



The Diocese of
Southwark

Season of Lay Ministries

First Sunday after Trinity

19 June

Preaching notes

Readings

1 Kings 19: 1-4 [5-15a]
Psalm 42
Galatians 3:23-end
Luke 8: 26-39

How we connect God as Father, God as Son (the Word) and God as Holy Spirit Three in One – in our times, in our world – is the joy and the challenge of the Trinity. We have just celebrated the gift of the Holy Spirit to the earliest followers of Jesus at Pentecost, and then the institution of the Holy Communion, so we may share at the feast and make a spiritual communion with each other, and we have said again, through Trinity Sunday, that the essence of our faith through our Creeds is God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The excitement and joy of the long season of Trinity has already begun!

The readings for Trinity 1 have some variety as some churches will use the continuous series as cited above and others the related material. The New Testament readings, both the Gospel of Luke and Paul's letter to the Galatians, are shared but the Old Testament, including the chosen psalms, vary.

Whichever is chosen, the Old Testament and Psalm are most valuable and richly significant because so fresh is our imagination, so soon after Easter and Pentecost, of what the earliest Christians faced.

When Jesus was walking the road to Emmaus, we are told by Luke that, beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, "Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27). When the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples at Pentecost, Peter announces that "this is what was spoken through the prophet" (Acts 2.16), and when Paul writes to the Galatians about Grace, he refers to the story of Abraham (Galatians 3-4).

Clearly, then, for the earliest followers of Jesus the Scriptures, the Old Testament, were essential not only in understanding God's redeeming work in Jesus but also their own lives as early Christians. So when these early followers declared that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, they would have received their understanding of Jesus as Christ through those Scriptures, and when they sought to understand the outpouring of the gift of the Holy Spirit they would have turned to those Scriptures too.

In the same way, when the early followers called people to faith they would have used men and women from those scriptures as examples of faithful obedience to God. The psalms speak of intimacy with God, pouring out feelings of despair, love and need. There is richness in the Old Testament readings and psalms that speaks to lives lived in the knowledge and presence of God that help us and enable us to support others in their own journeys of faith.

In this Season of Lay Ministries across the Diocese there may be brothers or sisters who might become Readers, teachers of faith using our Scriptures, teaching not only in our beautiful and holy places but also reaching out to our communities of worship online, and, having been theologically trained, speaking of God in their workplaces and neighbourhoods – to share their faith and help to equip others. Christianity is living as well as believing.

Today we see that the short reading from Kings (19:1-4) is about fear. Elijah is terrified for his life and runs. This is not an irrational anxiety such as when we might be feeling overtired or stressed but based on a direct threat to his life from Jezebel. Events were taking place when there had been a separation of the people of God. God's people in the Northern kingdom had increasingly turned to the gods of Jezebel, the wife of the king, who worshipped the cult of Baal, and it was left to the prophets Elijah and subsequently Elisha to seek to turn the people towards God. In this reading, Elijah has had enough and sits under a solitary bush and asks God to let him die.

There has been more of this visceral fear in our own times as a result of the COVID pandemic; the war in Ukraine, too, has caused many to experience fear and terror. How to respond to fear? To turn to God and engage with God, which is what Elijah does.

In the longer reading, we have the beautiful mystical account of Elijah receiving both physical sustenance and food in the wilderness but also, most significantly, spiritual reassurance and spiritual food, through being sufficiently physically able to listen, to encounter God in silence, and then to listen well and obey.

Psalm 42 aligns beautifully here: “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Psalm 42: 1-2).

When can I go and meet with God? In the longer reading this is what Elijah does, he meets with God; there is urgent prayer, there is conversation and there is both reassurance and direction. Elijah is given a specific task to do next. In this Season of Lay Ministries, with many people and their loved ones having come through torrid and fearful times, who else is seeking and saying: “So, my soul longs for you O God...When can I go and meet with God?” Are we listening well enough, seeking God in prayer and in worship as part of a community of faith and in leading a community of faith?

The Diocese has expanded its range of authorised lay ministries so there are now many more opportunities to answer these questions. Pastoral ministry, which can be so healing, encouraging others through being alongside them; sharing the good news with children and young people and helping them to develop a thirst for God that will guide their own journeys of faith; taking risks to learn and be what God intends us to be.

The passage from Elijah speaks to us of the Spirit, and this resonates with the Trinitarian God, “the Word that was with God in the beginning” (John 1:1-2), the Word that feeds, sustains, heals, directs. In Luke’s Gospel the horror of mental anguish is laid bare, then the demonic is healed and sits at the feet of Jesus, the power of which frightens the people around. Fear appears again. Are we afraid of what Jesus may ask of us when we are healed?

How we long to be a Church that does more for those mentally struggling, for those who are desperate. Jesus does not reject. Elijah, in our Old Testament reading, initially complains that only he is left as

a good man serving God, but this is unlikely! The reading from Paul’s letter to the Galatians reminds us of the importance of grace and humility. Paul reminds us that in Jesus, the community of faith includes those whom we might find unlikely and unlovely. The Scriptures show us that God chose and called people rich and poor, well-educated or not, administrators, those with menial jobs.

As we journey through the Trinity season, alive to the Holy Spirit, we pray that we respect that it is by God’s grace and mercy that we have been given the gifts we have to his glory and we pray that we live the faith that “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

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Prayer

Lord Jesus,
when you were confronted with difficult people
you met them with powerful compassion
and healing love.

As we minister in your name
help us to see the person behind the problem,
to love you in the loveless,
to be unafraid where others fear
and to witness to your liberating power.

Amen.

*The Very Revd Andrew Nunn
Dean of Southwark*

Suggested hymns

Be thou my vision
All I have/Build this house (Lou Fellingham)
From heaven you came (The Servant King)
Go! (Hillsong)
Hope of our calling: hope through courage won
Lord of Creation, to You Be All Praise!
Lord Jesus, I’m eager to answer your call (Wild Goose)
Now let us from this table rise