words as used by Paul at the end of one of today's suggested readings:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all. Amen. *(2 Corinthians 13 .13)*

Take care, stay safe.

The best of all is that God is with us!