

**Merrylea Parish Church Glasgow**  
**Pastoral Homily by the Locum, the Revd Jim Gibson.**

**Sunday, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2020**  
**Trinity Sunday.**

*I am John, your brother, and as a follower of Jesus I am your partner in patiently enduring the suffering that comes to those who belong to his kingdom. I was put on the island of Patmos because I had proclaimed God's word and the truth that Jesus revealed .... I had a vision and saw an open door in heaven. And the voice that sounded like a trumpet said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must happen.' At once, the Spirit took control of me. There in heaven was a throne with someone sitting on it ... in a circle were twenty-four other thrones, on each were seated twenty-four elders dressed in white and wearing crowns of gold. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Surrounding the throne were four living creatures. The first looked like a lion; the second a bull; the third had a man's face and the fourth looked like an eagle in flight. Day and night they never stop singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was, and is, and who is to come." The creatures sing songs of glory and honour and thanks to the one who sits on the throne, who lives for ever and ever. The elders worship him also, saying, "Our Lord and God! You are worthy to receive glory, honour and power. For you created all things, and by your will they were given existence and life." (Adapted. Revelation 1:9-11; 4: 1-8).*

Gradually, very gradually, national leaders at Westminster and in Edinburgh are beginning to release the lockdown that has had us all staying within the confines of our homes these last three months. For those living in high-rise flats without ready access to garden facilities and, especially when young families have been involved, lockdown must have seemed like a form of imprisonment with the internees wondering what crime they had committed.

Politicians must be wondering too. No matter how authoritative and/or empathetic they try to be, the media ensures that some form of criticism or rebuke is ever-present. Little wonder that the steps being offered towards the nation's freedom are small and almost hesitantly made. Throughout these times the recurring political mantra has been "We must follow the science" placing the need for lockdown and social-distancing firmly on the professional advice being received from government advisers. Now the scientists and medics are making clear that decisions about how the country emerges from our recent hibernation is a 'political' matter alone. The balance which needs to be struck, in order to enable people to leave home and get back to work so that the nation's economy can successfully re-boot and for us all to regain some semblance of normality, must be a mind-blowingly difficult one. No-one wants a regression. But how exactly we navigate through the nightmare mine-fields of current uncertainty is I am relieved to say a decision for someone else. No doubt, all may become clearer in time.

Today is Trinity Sunday. For the theologian – another nightmare. A time when, within the Church, we are asked to give thought to what we actually mean when we address God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I wonder if my choice of Scripture (above) surprises you? It relates the story of one living in just as confused and dangerous an era as ours. One who was himself imprisoned. Exiled from his family like so many in our day. Yet, it would seem that it was from the barren rocks of Patmos that, for him, the heavens opened and he heard the angels sing. I believe that gives us a strong clue about the meaning of the Trinity. Essentially, it is a song. From the beginnings of the Church, beliefs were never carefully written down, they were sung as hymns of praise. To this day, we continue to express our faith in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit far more often in music than ever we do in words.

The writer of the Book of Revelation was an early-Christian leader condemned to the quarries on this little, backwater island. Day after day hearing nothing other than tales of persecution and distant wars. Until something unexpected happened. For him, it was as though the skies opened, allowing him to hear this song emanating from the very heart of the universe: 'Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty'.

Centuries later, here we are. In a world that can often seem in danger of slipping out of control; where skills once used to promise new life to so many are used to threaten the extinction of all; where overnight one can become a refugee, a hostage, a victim of the gun, the knife or, even, the internet – and where there seems such little music.

As the nations of the globe struggle to defeat or, at least, control this unseen coronavirus and our political leaders seek a way for us to break loose from confinement, what has our faith to say? Is it any less possible for us, both metaphorically and experientially, to 'see the skies open' and to 'hear the voice of God'?

Perhaps our future lies in our history. Another Scripture reading suggested for today is Psalm 8: *"When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have set in their courses, what are mortals that you should be mindful of them? Mere human beings, that you should seek them out? You have made them little lower than angels; and you adorn them with glory and honour".*

What is that if not a love poem? An ancient insight into the essential nature of the Christian God whom we worship; and which, through time, has come to be understood as the love God expressed in the act of creation, the love Jesus demonstrated time and again reaching out, touching and healing hearts and minds, the love active throughout the world by means of the Holy Spirit's irrepressible energy bringing good out of evil, beauty out of ugliness and offering hope to those despairing. It's through such love that we recognise our common humanity and interdependence. If we can discover new ways to share that love perhaps the angels will sing and God's pleasure given voice.

*Prayer:*

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the mystery we call God, to you this prayer is offered, for you are the Lord of all power: past, present and to come, none is beyond you, none can defeat you, none can claim they are greater. For love is the only engine of survival and in that knowledge we live secure. As our nation begins its perilous and uncertain journey out of lockdown, may our political leaders have the wisdom and compassion to remember we can only be as safe as the most vulnerable; and may fellow citizens remember that privileged release is not the freedom to do as we want, for the virus still overshadows and the well-being of so many remains under threat. God of our everyday, hear this prayer for the realities of our nation and community. Fill our cities, our towns, our neighbourhoods and our workplaces with confidence that, in helping each other, all may face the challenges of each new day strengthened and encouraged by love's power to unite, energise and heal past divisions. You are the father and mother of us all, before you silence is kept for all eloquence and language is facile. Let the child deep within us be content in the knowledge that all are known, wanted, forgiven and loved. And so, to you let angels sing their praise. For holy, holy, holy is our God who was, and is, and is to come.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin against us. Do not bring us to the time of trial, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours. Now and for ever. AMEN.