

# Rainham Christian Fellowship Zoom Service: 7th June 2020

## **Welcome:**

Welcome to our zoom service.

- This morning Jenny will be sharing some thoughts with us
- But before I hand over to her
- I want to say a few words and share a prayer about recent events

Let's begin with the words of God spoken through the prophet Micah  
He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

I am sure all of us have been horrified and distressed by the events beginning in Minnesota

- And the reactions spreading across the Globe
- The tragic killing of George Floyd and the demonstrations since.
- I feel we need to acknowledge these events
- Racism is not something that just affects others
- Neither can these evil acts be dismissed as the work of a few bad men
- We are all victims
- We are all guilty

It is not good enough to say we are not racist ourselves

- We need to be willing to stand against racism
- That does not mean rooting out racists from our midst
- It means rooting out racism from our hearts and minds
- From our customs, our practices, our communities, and our nation.

We cannot allow ourselves to remain unaffected

- We owe that to George,
- We owe it to our friends and neighbours who experience the pain of racism
- And, most of all we owe it to God, whose name we claim.

The God, who tells his people  
Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. (Isaiah 1:17)

I guess this is a lesson we are still needing to learn

## **Prayer**

Father God,

We know you are a God of Justice, mercy, and righteousness. We read in the Psalms that  
"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne" (Psalm 89:14)

We come before you this morning heart broken and ashamed because we have fallen so far below  
the standard you demand of us

You have commanded us time and again, through your prophets, over thousands of years  
to learn to seek justice, yet this week we mourn the death of another man mistreated for his  
colour. We are reminded of those of our brothers and sisters, whom you love who face this  
ongoing denial of their value. We acknowledge our failure to uphold justice in our own  
communities and to be your voice of love and healing and justice.

We ask you to comfort the family of George Floyd, whose grief should not be forgotten in our indignation. We ask for healing for those who have been victims of previous incidents whose wounds have been reopened by these events. We pray for the police officers involved and for their families for they too are in deep emotional turmoil and we know you love them too. We pray for those who feel outraged and are demonstrating. Enable them to have the voice they crave and know they are listened to by the judge of all the earth. We pray for peace to overcome, anger and hate and prejudice.

We ask you forgive us our indifference and teach us to seek justice in our lives and communities. Enable us to bring worth to the devalued, and healing to the hurting.  
Root out in us anything that is not of you, anything that hinders others from knowing justice

We ask you to bring your healing, forgiveness, and peace to your world.  
Not a peace that tolerates evil but a peace that has overcome evil  
We ask you to let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!  
(Amos 5:24)

Amen

**Worship** (What a Beautiful Name)

## Trinity: Unity and Diversity (Jenny B)

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*Based on "The United Godhead" from AllAgeWorshipResources.org and taken from the sermon, "Made in the Image" from Centre Street Baptist Church, St Thomas, Ontario.*

Continuing the series that has included Easter and Pentecost, the Sunday after Pentecost is also known as Trinity Sunday. Neither the word *Trinity* nor *Triune* actually appear in the Bible but have been adopted into Christian language to try to describe the Three-in-One'ness of God. It's one of those times where the slogan on a Wal-Mart T-shirt sums it up nicely: *I can explain it to you but I can't understand it for you.*

The Grace or Apostolical Benediction in **2 Corinthians 13:14** says "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." acknowledging that Father, Son and Spirit are three distinct persons, yet one God. Paul encourages the Corinthians (and us) to live in continual respect of the Godhead, in whose name we are blessed: the grace of Christ as Redeemer, the love of the Father who sent Him and all the communications of the Holy Spirit that qualify us for an interest in that grace and love.

This thread also features in **Romans 5:1,5b (NLT)** "Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love."

Imagine I was setting up an online chess club and asked the three carefully selected Board members what would show commitment from players and qualify them to be part of the club. Do you think I would get one answer? The same answer from all three? Let's ask the three members of the imaginary Board for their opinions ...

"To show commitment to the club, members should:

- 1) Make a charitable donation for each match they win;
- 2) Always wear black and white when playing matches;
- 3) Buy the board members cakes on their (the player's) birthday."

