TRINITY SUNDAY

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Rev Tom Gordon, Retired Chaplain of Marie Curie Hospice, offers his thoughts on Trinity Sunday.

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Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?

On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand;

beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out:

"To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.

The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.

Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

When there were no depths I was brought forth,

when there were no springs abounding with water.

Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth--

when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil.

When he established the heavens, I was there,

when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,

when he made firm the skies above,

when he established the fountains of the deep,

when he assigned to the sea its limit,

so that the waters might not transgress his command,

when he marked out the foundations of the earth,

then I was beside him, like a master worker;

and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,

rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race."
Notes on OT reading

The Book of Proverbs is distinctive in the Old Testament is that it offers a particular way of teaching through short, easy-to-recall sentences. The overall purpose of the book is to offer the whole design of God’s truth through ‘proverbs’ which are not necessarily connected to one another. Earlier in the Old Testament we have had divine ‘laws’, divine ‘histories’ and divine ‘songs’. Now we have divine ‘proverbs’, which contain infinite wisdom and teaching for our instruction and guidance. This was an ancient way of teaching, familiar to the Greeks. Matthew Henry in his ‘Commentary on the whole Bible’, writes, “Each of the seven wise men of Greece had someone saying that he valued himself upon, and that made him famous. These sentences were inscribed on pillars, and had in great veneration as that which was said to come down from heaven. ‘A cælo descendit, Gnothi seauton’ - Know thyself is a precept which came down from heaven. The first nine chapters of the Book of Proverbs are considered to be by way of a preface, an exhortation to the study and practice of wisdom’s rules, and caution against those things that would hinder such an approach.

Chapter 8, therefore, from which this reading comes, falls at the conclusion of this exhortation. It calls on the reader to meditate on the nature of God, to enter into the ‘circle of God’ (see ‘Resource Section’ later) by giving thought to the wonder of God’s eternal presence and creative might. It is, in effect, a hymn of praise, or a ‘creedal statement’ on the mystery of God.
Psalm 8

Page 92, Domine, Dominus noster

1 O LORD our Governor, how exalted is your Name in all the world!

2 Out of the mouths of infants and children
   your majesty is praised above the heavens.

3 You have set up a stronghold against your adversaries,
   to quell the enemy and the avenger.

4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
   the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

5 What is man that you should be mindful of him?
   the son of man that you should seek him out?

6 You have made him but little lower than the angels;
   you adorn him with glory and honour;

7 You give him mastery over the works of your hands;
   you put all things under his feet:

8 All sheep and oxen, even the wild beasts of the field,

9 The birds of the air, the fish of the sea,
   and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea.

10 O LORD our Governor, how exalted is your Name in all the world!
Canticle

Canticle 2 Page 49, BCP or Canticle 13 Page 90, BCP

Song of Praise Benedictus es, Domine - Song of the Three Young Men, 29-34

Glory to you, Lord God of our fathers;
you are worthy of praise; glory to you.
Glory to you for the radiance of your holy Name;
we will praise you and highly exalt you forever.
Glory to you in the splendour of your temple;
on the throne of your majesty, glory to you.
Glory to you, seated between the Cherubim;
we will praise you and highly exalt you forever.
Epistle

**Romans 5: 1-5**

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

**Notes on Epistle**

Paul begins to unfold the ‘new status’ of the Christian life, which Christians can find through faith in what God has done in Christ, and, by implication, what the Holy Spirit continues to do in us. It is what has been called the ‘sanctification’ of the Christian, the revelation of God in Christ, along with the emboldening of the Spirit, giving Christians the ‘blessed’ (sanctified) life, the fullness of life Christ himself promised. The outcome of sanctification is, as William Neil writes, ‘... to restore our true relationship with [God] ... [which gives] us both the inward peace that comes from knowing we are forgiven and also the certain hope of ultimately reaching the fulfilment of our destiny in the nearer presence of God.’ On the basis of this confidence, Paul is saying, we can face whatever life throws at us as Christians, knowing we are safe in the hands of the God who reveals His all to us in the being of Christ and the promise of the Spirit. The proof of God’s love is that Jesus died for us while we were still undeserving of such a sacrifice. We have a hope, therefore, which is unshakable, that we can grow further into Christ through His risen power.
Gospel

