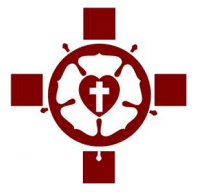




LUTHERAN PORT ELIZABETH FRIEDENSKIRCHE - CHURCH OF PEACE



Home Service for Trinity Sunday

30 May 2021

Opening with lighting of three candles:

Three candles are lit for the Holy Trinity on this Sunday celebration of the Trinity, God in Three Persons, in the unity of Love: GOD above us as Creator and Father, GOD beside us in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Redeemer, and GOD in us and among us as Spirit of Comfort and Truth; God as Beginning, Middle and End, the only true GOD from everlasting to everlasting. Amen.

Good morning dear Congregation. A warm welcome to you all on this Trinity Sunday.

Holy Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost in the church calendar, turns many Christians into mini detectives. Magnifying glasses in hand, they twist themselves into knots trying to unravel and explain the mystery of the triune God.

In his Prayer Book, Johann Friedrich Starck compares trying to understand this deep mystery of the Trinity, how He can be both three persons yet one God, to staring at the sun.

“When believers are about to begin a meditation on the mystery of the Holy Trinity, they must be like those who want to obtain the light and benefit from the sun and make it serve them. If they look into the sun with unprotected eyes, they become blinded; they see nothing but darkness, indeed, nothing at all. But if they keep their eyes cast down and thus use the light and splendour of the sun, they see much. Indeed, they see all that they ought to see” (p. 108).

Scripture does not explain the mysterious way God is three in one, only that He is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. When we try to understand this mystery with our finite abilities, we end up blind. It is too great and too brilliant a mystery to see. And, if we obsess over this mystery, always looking up, we will remain blind to the work of God down below, around us.

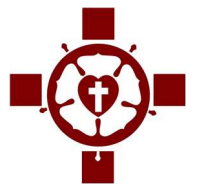
But if we want to “obtain the light and benefit” from it, we need to look to what is illuminated, as Starck suggests. On Holy Trinity Sunday, God draws our attention, not to the inner workings of the Trinity, but the outer workings of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Those things we can see; namely, the work of the triune God for us.

May God bless us and this Divine Service with the abundance of His grace. Amen.



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Opening Hymn Sup 880, 1-3

1

How shall I call you? Maker of heaven,
poet of sunset and painter of sky,
Father almighty, who's running to find us,
giving his Son who must suffer and die.

Chorus

Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit,
let's sing it again and again.
Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit,
forever and ever. Amen.

How shall I call you?

2 How shall I call you? Master and servant,
lord of the seasons and lord of the years;
faithful and constant in loving and mercy,
giver of laughter and taker of tears.

Chorus

3 How shall I call you? Spirit of comfort,
cloud in the daytime and fire in the night,
guide as we wander, protector in danger,
listener and helper and giver of sight.

Chorus

Introitus

P. In the Name of the triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

C. **Amen.**

P. Our help is in the Name of the Lord,

C. **who made heaven and earth.**

P. We confess before a holy God that we have sinned with thoughts, words, and deeds,
and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinfulness by our own strength. Therefore,
we seek refuge to our Heavenly Father's unfathomable compassion, and seeking mercy
for the sake of Christ, we confess:

C. **God, be merciful to me, a sinner. The almighty God have mercy upon us, may He forgive
us our sins and lead us to eternal life. Amen.**

P. In mercy of Almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for you, and for his sake God
forgives you all your sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ he gives the power to
become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit.

C. **Amen.**

Psalm 145:

P. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

C. **One generation shall commend your works to another, man shall declare your mighty
acts.**

P. On the glorious splendour of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

C. **They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness.**

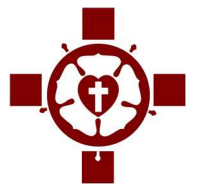
P. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

C. **He fulfils the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them.**

C. **Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now
and shall be forevermore. Amen.**



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Kyrie

L. Kyrie eleison!
L. Christe eleison!
L. Kyrie eleison!

C. Lord, have mercy!
C. Christ, have mercy!
C. Lord have mercy!

L. Glory be to God in the highest!

C. And on earth peace, to all in whom He delights.

All glory be to God on high! Who has our race befriended; to us no harm shall now come nigh, the strife at last is ended. God showeth His goodwill to us, and peace shall reign on earth again. O thank Him for His goodness!