*[note - the following 'statements' are just a bit of fun!]*

Make a charitable donation... (Faith):

*We are gathered here today to discuss the most basic of rules that our new members will need to carry out to pledge their allegiance and commitment to the club and its activities. Our most simple rule is that we expect a member of the club to make a charitable donation each time they win a match.*

*As I'm sure some of you know, I hail from a great long line of ancestors, dating back as far as the 6th century to India, where chess was first played under the name 'Chaturanga' in a professional setting. In these olden times, commitment was shown by a member of the club donating a portion of their wealth after every win, with the loser donating their life to the critically ill daughter of the country's Rajah, or king.*

*My family lost my great, great, great grandfather's wife to this tradition, which is why my family have since been board members to avoid this tradition. Nowadays of course, we don't really dabble in sacrificial offerings and we also kind of have vaccines, but the noble offering of our livelihood remains, which is why I ask you to honour this ancient tradition, as a sign of your ultimate commitment to the club.*

Always wear black and white... (André):

*To show commitment to the chess club, we expect a member of the club to dress in black and white every time they play a match out of respect for the first ever chess champion, Magnus of Norway, who won spectacularly in 923 AD. It is also scientifically proven that wearing black and white clothing whilst playing a chess match can increase a player's thinking ability and reduce time consumption by 15%, as your brain waves are more concentrated towards the thinking part of your brain.*

*This is in accordance with article 46, section 12 of the official 1948 chess handbook and is therefore chess law. All members who do not abide by these rules will have the right to play chess stripped away and will need to return their memberships within 24 hours of this happening.*

Buy the board members cake... (Hannah):

*To show commitment to the chess club we expect a member of the club to buy the board members cakes on their (the player's) birthday every year.*

*To commemorate you coming into this world as a gift, it only makes sense that you continue to be a gift by giving gifts to others. It doesn't make sense for you to receive gifts; your existence is the gift. Rather, make yourself more so the gift. Make your presence, with cake, be a blessing to the rest of the club. For it to be a true gift you must yourself provide the cake, even up to the point of having a slice ready on the plate. Any effort on our part would spoil the goodness of the gift.*

*As the chess club is such a pleasure to be a part of, surely maintaining your membership would not satisfy you as a way of thanks. On a day set apart for being thankful for another year, it only makes sense to also thank the chess club that played such an important part in making that year good. Also, we come together to celebrate and partake in the wonderful game chess. As such, we pay no attention to fellow members, other than to strategize, to learn and so predict their play. Hence, we would be unable to purchase cakes that were to the liking of the member whose birthday it may be. I look forward to our members' offerings, and while we're on the topic of preferences, I'll close with the note that I myself am very fond of carrot cake.*

Each argument is as valid (or invalid!) as the others, though they are not convincing enough to leave us feeling satisfied we have a Board in complete agreement. God, however, speaks to us as One person. We can be assured that there is no division between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, despite their subtly different facets. He is One God of perfect unity and diversity at the same time. So the challenge for us is to ensure that there is no division between us as a hugely diverse church!

### **1 John 5: 3-8 (NLT)**

*Our love for God means that we obey his commands. And his commands are not too hard for us because every child of God is able to defeat the world. And we win the victory over the world by means of our faith. Who can defeat the world? Only the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus Christ is the one who came with the water of his baptism and the blood of his death. He came not only with the water, but with both the water and the blood. And the Spirit himself testifies that this is true, because the Spirit is truth. There are three witnesses: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and all three give the same testimony.*

This does not mean we have to agree on every tiny detail of every aspect of church life, e.g. I tend to choose newer worship songs with a hymn thrown in occasionally for good measure, whereas others only play hymns and others still only lead the latest releases. None of the styles are fundamentally right or wrong as long as God is not prevented from being glorified. E.g. we use intolerance-friendly crackers and Ribena for celebrating Communion but some people would insist on unleavened bread and red wine. Jesus said to do it in remembrance of Him; I firmly believe our heart attitude when we come to the table far outweighs the symbols being used.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch wrote “Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the universal Church”. The church is a single unit. There wouldn’t be a church without people, flawed and opinionated as we are. Christianity is realised in being a people gathered together by God.

## **One Lord, one faith, one baptism**

### **Ephesians 4:3-6 (NLT)**

*Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.*

We all know that baptism is practiced and understood in a variety of ways. If you gathered a dozen Christians from a dozen different churches and denominations and asked them about baptism, you’d get at least a dozen different answers – maybe more! Baptism itself is rooted in Trinitarian formula: The Father spoke at Jesus’ baptism, saying, ‘this is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’ and the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. Before ascending to the Father, Jesus commissioned the disciples to baptise ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’. God’s gift of baptism is a foundation of unity and should not be a source of division within the church. By simulating death to the old ways of living and rising into a new life, it symbolises belonging and is a visible demonstration of the covenant relationship between Christ and his church. The church baptises by faith in the word of God; Christians receive their baptism by faith in the promise of God.

