

Liturgical and Sermon Resources for Trinity Sunday 2006 *using the Diocesan Environment Sunday focus*

Foregoing Note

The following resources are intended to bring together the themes of Trinity Sunday, the lectionary readings (especially the Gospel for the day) and the 2006 United Nations Environment Day ('Deserts and Desertification') in a creative manner. Theologically speaking, we are offered the opportunity to reflect upon, and bring alive, the Holy Trinity in relation to the eternal choice of life and death put forward by God in the Scriptures, focussed in the choice before Nicodemus in today's Gospel, and contextually ever more present to us in the choices we make today about caring, or further destroying God's Creation. *Please feel free to use and/or adapt all or part of the following as is appropriate to your setting – and to add further ideas (eg in decorating the place of worship) in line with these themes.*

Collect

Holy God in Holy Trinity

We give you thanks for the mystery of your creating, redeeming and sustaining love,
Grant that as you once called your servants to discover new life in the desert,
So we too may overcome the spiritual demons of our own times,
Bringing true hope not false deserts to our world.
Enable us to see your presence in all Creation
That we may renew our world as we are renewed. **Amen**

Intercessions: *Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer of all* ***Bring us to new birth in the mystery of your love***

Holy God, Source of all Being

We give thanks for your presence in Creation:

for the new births you daily bring to life in the glorious array of our world and cosmos
and for your redeeming power in the face of human environmental destruction.

Help us see and honour your image among your creatures,
and especially in the deserts and dry places of our nation and our world.

Strengthen those who work to prevent the desertification of our world,
especially the work of the United Nations, the world's governments and Australian
environmental agencies; enable us to develop more sustainable agriculture and land-use;
and bring us all to a deeper awareness of your glory in all things.

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer of all

Bring us to new birth in the mystery of your love

Holy God, Christ who bears and transforms our pain,

We give thanks for your presence in the redemption of evil and suffering:

for the new births you create from the death-dealing situations of our world
and for your saving power in the face of human indignity and oppression.

Help us bring the hope of your Resurrection to all who suffer,
remembering especially today those who suffer from hunger, hate, or human horror....

(please insert the names of particular people and situations as appropriate)

We repent for our misuse of the gifts you have given us, especially in the exploitation of the
world you give to us in trust; enable us to be better stewards one with another;
and bring us a to fuller living out of your prophetic Word in us.

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer of all

Bring us to new birth in the mystery of your love

Holy God, Lifegiving Spirit,

We give thanks for your presence in the sanctification and eternal hope of our world:
for the new births of purpose and meaning you forge from suffering and sadness,
and for the anticipations of your final consummation in which we shall see you all in all.
Grant to us and your people sure hope for the future and confidence in your love..
and hear our prayers today for those within our lives and parish in need of your restoring love...

(please add names of particular people and situations as appropriate)

Strengthen your Church to be a sign of your sanctifying and sustaining love,
a witness to your inspiring love and healing grace:

and especially we pray today for those on our cycles of prayer...

(please add names of particular people and situations as appropriate)

From the false deserts of sin and self-centredness
lead us into your eternal presence.

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer of all:

Bring us to new birth in the mystery of your love

Holy God in Holy Trinity,

Your Mystery is as infinite as the Cosmos

yet nearer than the breath we breathe.

As we walk this land may we feel your presence,

as we enter desert places may we open ourselves to your glory

and as we care for your world may we always seek new birth,

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who walked humbly on the earth,

rejoicing in Creation and sharing your glory.

Amen.

Possible hymn for the occasion (to tune of Love Divine or another 8.7.8.7 setting)

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| 1. Trinity of Love and Mystery,
Ground of Being, Source of Birth,
In the hurts of human history,
Teach us your Creation's worth. | 2. Father of true genesis
Mother of the land and sea,
Desert's balance is in crisis
Help us set Creation free, |
| 3. Word of Wisdom, sent to save,
Cosmic Christ, light from above,
In dry places make us brave
Prophets of redeeming love. | 4. Holy Spirit, breath of new life,
Healing presence, blowing wild,
Turn us from our senseless strife.
Our world's glory undefiled |
| 5. God of all the world's great beauty
Saving Earth from human greed,
Call us to our sacred duty
Meeting your Creation's need. | |