Opening Prayer

L. The Lord be with you!

C. And also, with you!

L. Holy God, as You live in Triune community, you draw us into your community of love. By the same Spirit that binds us together speak to us in what we read, hear, and ponder today, that it may enliven us and stretch us to trust and follow you; through Christ our Saviour, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit forever.

C. Amen.

Epistle Reading

Romans 11:(31)33-36

C: Hallelujah

Hymn Sup 778 1-3

1 Father, we adore you,
lay our lives before you.
How we love you.
2 Jesus, we adore you,
lay our lives before you.
How we love you.

Father, we adore you.

3 Spirit, we adore you,
lay our lives before you.
How we love you.

Gospel Reading

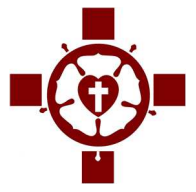
John 3:1-8(9-13)

Confession of Faith

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth...



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Hymn LH 500 1+2

1 Blessed Jesus, at your word
we are gathered all to hear you.
Let our hearts and souls be stirred
now to seek and love and fear you.
By your gospel pure and holy,
teach us, Lord, to love you solely.

2 All our knowledge, sense, and sight
lie in deepest darkness shrouded,
till your Spirit breaks our night
with your beams of truth unclouded.
You alone to God can win us;
you must work all good within us.

Blessed Jesus...

Sermon

John 3:1-15 (16+17)

Dear Congregation,

Re-birthing is "in". Counsellors and therapists promise their clients an experience for a lot of money in which they can recreate their birth – through a special breathing technique or in a trance.

In this way, internal blockages are to be overcome. A person should be able to experience him- or herself anew.

Some associate this with the ancient belief in soul migration and then begin to believe that they are actually a completely different person. In faith or religious circles being born again is also described often in similar terms where one gets the sense that you have to make sure that you are born again and recreate your life by giving your life to Christ, - as if your life did not belong to Christ already.

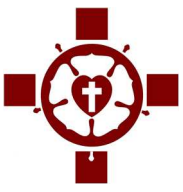
The boom in these offers on the secular as well as the religious market shows us the deep longing that lives in many people: jump over your own shadow once again, start again from scratch – to not be limited by the many burdens of one's own life story, by missed opportunities or mistakes, bad experiences, inner blockages, or guilt.

Becoming new again is also the theme of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. An unequal conversation between an old, respected religious leader and teacher, Nicodemus and a young, - and in Nicodemus' eyes, unlearned wandering preacher, who somehow made an impression with his words and deeds. A strange conversation, because the two somehow talk past each other, and it is the learned teacher who is not understanding and is not able to comprehend what is being said to him. In the end, he does not understand anything, because what he hears does not fit into his thinking or frame of reasoning at all.

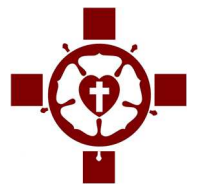
II.

But what is the conversation at night about? Nicodemus sets out, in the dark, to see Jesus. He is looking for a one-on-one conversation. He wants to know what Jesus has to say, of God, of life, of salvation. And so, he speaks to him with great esteem: "You are a teacher of God! For whoever does such deeds as you can only be from God." Shouldn't Jesus be happy

4 (8)



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about this recognition? But far from it: Jesus pushes back at Nicodemus and says something completely unexpected. "If a man is not born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God!" That means: "You don't really understand anything. As you are, you are blind, even if you are a valued teacher. Your categories, with which you judge things, pass by the real thing. When it comes to God, to His work in our lives, you shoot right past, despite all your best manuscripts and learnedness and with all your experience. You presume to judge spiritual things by your reason, and at the same time you cannot understand the simple things of nature. Jesus calls Nicodemus' attention to the wind. No philosopher or scientist has ever been able to comprehend and describe the nature of the wind--where it has its beginning or where it ends. We cannot see where the wind comes from, or how it blows past us, or how far it goes. Now, if we cannot by our reason fathom those things which we see daily in nature, much less will we be able to fathom with our reason the divine works which God accomplishes within us. There are times when the only thing that really helps is to cling to the Word of Promise from God and believe it.