**John 16:12-15**

Jesus said to the disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot ‘for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Notes on Gospel reading

It should be remembered that the Gospel of John was the latest of the Gospels to be written, and is, therefore, more of a theological commentary on the events and purpose of the Jesus narrative than a factual account of Jesus’ life and ministry. It has been suggested, therefore, that the introduction into the teaching of Jesus of references to the Holy Spirit – such as are outlined here – is an attempt to provide ‘source’ material which could be seen to underpin the Pentecost narratives of the early chapters of Acts – rather than the other way around. That notwithstanding, this section of the sixteenth chapter of John’s Gospel does pull together some important theological strands which has much to teach us about a wider – Trinitarian, perhaps? – understanding of the nature of God.

To Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. Such truth is what we know as ‘revelation’, and, as William Barclay says in his commentary on John’s Gospel, ‘there is no passage in the New Testament which shows us what we might call the principles of revelation better than this passage does.’ He goes on to suggest that revelation is progressive, it offers us all truth, it comes from God and it reveals the significance of Jesus to us.

Such analysis has important things to teach us about the nature of God. The revelation of God’s Truth is continuous. If we consider, therefore, that we have already had the completeness of the revelation and that we now have the grasp of all truth, there is a danger that we cease to grow in our faith. Such Truth is rooted in the nature of God. Consequently, we are called upon in prayer, reflection and meditation to enter into the very nature of God. Only then can we say that we have glimpses of God’s truth.
Sermon Outline

This is a sermon preached on Trinity Sunday 2012. It seeks to offer an insight into the Trinitarian nature of God, and while it contains personal references – particularly in the opening section – it is, of course, adaptable for any preacher.

I thought I’d try out a wee quiz with you this morning. And the quiz would be called ‘What do really know about Tom Gordon?’ I could have two teams, searching questions, a couple of picture rounds, a quick-fire buzzer round, and a complicated question to sort things out if there was a dead heat – and maybe a major prize for the winners. How well would you do? Not too bad, you might think, because you might have picked up bits and pieces of information about your minister today, or you might be really worried that I might put you on the spot.

But what if I was to ask a specialist compiler to set the questions? Who would that be? I know… the world’s foremost expert on Tom Gordon – me… What if the questions to be set were really obscure pieces of information you couldn’t possibly know, things that were only known to me…? Would you do so well then?

You might know the name of Tom’s Gordon’s grandsons, but would you know who Tom Gordon’s teacher was in Primary 1?

You might know he was brought up in Fort William, but would you know where Tom Gordon did his first placement when he was training for the ministry?

You might know he’s a writer, but do you know what song he sang to win the boys-under-11-learner-gaelic competition in the Local Mod in his town in 1958?

[Room here for lots of examples from your own life … What are the things that the congregation knows about you – the obvious things – and what are the things they’ve got no chance of knowing? Go on! Give it a try! It’s fun …]

Struggling? I thought you might be… and that’s why I’m not actually going to put you on the spot with a Tom Gordon Quiz… And, in case you were wondering, the obscure answers are, in question order, Miss Logan, Granton Parish, and ‘Failte Rhu a Vaternish’…
Of course it would be too difficult for you if I set the questions... So, we’ll not bother with the quiz... You’d be rubbish... And I’d have the last laugh...

Why do I bother starting a sermon this way? To make a point, really... You see, you know a bit about me, but you don’t know it all... Only I know that. The bits you know about me might help you understand who I am and what I’m like. They might encourage you to get to know some more. They will, however, only give you windows to look through, insights that allow you to work out what the bigger picture might be. They will not tell you it all. You will never know it all. Only I know that.