Suggested childrens activities

- produce pictures or collage in shape of Celtic-style interwoven Trinity cross – with the theme/pictures/ideas related to life in the desert or dry areas (eg desert flowers/insects/rocks/wildlife)
- give each person 3 ribbons (one gold – for the Father and God's glory and source of Life; one white (or red) for the Son and Light of the World; one blue for the Holy Spirit)

and water of new life – and decorate each with appropriate symbols and words (eg doves and spiritual gifts for the Holy Spirit). Then fasten or plait the ribbons together to ‘show and tell’ and take away

- (alternatively) take three strands of wool or ribbons and plait them for each person as a wristband for everyone in the congregation as a token and reminder of the Trinity
- (if creative/skilled enough!) create a simple circle dance with each person having one of three different coloured ribbon sashes or flags, dancing in and out and together with their own colour and with the other colours together

Other possible resources

www.seasonofcreation.com -

see especially Outback Sunday materials and photo gallery for powerpoint photographs

Some Sermon reflections: *Choosing life, choosing true deserts, choosing the Trinity*

Overview

The choice given to Nicodemus in our Gospel today, this year’s UN Environment theme of ‘Deserts and Desertification’, and our celebration of the mystery of the Holy Trinity – what can these three things have to do with one another? Are they simply three themes arbitrarily linked together? Assuredly NO: as we reflect upon them together, they take us deeper into the heart and challenge of our Faith today. For Nicodemus, like each of us, is presented with a choice by Jesus: the choice between death and new life; the choice between remaining in a false desert or opening ourselves to a new existence which can renew all our dry places; the choice between the false Gods of this world and the only true God, the God of all Creation, found amongst us and beyond us, in Holy Trinity. Today’s themes therefore provide a journey into the heart of our Faith: seeking the one true God rather than false ones, the value of deserts rather than desertification, life rather than death.

False gods in the desert

In the desert of New Mexico, in the early morning of the 16th of July 1945, the first ever explosion of a nuclear bomb took place. Although actually very small by today’s standards, the light and heat from the explosion was fearsome. Its effect was far more lasting and far-reaching however. In many ways it changed the face of our world for ever and brought a terrible new reality to birth. Shockingly, and yet very appropriately – in an heretical sense – this epoch-making event was called Trinity, and the desert site renamed the Trinity site. No one knows exactly why, but a widely held theory is that the name Trinity was given by Robert Oppenheimer himself, the leading theoretical physicist of his day, and the so-called ‘father of the atomic bomb’. Oppenheimer named the event Trinity, it is said, referring to the divine Hindu trinity of Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver), and Shiva (the Destroyer). For he had an avid interest in Sanskrit literature (which he had taught himself to read), and following the Trinity test is reported to have recited the following passage from the Bhagavad-Gita: *If the radiance of a thousand suns/ Were to burst at once into the sky,/ That would be like the splendor of the Mighty One.../ I am become Death./ The shatterer of Worlds.*

Whether or not this is the exact derivation of the Trinity site, it is a powerful expression of the heretical nature of the gods of our modern world and their relationship to the deserts and dry places of the true God in Holy Trinity. When we trust to human ingenuity alone, is this not where we end up? Are not death and destruction the cost of human false gods? And are they not so very visible in the spiritual and environmental destruction of our times?

Journey into Death with a false idea of desert

Appropriately enough, the Trinity site is in that section of the new Mexican desert which the Spaniards once called Jornada de Muerto, or 'Journey of Death'. For there is a basic flawed human attitude to deserts and dry places which also lies at the heart of the human destruction symbolised by the Trinity site. To many human minds, desert equals a place of death. No wonder the deserts of our world have been used in such ways. What does northeastern Kazakhstan, ground zero for the former Soviet Union, have in common with the Mojave Desert or the saltgrass and shadscale of the Great Basin? What does Nevada, New Mexico, and the Colorado Plateau, have in common with Australia's Maralinga, the African Sahara, China's Lop Nur west of the Gobi Desert, the Rajasthan in northwest India? Yes, they are all regions whose geographical situation provides the equivalent of "neutral" laboratory conditions for huge physics experiments. But common to all these lands is also a consensus of their worthlessness and the assumption that their local populations are invisible, expendable, or relocatable. Deserts are not important to the false gods of human beings who prefer the Journey of Death. No wonder our world's deserts are not cared for and other dry lands are made barren or degraded..

Journey into Life with a Christian understanding of desert

In contrast, when we come to the Holy Trinity of Christian Faith, we are offered a different journey: a Journey into Life, a journey which begins in the deserts and dry places of our world, a journey which values all of Creation and finds the Holy Spirit moving within it.