God does not come like a steamroller rolling over our lives. Rather, his Spirit acts quietly in and among us, comparable to a delicate breeze that one can feel on the skin, but cannot grasp and hold on to. *"The wind blows where it chooses, and you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."* It is the same with us as with Nicodemus: we all have our set convictions, and with those in the way, it is hard for us to comprehend the delicate workings of the Spirit of God in our lives. Most of the time, it does not fit into our categories of what a new, successful, and fulfilled life should look like. Sometimes we rub our eyes and ask, "Was there something?" We too are often blind to God's will and his work in our lives and our world.

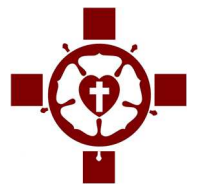
III.

How *does* God's Spirit work in our lives? Where does renewal happen, and new life begin? Well, the beginning of this birth for us was in baptism. The water is baptism; the Spirit is that grace which is given to us in baptism. Since our baptism, renewal is a daily thing. Daily we die to sin and are raised to new life in Christ. Daily we repent of our sin before a holy God and daily we are forgiven by a gracious God. That is how our baptism is active in our lives every single day. There is no reset button like on a computer that could reset our lives to their original state, that could simply reset fears and blockages, bad experiences, and bad decisions to zero. Just as one can only experience one's own birth passively, so we can only receive the new-birth passively.

"But how does this work?" Nicodemus asks. "As an old man, I cannot go back to the womb of my mother again." I am as I am, and what life has made me. Again, you cannot force a new beginning. Rebirthing as a technique, - that does not work. A new life can only be received as a gift. For example, when a person returns to life after a life-threatening illness and can now suddenly look at everything with different eyes. "I was given more time. And now other priorities count for me. The things that seemed important before, are not that important now. Now it is the gratitude for a newly gifted life that determines my thinking



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and action." To be able to see things in a new light is a gift. The result of this birth is clearly seen in the hour of death or in times of test by poverty and temptation. He who is born of the flesh fights to defend himself, looks hither and thither, employs his reason to make his living. That is the first place we all go to. Until the effect of our rebirth from above sets in and reasons like this: I am in God's hands, who has preserved and nourished me before in a wonderful manner; he will also feed and preserve me in the future and save me from all sorrow and misfortune. That this will be, we are to believe, but not to know how. It is the work of God, and he has not commanded us to fathom it. (M. Luther)

That is why this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus goes far beyond "you must" and "you should". In the following verses, Jesus speaks enigmatically of another "must", of something that is even more fundamental: The Son of Man *must* be lifted up so that all who believe have eternal life in him. Just as the Jews in the desert, after having been bitten by a poisonous snake, would live if they would look at the bronze serpent, that God had commanded Moses to put on a pole, so, in the same way, all who look up to Christ on the Cross and believe that he died for them and rose from the dead, will have eternal, imperishable life. In this way we will be healed from the devil's poisonous bite. He has bitten us, the serpent in the garden in Eden, put his poison in us and wounded us in body and soul.

And none of us is able to get rid of such harm and deadly poison, unless we look to Christ, on whom God has thrown all our sin, the one who would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15).

God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that all who believe in him may not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). This is the verse that comes directly after the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. All of Nicodemus' confusion, all our confusion about the meaning of life and newness of life drives us back to this central verse of the Gospel.

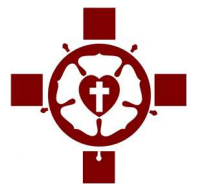
God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. That "had to" happen, and that has happened. Something that precedes all our efforts to attain a new life. A foundation was laid long before we started breathing: God's love, Jesus' way into the world and into death, his commitment to our life, by bringing us a new, eternal, divine life. There is great comfort and incredible assurance in that. It is not "you must do!" - but: "The decisive thing is done. God has acted, and this foundation is firm and certain."

