## Morning Worship – Sunday 30th May 2021

## Welcome to our service this morning coming to you from Bamford Chapel and Norden United Reformed Church, Rochdale. Our service is live in church this morning but is also available on Youtube on behalf of the Rochdale, Bury and North Manchester churches Missional Partnership.

The service has been prepared by our Church Secretary, Anne Fitton, and is being led by the Elders of Bamford Chapel and Norden URC.

## Call to Worship

Wonderful God,
as we gaze at the miracle of your world,
intricate and interconnected,
huge in scope, microscopic in detail,
we are amazed.
We wonder that you love each one of us,
seeing us, knowing us and filling us with the breath of life.
Help us to worship you as mystery, to hug you as friend,
and, with you, to care for the whole of creation.
Amen.

Our first hymn is:

983 Father of life draw me closer. (verse, chorus, verse, chorus)

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| 1.. Father of life, draw me closer, Lord my heart is set on You: let me run the race of time, with Your life enfolding mine, and let the peace of God, let it reign. (x2) | 2.. Oh Holy spirit, Lord my comfort; strengthen me, hold my head up high: and I stand upon Your truth, bringing glory unto You, and let the peace of God, let it reign. (x2)  |
| Chorus: *Oh Lord I hunger, for more of You.**rise up within me, let me know Your truth.**oh Holy Spirit, saturate my soul,**and let the life of God, fill me now,**let Your healing power,**breathe life and make me whole.**and let the peace of God, let it reign.* | Darlene Zschech ©1993 Wondrous Worship/Music Service/Song SolutionsCcli 169737 Streaming licence 595811  |

Opening Prayers and Lord’s Prayer

God of Creation

We come to praise and worship you this morning,

To acknowledge that you are the ruler of heaven and earth,

Lord of space and time and

The Creator of this world in which we live,

Always at work, always with us.

God of love

We thank you that you care for each one of us,

that we matter so much to you,

that you want to share with us your gift of life

and lead us into a living, loving relationship with you.

God of Grace

We thank you for showing your love for us by sending us your

Son Jesus,

so that we could learn about you and your plans for us,

so that we can be brought to salvation by believing in Him,

His life, His death and resurrection.

God of Power

We thank you for continuing to bless us each day

through your Holy Spirit.

Your power within us nurtures our faith, renews our vision,

guides our footsteps and equips us for your service.

God of Forgiveness and Mercy

We come before you to say sorry for things we say and do that we know are wrong, for thoughtless words and careless deeds.

We are sorry for the times we have failed to live as you want us to,

for the times we have strayed from your paths.

Forgive us we pray, and assure us once again of your mercy and forgiveness.

Help us and give us strength to follow your will, so that we may truly

be your people in the world.

In the precious name of Jesus we pray

Amen.

Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in 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

for ever and ever

Amen.

Introduction

Today is Trinity Sunday,

a day when we think about, discuss and try to understand the concept of the Trinity, One God in Three Parts,

God the Father, God the Son Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit.

Not three different Gods, but One God in three different parts,

Father, Son and Spirit; called the Trinity.

Last week was Pentecost Sunday when God sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples and to all believers, including us today.

Jesus promised us that God would do this, he would send the Spirit to be God’s power in us to help and guide us in our faith.

Today we want to look at how the Spirit fits into God’s plan for us.

One of the ways for comparison and explanation is to look at water. Water can be seen as ice, steam and water. Each is different in form and use but is essentially the same item. Three individual items but the same. Ice when it melts becomes water once more and the same applies to steam when it condenses it too reverts to water. Father, Son and Holy Spirit individually do different things but are essentially the same; one God, the Trinity, three in one.

Our next hymn is

HYMN 987 Here is love vast as the ocean.

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| 1.. Here is love vast as the ocean, loving kindness as the flood, when the Prince of life, our ransom, shed for us His precious blood. Who His love will not remember; who can cease to sing His praise? He can never be forgotten throughout heaven's eternal days.  | 2.. On the mount of crucifixion fountains opened deep and wide; through the floodgates of God's mercy flowed a vast and gracious tide. Grace and love, like mighty rivers poured incessant from above; and heaven's peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love.  |
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Our reading is John chapter 3 verses 1 to 17 - **Jesus teaches Nicodemus**

3 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 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.’