You know me as a minister, but that is not the whole of me... You might know me as a grandfather, but that is not the whole of me... You know me as a collector of out-of-print books, but that is not the whole of me... You know me as a Rangers supporter, and that’s the complete picture... You know me as a story-teller, but that does not define me either...

[Again, lots of scope here for personal input ...]

No ... Knowledge of any one of these things is not the whole of me. The parts of me you know will not tell you everything. You will never know it all. Only I know that.

This is Trinity Sunday, the Sunday after Ascension Sunday and Pentecost Sunday, the day when we celebrate a central belief in the Christian Church about the nature of our God - when we celebrate the Trinity, the Trinitarian nature of God - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Now, that could easily be confusing. One God, three names... One God, three parts... One God, three images... One God, three ways of understanding... Today, you see, that is where the “Tom Gordon quiz” makes the point in a different way. You can know some, but you may not know all... So you need to use what you know, and let that point you to the bigger picture. The different ways of understanding the nature of God give us windows through which we look, insights from which we can begin to have an understanding of the whole of God...
We would all fail the quiz about knowing all there is to know about God… God is too big, too wonderful, too amazing for us to get anywhere near a total understanding. People have tried all their lives to get close to that and they've all failed. Only God knows what the whole of God is like. So do we give up? Not at all… For God gives us windows, ways of knowing, insights which are enough for now, but through which we can look with a view to exploring more of what God is like.

God the Father is not the whole of God… but it may be enough for now, sufficient for our needs for now, and maybe the beginnings of a deeper understanding of the whole of God, to pointer to a bigger God...

God the Son is not the whole of God… but it may be enough for now, sufficient for our needs for now, and maybe the beginnings of a deeper understanding of the whole of God, to pointer to a bigger God...

God the Spirit is not the whole of God… but it may be enough for now, sufficient for our needs for now, and maybe the beginnings of a deeper understanding of the whole of God, to pointer to a bigger God...

So if you know God through God’s creative power, God’s eternal love, God the giver of life and love, you have enough of God for you at this time, and you have the beginnings of more that you can know. Do not get stuck there, but use this window to explore much more.

If at another time you know God through the gift of his Son, the Gospel of Christ, the Salvation of our Lord, the victory of the Cross and Resurrection, you have enough of God for you at this time, and you have the beginnings of more that you can know. Do not get stuck there, but use this window to explore much more.

If at another time you know God through the presence of the Spirit, the feeling of God being close, the empowerment of a divine strength, the compulsion to go out to serve, believing in God’s eternal presence, you have enough of God for you at this time, and you have the beginnings of more that you can know. Do not get stuck there, but use this window to explore much more.
So do not worry if yesterday you knew God through the wonder and beauty of the created world. That’s your way into the nature of God. For on another day you may need to know God through the Son or the Spirit...

And do not worry if today you know God through the story of Jesus. That is your way into the nature of God. For on another day you may need to know God through the Father or the Spirit...

And do not worry if tomorrow you know God through a sense of the presence of the Spirit. That is your way into the nature of God. For on another day you may need to know God through the Father or the Son...

That is the amazing message of Trinity Sunday. The God of our Old Testament lesson, the great, Almighty God of the wonder of creation, the God beyond our comprehension, is not the whole story... Believe it or not, it is only a part of it...

There are different ways into the nature of God, and they all lead us to the same God, and they all reveal what God is like, and they are all absolutely right.

[It might be useful to include here the story ‘How does the fire work?’ from the resource section which follows this sermon. Indeed, the concept of the electric fire – which is derived from a ‘new communicants’ resource booklet published by the Church of Scotland forty years ago, called ‘A Faith for the Seventies’, is a useful visual illustration for a children's/all-age section for a Trinity Sunday service.]

On this Sunday, this Trinity Sunday, we are reminded of the many faces of God... We can know what God is like, and how God reveals himself to you, right here, right now, will always be enough...