So often it is in the desert that human beings find spiritual renewal. In Australia, we are reminded of this by the rock, Uluru, at the heart of our own land, and, throughout the biblical story, God again and again takes his people into the desert to renew them and create new life and hope. Abraham, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, Jesus himself: all go into the desert and emerged renewed with God's grace and power. Significantly it was also amongst those early Christians who went out into the desert seeking spiritual renewal that the understanding of God as Holy Trinity historically came to fruition. They chose the desert for it was there that they could come closest to the mystery of God. For there they were able to leave aside human conceptions and discover the true God who spoke in the incomprehensible grandeur and complex balance of the desert. This was the God who is greater than all we can ever comprehend and yet closer to us than we are to ourselves. For the true Trinity is not apart from Creation, still less destructive of it: the Trinity is the very meaning and purpose of Creation. As St. Basil expressed it: *'the Father is the "Creator of all things", the Son is the one "through whom all things were made", and the Holy Spirit is the one "in whom are all things". Everything that he (God the Creator) had made ... was very good" (Gen. 1:31), because "first He conceived, and His conception was a work carried out by His Word, and perfectly by His Spirit."*' To follow in the steps of the Desert Fathers and the great theologians of the Holy Trinity is therefore to see the desert, literally and metaphorically, as the place where God as Trinity is found; the place where new birth and new life comes into being; a place of mystery, to be loved as God loves.

Nicodemus and the choice of life or death

Nicodemus, unlike the Desert Fathers, can be seen to represent those who seek a god of great power (like the people of the Trinity site in New Mexico) and he represents those who wish to stay in control rather than letting go into the mystery of the true God. He comes to Jesus affirming his faith in Jesus' great miracles: 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, because no one can do these miracles which you are doing unless God is with him' (3:2).

Yet Nicodemus cannot move beyond this into a deeper, and humbler, understanding of who Jesus really is: into a deeper understanding which will bring relationship with the true God..

Nicodemus clearly knows and recognises something about Jesus., but Jesus' abrupt response - 'You must be born again' - challenges Nicodemus to take a completely different approach to faith, and to give up his false understanding of God. For Nicodemus needs to have a new kind of seeing and knowing, if he is to see (3:3) or enter (3:5) 'the kingdom of God'. (Note: Jesus' favoured term ('the kingdom of God') in the first three gospels appears only here in John, as the writer in 3:5 uses an old saying of Jesus linked with conversion and baptism and reworks it in 3:3 (see Matthew 18:3; Mark 10:15)). It is not enough to recognise something of God's power in Jesus. We need to recognise Jesus' true nature, and open ourselves to relationship with Him. Only such a faith will bring new life because only such a faith involves true relationship with God.

Nicodemus thus represents human beings where we allow ourselves to be dried up spiritually and when we refuse to 'let go' and allow ourselves to enter into our own spiritual desert to be renewed by God. Humanly speaking, desertification happens to us, when we try to control life and do not 'let go and let God' (as the Desert Fathers did). For, as those who have gone into the desert have found, it is only by being humble and by being reborn in the dynamic energies of God that our personal deserts can flourish, and the dry places of our lives bloom again.

Nicodemus, Romans 8:12-17 and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit

Unless we recognise the Holy Trinity in our own selves and in the wider Creation, then there is no hope of new life, new birth. Just as Creation itself depends upon the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – creating, redeeming and sustaining – so it is with our individual selves.

In 3:8 John plays on the word, pneuma, which means spirit and wind. People like the Nicodemus remain at the level of miracles and cannot open themselves to the level of the Spirit. When we allow ourselves to be born of the Spirit however we experience a new way of living in the world: not a new mystical height of experience but a qualitatively different relationship of love towards God, God's people and God's world.

The passage from Romans 8:12-17 thus outlines what living in relationship with the Holy Trinity produces. For the fruits of the Spirit, which Paul enumerates, are certainly qualities that would clearly enhance an ecological spirituality. Were all human actions imbued with the fruits of the Spirit, then the creation would be set free from its bondage to human exploitation. For through the graceful presence of the indwelling Spirit, our self-centered consciousness can be transformed and we can become a new being responsive to the needs of our surroundings. In choosing the Holy Trinity, our true God, we choose the journey of life through the desert, and the possibility of life not death for ourselves and our threatened world.