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

4 ‘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!’

5 Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, “You must be born again.” 8 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. 9 ‘How can this be?’ Nicodemus asked.

10 ‘You are Israel’s teacher,’ said Jesus, ‘and do you not understand these things? 11 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. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.’

16 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. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

A Reflection on the reading
In our reading today a man named Nicodemus goes to see Jesus, he wants to ask him some questions. He wants to find out for himself who this Jesus is that he has heard about. This Jesus who has been preaching to large crowds, performing miracles and challenging the views of the Pharisees.

Nicodemus is a Pharisee, a strict Jew, a religious leader and an important member of the Jewish ruling council.

He comes to see Jesus at night, he almost certainly doesn’t want to be seen in Jesus’ company, and yet he doesn’t want to send an assistant either. He wants to sits with Jesus and ask him some questions for himself, because he already feels that Jesus must be from God to be performing miracles he has heard about.

Nicodemus gets some answers he is not expecting as Jesus challenges him to a new life, and teaches him about God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus tells him that to enter the kingdom of God he must be reborn into life in the Spirit, a second spiritual birth, that people don’t enter the Kingdom by being a Pharisee or Jewish council member or doing good deeds but by turning to God for forgiveness. Nicodemus finds this hard to understand, how can we be born again, because he is thinking of being reborn in a physical sense and Jesus is describing a spiritual rebirth.

When we turn to God, give our lives to Him, believing Jesus is the Son of God then we too have a spiritual rebirth, our lives are changed, we begin again as Christians. We then listen to the Holy Spirit inside us for guidance and inspiration to live in the ways of the Kingdom that Jesus teaches about in the Gospels.

This is the same Holy Spirit that God sent all believers at Pentecost.

Jesus then tells Nicodemus that as the Israelites in the desert were healed when they turned in faith to look at the bronze snake held up by Moses, the Son of Man will be lifted up and all who turn to Him in faith will receive eternal life.

Jesus predicts his part in God’s plan, what’s going to happen and how it will affect the people who see it and come to know about it. Nicodemus at this point hasn’t recognised Jesus as the Messiah that comes later for him.

Jesus teaches Nicodemus that God’s only motive is love for humankind.

“v 16, For God so LOVED the world he gave his one and only Son.”

Jesus loved us so much he took on our sins and accepted our punishment, to give us eternal life.

I am sure this conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus went on for much longer than is recorded, the things that Jesus says here must have provoked more questions from Nicodemus.

Nicodemus is a man of learning, of great importance in Jewish life, who would know the scriptures well. I don’t think he was expecting Jesus to turn the tables on him and tell him that knowledge, importance and good deeds are not the way to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Knowledge does play a part in bringing us to faith, talking to other Christians, asking questions and reading the gospels does bring people to the point where they are ready to give their lives to God, but it’s though believing in Jesus and by the Grace of God that we are saved.

Nicodemus came to Jesus to find out more, and it’s important for us to continue to ask questions throughout our faith lives. We will never know all there is to know about the mystery and glory of God, so it’s important that we nurture our faith, ask each other questions, shore ourselves up so that our faith stays strong in times of doubt and when life gets tough.

As we come out of lockdown, and as our Churches are open again it is important that we think about all the new ways of keeping connected and reaching others that we have started up while we couldn’t meet in our Churches; to join in the discussions that are starting to happen in the URC about how to reach others with the Good News of Jesus; to join in and ask questions so we can find out more about our role in God’s plan as Nicodemus did when he went to see Jesus.

Nicodemus became a believer, and his story continues further on in John’s Gospel. Taking with Jesus turned his life around that night.

Jesus commands us to continue to tell people of the Good News, so they can turn to God and be saved, and it’s the Holy Spirit that gives us the power and the strength.