This Trinity Sunday reminds us of this important truth ... there is more than one way to enter into the mind of God; there’s more than one way to know God’s amazing love; there is more than one way to know the touch of God’s blessing; there is more than one way to understand God’s glorious revelations; there’s more than one way to know God’s presence ...

On this Trinity Sunday, we say thank God ... and thank God ... and thank God ... for that.
Resource section

A child's picture of God

There’s a story told of a little girl painting pictures of her family. One by one, she completed paintings of her mum, her dad, her wee sister, and herself. Then she began another one, and her mum asked, “Who’s that going to be, because you’d done all the family already,” “Oh,” replied the child, “I’m going to paint a picture of God.” “But,” her mum responded, “no one knows what God is like.” “Ah,” the wee girl responded, “but they will when I’m finished my picture.

A Reflection on the Trinity Three


I visited a castle once,

and, not surprisingly, it had a grand entrance,

with a long drive-way up to it, and steps, and an archway,

and huge, iron-studded oak doors.

Well, that’s what you would expect from a castle.

And then the tour-guide took us round the back, to another door,

where the tradesmen came and went,

and the servants went in and out, unseen, unknown.

Not for them the grand entrance; they had their own door.

Well, how else were they going to get in and out of the castle?

But, at the end of the tour, we found another door,

a secret door, we were told, where special visitors got in,

and personal liaisons were arranged,
and, in later years,

which people used as an escape when they were in danger,

and, in recent times, where the children played ‘hide-and-seek’

because they had their own door.

Well, it was their castle too, wasn’t it?

I liked that.

Here was a great castle with three doors –

and probably more, for all I knew –

where people could come and go, depending on who they were,

and what they needed, and what else was going on.

I liked that.

What a great place ...

Well, even a castle’s all the better for having three doors,

don’t you think?
The circle of God

This understanding of the Trinity is taken from ‘Fire and Bread’ (Wild Goose Publications) and is my attempt to expand on the idea and add visual images to it.

The Trinity symbol

The symbol of the Trinity is familiar in our Christian Churches, and is often depicted in what we call a ‘Celtic Knot’. What does it mean, and how does it inform our understanding of the nature of God. How can we say there is only one God and then talk about three - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? We say this is a mystery, three persons but one God...

Three sides

One way is to understand that there are three sides of the true God, like the three leaves of a clover-leaf, or the three faces of a marble obelisk... three ‘states’ like water, mist and ice, liquid, solid and gas, but still all the same element... that might make us feel that God is like ...

An Isosceles Triangle

... with The Father on Top, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit with their own names but definitely not so important.

If we do, then we project on to God our own hierarchical way of ordering life – with The Boss at the top, but surely there is surely no hierarchy in the nature of God, in the Trinity.

Yet, this hierarchical way of thinking about God is reflected in the way old churches are designed.
Church design

Take the line of a church such as Dunkeld Cathedral...

Here it is sideways... with what is known as the Nave on the left-hand-side – the big part – and the choir and the altar on the right, the thinner part, but when you turn it around, the way we would see it if you were to enter the Church by the door into the Nave, with the choir and the altar a long way ahead up at the front – as in any Cathedral you've ever been in, it's designed like this...
with the Holy Spirit in the body of the church, what we know as the Nave, Jesus at the steps of the chancel where it begins to get thinner, more remote, more mysterious – and often with a screen hiding the rest - and God the Father, up here, way up the top, at the altar or Communion Table. In the past, the screen would separate the Nave from the Sanctuary, hiding off the full nature of God from people like you and me, a long way away. It is kind of like this:

![Diagram](image)

It is a tidy way of solving the puzzle, and plenty theologians over the years have been happy with that solution. It is just a hierarchy in another form. It leaves God remote, too far away, almost unattainable, only for the special of the special...

**Equality**

So let’s go back to the triangle, and make it an equilateral triangle, all sides equal, all angles the same.

![Diagram](image)

There is a problem with that too, for we are drawn to one corner or another, as it suits our style or personal approach, and one bit always comes out on top – just as it suits our personal preference.
It may be that traditional Christians are drawn to one corner, to God as Father, evangelicals talk to Jesus, charismatics speak to the Holy Spirit. So it could be like this...