Faith in this context refers to that divine persuasion [Greek – *pistis*] which can only be given by God. It’s not about having one set belief system but about allegiance to the One in *whom* we believe. The most important part is the agreement that there is “one Lord”. All Christians can be seen as unified in this declaration! There will almost definitely be a difference of opinion on the intricacies of what that means – we looked a few weeks ago at whether the Resurrection was a literal or spiritual one – but at least there is agreement that **Jesus is Lord**.

With this understanding, it is possible to explore differences of doctrine whilst remaining united in love and submission to Christ.

God, the Father of all, is over all those who belong to Jesus. Knowing that *should* impact how we treat each other. We are called to “always be humble and gentle and [Be] patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of [your] love.” (Ephesians 4:2). As vessels of the Holy Spirit, we should not be in conflict with another person who carries the same Spirit within them. We should always crave to conform to God’s pattern (Romans 12:2, 1 Peter 1:13-14), meaning however challenging we find it to work with other people, we need to remember to try to see them how God sees them.

This also means recognising that we may not be the easiest person in the world to get along with, and asking God to show us particular areas of shortcoming where He can work in our lives by His amazing power. I remember being told to picture a stone wall where all the individual pieces had their own lumps and bumps that prevented them from sitting flush against each other. One of the stones kept crying out to God to grind down the sharp point on the stone above because it was constantly pressing in and causing discomfort and making “life” difficult ... so God answered by making a recess in the lower stone so that the protruding feature of the stone above could fit comfortably! It was the one who was complaining that needed to change!

We are *all* made in the Image of God. **Genesis 1:26-27** in the Amplified version tells us “then God said, ‘Let Us (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) make man in Our image, according to Our likeness [not physical, but a spiritual personality and moral likeness]; and let them have complete authority over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, and over the entire earth, and over everything that creeps and crawls on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image, in the image and likeness of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

So we are designed to be like, and do like God, albeit in finite capacity including in the areas of leadership, compassion and relationships among others.

As a unified church, we should reflect the unity and diversity of the Trinity. We are to be “of one mind” as Paul says. This doesn’t mean thinking alike about everything. It’s OK for Christians to like different types of music, choose to eat different foods, or prefer to pray in different ways, for example. Being of one mind means sharing the same commitment to the same Lord as individuals who:

- receive His grace and respond to His call with obedience,
- submit to God and each other,
- die to self and give up selfish desires for the sake of allowing the Spirit to work in them, through them and despite them.

We can’t grow in Christ’s likeness when we reject community. Living in fellowship with others will almost definitely throw up challenges ... about many things ... but it is so discouraging when Christians leave a community because something happens that didn’t meet a preconceived idea of what church should look like, or because they didn’t get their own way. **Jesus didn’t get His way.** Father God didn’t take “the cup” from Him. His commitment to obediently do the will of the Father meant laying aside any preferences or agenda He had. It’s not acceptable to change church just because you don’t like the Pastor’s fashion sense! Christianity is not a buffet – you can’t just pick out the bits you like and leave the bits you don’t. The church is the body of Christ, unified by one Spirit, in all, and living through all.

Being united is about attitude and motives. The late Bob Gass (creator and author of Word for Today) said “we haven’t been called to compare, to compete, to complain, or to criticise one another. We’ve been called to complement one another.”

He reminds us that when Israel was occupied by the Philistines, the prophet / Judge Samuel told the Israelites, “If you are really coming back to the LORD with all your heart, you must throw away your foreign gods and your idols. You must give yourselves fully to the LORD and serve only Him. Then He will save you. I will pray to the Lord for you.” (see **1 Samuel 7:3,5**) and the Lord gave Israel a spectacular victory over their enemies, but Samuel fully shared the credit because he was ‘us’ focused and honouring God was his highest priority.

Even when it is not possible to physically meet together, it is still possible to function in a united way, e.g.

- the principle of compassion can stretch from the church as a whole, even if one or two people are doing the leg-work.
- Each individual can be an example of Jesus in their own circle, reflecting the desired values and vision of the church.
- If a relationship breaks down or suffers, the whole body is affected but if the relationship is restored due to pastoral care, then unity has been exercised!
- Encouragement is vital in showing that we are all pointing to and moving in the same direction – towards the Kingdom of Heaven – which is why it is important to share, particularly positive things that have risen as a result of the current Coronavirus situation.

## Summary

We are only capable of understanding certain aspects of the Trinity. We know we are called to worship one God and Father, obey one Lord, and be led and empowered by one Spirit.

Understanding the diversity of the church without knowledge of the Trinity is difficult at best, but by being an authentic, united Christian Community, perhaps it will help us to better comprehend the Trinity.

**Worship (I Will Rise)**

**Closing Prayer and Grace**