Amen

Hymn 612 Spirit of the living God

 followed by 613 Spirit of the living God

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| 612: Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me; Spirit of the Living God; fall afresh on me; fill me anew, fill me anew; Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.   | 613: Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me; Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me; break me, melt me, mould me, fill me; Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.  |
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We will now have a meditation by Frank Topping

Meditation

Life in the Spirit by Frank Topping.

There does not seem to be much room for spirituality

in an average day.

Most days are filled with the practical and the material,

food, clothes, travel, shopping, filling up with petrol,

answering emails, filling in forms, answering our phones,

catching the bus, appointments and watching TV

there does not seem to be much time for exploring the

spiritual dimensions of being alive.

But the life of the Spirit is not restricted to holy places,

worship and spirituality is not confined to churches,

chapels and monasteries.

The Spirit lives in people, and there is spirituality in a smile,

in generous words, in acts of kindness, in courtesy.

There is spirituality in patience and understanding.

Everything we do or say or think, no matter how mundane and ordinary

can be transformed by the Spirit.

We pray, Lord, in this moment, fill my heart and mind

with the knowledge of your presence,

that whatever I do this day may be guided by your Spirit and truth.

Lord, you know that I shall be busy this day,

do not thou forget me.

We now have prayers for others and for ourselves

Prayers for the World and ourselves.

Loving God,

We come before you to pray for our world.

We acknowledge that in a world of fake news, you are our truth

In a world of false gods, you are our true Saviour

In a world of dominant powers, you are our peace

In a world of false dreams, you are our reality

and in a world that is hurting, you are our hope.

We bring before you this morning our concerns for the world.

Our whole world has been, and still is caught up in this Covid pandemic,

We pray for all those around the world who have lost loved ones, for those who still haven’t recovered properly, for those who have lost jobs and their businesses,

for those who have struggled with isolation and not being able to see their families.

It has affected us all in different ways, Lord be us everyone as we struggle still to contain this virus.

We hold up to you all those who have worked tirelessly to produce vaccines, drugs, ventilators etc. and those who have risked their lives on the front line.

Now Lord we pray that the whole world can come together to support one another,

that the richer nations will help the poorer ones through this.

We pray for our government and those around the world, that those in power will make the right decisions.

We pray for those who are grieving, for the sick and the dying, bring them your peace,

For the homeless people who sleep on our city streets at night, and for all those who worry about providing for their families.

We pray for our churches and our congregations, that we may feel safe to come back to church, and that we may connect with our communities and continue to serve them.

In a moment of quiet we bring to you those, known only to us, who need our prayers (pause)

Loving God we pray for ourselves,

that we will see the truth in Jesus and strive to serve as He did,

As we go out into the week, give us your courage and strength in the Holy Spirit,

to spread your message and love to the people we meet.

We ask all these prayers in Jesus’ name.

Amen

Our closing hymn is

Hymn 187 God is Love, let Heaven adore Him

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| 1.. God is love: let heaven adore Him;God is love: let earth rejoice;let creation sing before Him,and exalt Him with one voice.He who laid the earth's foundation,He who spread the heavens above,He who breathes through all creation,He is love, eternal love.  | 2.. God is love: and He enfoldethall the world in one embrace;with unfailing grasp He holdethevery child from every race.And when human hearts are breakingunder sorrow's iron rod,all the sorrow, all the aching,wrings with pain the heart of God.  |
| 3.. God is love: and though with blindnesssin afflicts the souls of men,God's eternal loving-kindnessholds and guides them even then.Sin and death and hell shall nevero'er us final triumph gain;God is love, so love for evero'er the universe must reign.  | Timothy Rees 1874-1897 altdAR Mowbray & Co Ltd/Continuumccli 169737 Streaming licence 595811  |

## Before our blessing we again thank Anne for preparing this service before going into hospital for surgery and we thank you for sharing in our service today.

## Blessing.

Wonderful God,
help us to keep adventuring with you.
May we allow ourselves to be filled
with visions of your awesomeness,
and may we know your presence
closer to us than our own breathing.
Thank you for creating us,
for being visible to us in Jesus,
and for inspiring and empowering us
with your interweaving Spirit.
Amen.