Or like this...

It depends on our mood, or approach, or theology...

**The truth of the nature of God**

God is not a hierarchy or as a triangle as it suits us. God is a circle...

A circle, no beginning and no ending – no top and no bottom – God as an existing and eternal relationship.
Jesus can say ‘I am in the Father and the Father is in me…’ This is the relationship we are invited to join, so that we pray IN God and not TO God. Here is the God committed to an equal and unending relationship, willing to suffer rather than force us into a relationship. We see the Father and the Holy Spirit in agony with Jesus on the Cross, so close is the relationship… and we are invited into this relationship.

We enter into this relationship as so often depicted on the icon images of the Trinity.

Instead of constantly searching for the way to God, whenever we pray we dwell in God, in the living God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer… Equal and one… We enter into that mystery... simply put, we become intertwined with God...
A Pastoral illustration

When I was a hospice chaplain, I was asked to visit one of our patients at home. This lady, in her early 70s, was dying of heart failure. She might have lasted for some months. She could die soon. She wanted to talk with the hospice chaplain about her faith, her attitude to dying, and her understanding of God.

It was one of those special occasions when it was not her who was benefiting from the sharing, but me, not the Chaplain being the minister, but a devout lady being my minister while I was in her presence.

For as she was telling me about her times of prayer, her meditations, her reflection times, she simply looked serene and holy – I can describe it in no other way. When she explained about not praying TO God but spending time being WITH God, and when she talked about not asking FOR things but seeking to be fully AWARE of God’s presence with her, and when she spoke of not needing to FIND God, but believing in her prayers that God had already FOUND her, and when she smiled and said she had no fear of death because in death, too, she would be fully immersed in the presence of God, then I know I was learning and growing and being ministered to and being given a gift I could share with you his morning.

That lady had it right. Our prayer is to be IN God, to be so fully immersed in the nature of God that we know what holiness is like – no hang-ups about hierarchies, no struggles with a far-away God, no personal preferences that give you one-up on someone else – just God and you at one, fully at one, in total union.

Do you and I get there very often? You might, but I certainly do not? Does that lady live there all the time? No she does not... She has to work at it, in the midst of all the other issues she has to deal with in her living and her dying... Is it possible for you and me? If course it is... can we be one with God and not worry about how to define that or pin it down? Of course we can...
Jesus’ commission

Matthew tells us that Jesus commission was given to his disciples “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost...” I do not think so, for this is simply Matthew’s gloss on the end of a story, written many years after it had taken place. God will go with you, Jesus is saying. The nature of God in all its forms will go with you. You will be at one with God, and the one God will always be with you.

Paul’s teaching

Paul, right at the end of his 2nd letter to the Church in Corinth, offers them this blessing: “May the God of love and peace be with you” – the whole God... the Mystery of God... the circle of God... always there... Only then does he seek to define that in the form of the Trinity familiar to us: “The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God the son, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Paul offered them the whole nature of God before he offered God in the three parts of the Trinity.

The milking-stool


Johnny’s granny had been a milk-maid. Not recently, of course, for Johnny’s granny was a very old lady. But Johnny’s granny had been a milk-maid, ages and ages ago, when she was not much older that Johnny was now - so she delighted in telling him. For Johnny just loved it when his granny told him stories about ‘the olden days’, like when she had been a milk-maid, ages and ages ago.

Johnny never really understood much about his granny being a milk-maid until he had been on a visit to a farm with his school class. To be honest, he was not that interested up until then. He knew that milk-maid and ‘granny when she was young’ went together, but not much more.

The visit to the farm had changed all that. It had been so fascinating. He had watched in awe as the farmer got those big, mucky cows into the shed and steered them into their proper places
for the milking. His eyes had nearly popped out of his head when he had seen the men washing the rubbery udders – disgusting and amazing at the same time. He had been riveted when the big suction tubes were fitted on the udder of each cow. He had been mesmerised by the rhythmic swish-swish-swish as the milk was squirted into the glass vats.