IV.

If someone is not born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. This is, of course, an indication of what happens in baptism. There is the water that washes and cleanses. But it is also a picture of something that must be put to death, must be drowned in the waters of baptism. Something old has to die in order for something new to live. What emerges from the water may be regarded as something new, a new life, in the power of the Spirit of God. In baptism, the new life in Christ is given to us from the Spirit.



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You can light a candle every day to remind yourself of your baptism and say: "I am baptized. I am gifted. I am a new creation in Christ."

And, of course, every time we come to the Lord's Table, we again receive his gift of new life, which we were promised in baptism. Through such remembrance, I am grateful for what has been given to me in my life or where I have repeatedly experienced God's help, comfort, and guidance. Where I gratefully remember, I begin to see the kingdom of God and myself as part of it. Rebirthing – to be born again, cannot be forced. And you do not *have* to force anything. For you are already gifted with the seed of the new life in Christ, with the Spirit of God, with the power of forgiveness, and with the gift of hope.

When we become too sure of what we know about Jesus (or indeed the Trinity on this particular Sunday), when we believe that we have grasped him at last, that is when we can perhaps expect to be undone like Nicodemus. That undoing – that overturning of our certainty – may be a very good thing if it allows us to experience anew the miracle of our birth from above into eternal life, which has nothing to do with what we know or what we are (any more than our birth from our mother's womb did). It is a gift of life from the heart of the Father, breathing the Spirit wind over us and through us, and opening our infant eyes to the Son, our Teacher, lifted up to draw all people to himself and his love.

Nicodemus went out at night to look for Jesus and he found the light of life. **The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.** May this light guide and keep your hearts and minds in true faith unto everlasting life.
Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Triune God, you have given us life, you gave us new life in baptism, you give us life through your Word and your Holy meal.

We belong to you. We are your creation. So, we pray that you fill us with your life-giving strength in these times where we are all feeling exhausted and powerless in the face of an uncertain future.

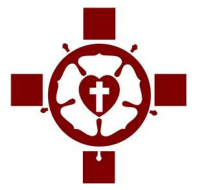
Fill us with new hope each day. Open our eyes for the subtle workings of your Spirit in and around us. Strengthen our dwindling courage knowing that we are strong when we are on your shoulders.

We pray for the sick in our neighbourhood, in our places of work, and amongst us. Stretch out your healing hand to them and nurse them with what they need in body and soul.

We pray for all who mourn the loss of a loved one, whose days are sad and dark, whose nights reveal to them their deepest fears. Be near with your Spirit of comfort and peace.



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We belong to you. You save and bring peace. We pray for those who are enemies of each other. We pray for those who are crying out for rescue -in prisons, torture cellars, or on the run. Be a place of refuge and shelter for them and for all the restless, Lord.

We belong to you. You give us new breath. We pray for hope for the hopeless. We pray for the searchers - the perplexed and the angry. We pray for those who are disappointed - In other people, in faith and in the Church. God, Holy Spirit - we pray that you still the longing in their heart with your Word.

Triune God, gift us with your breath, your love, and your peace today and every day. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Holy Communion

**Preface, Sanctus, Our Father, Words of Institution, Agnus Dei
Distribution**

Closing Hymn LH 508, 1+2

1 Lord, dismiss us with your blessing;
fill our hearts with joy and peace;
let us each, your love possessing,
triumph in redeeming grace.
O refresh us, O refresh us,
trav'ling through this wilderness.

Lord, dismiss us with your blessing,

2 Thanks we give and adoration
for your gospel's joyful sound:
may the fruits of your salvation
in our hearts and lives abound:
ever faithful, ever faithful
to the truth may we be found.

Blessing

L. Depart in the peace of the Lord

C. Thanks be to God.

L: The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you;

The Lord look on you with favour and give you, His peace.

C. Amen, Amen, Amen