Johnny could not wait to get home to tell his granny that he had seen what she had done as a milk-maid in the olden days. And tell her he did, in breathless excitement, in minute detail. Johnny's granny listened in rapt attention, only speaking when Johnny needed a bit of encouragement to explain things in proper order, rather than galloping on too fast with his story. In time, the whole story of the visit to the farm was done. But Johnny was not finished yet. He had lots of questions for his granny.

‘Did you work on a farm like that in the olden days, granny?’ The old lady smiled. ‘Well, nearly like that. But it was a long time ago, and things were very different then.’

‘Did you have to get the cows into the shed like the farmer did, granny?’ ‘No,’ she replied, ‘and it was called a byre in my day. No, son, your granddad did that. It was his job. He was a dairy-man, and he looked after the cows, fed them, and things like that. He got them into the byre, and I did the milkin’.’

‘Did you have to fit the rubber pipes on to the cows, granny?’ Johnny’s granny laughed. ‘No, laddie, we had no machines like that back then. We had to do it all by hand.’

Johnny wrinkled his nose and furrowed his brow. ‘By hand, granny? Do you mean you had to get the milk out of the cows’... eh... thingies... with your hands?’

Granny laughed again. ‘Aye, I did that. And hard work it was too. One hand on one teat, and one on the other, pulling on one, then on the next, making sure the milk got down into the bucket and none got spilled. And then working with the other two teats, until the bucket was full or the cow was done.’
It was Johnny’s turn to listen in wrapt attention. ‘Bucket, granny, what do you mean? Didn’t you have a glass churn like the farmer? Why would you use a bucket?’

‘Because that’s what you did. A white bucket, galvanised, we called it. And when the bucket was full the milk was tipped into a big metal churn. We had to do it all by hand. No machines then. I spent half my life under a cow, sitting on my three-legged stool.’

This was getting more than enough for Johnny. ‘Stool, granny, what’s a stool?’ ‘A stool, son, is a wee seat with three legs, just at the right height to get you in the right place for the milkin’.’

‘Three legs, granny? Not four like our chairs?’

‘No, Johnny, it had to be three. It was perfect for the uneven floor of the byre, don’t you see? Four would have been too wobbly. Two? Well, I would just have fallen over. But three was perfect for a milkin’ stool, just perfect…’

Johnny had had enough for now. His head was swimming with the information about granny being a milk-maid in the olden days, and not having machines, and sitting on a three-legged stool, and everything… So he slipped off his granny’s knee and went away to process his learning - ancient and modern.

He’d left his granny smiling, not just in a recollection of the olden days, and the smell of the byre, and the feel of the milking, and the swish-swish-swish of the milk in the bucket, and the handsome dairy-man she’s had her eye on for ages. But she was smiling to herself about how she’d described the three legged stool, four legs was too many, two legs wasn’t enough, one leg and it’s wasn’t a stool at all. But three legs? Her seat for the milking with three legs, each one important, so that a milking-stool could work on an uneven floor. A three legged stool for the milking. Three legs together… Perfect, just perfect.
Trinity


Trinities of things,
Repetitive and compelling –
Abraham, Isaac and Jacob;
The Way, the Truth and the Life;
Faith, Hope and Charity;
One Church, one Faith, one Baptism –
Holding together,
A three-way tie;
Any two not surviving without the other.

Is God like that –
Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer;
Or whatever –
Repetitive and compelling;
Holding together,
A three-way tie;
Any two not surviving without the other?

Or should I be happy with the whole
And not worry about the different parts,
As long as I can sit properly on a wobbly floor
And not fall over.
How does the fire work, daddy?


‘How does the fire work, daddy?’ Chloe asked one day. Graham was too tired to answer. There had already been too many questions, too much enquiring for a daddy’s weary, end-of-a-long-day mind to cope with.

‘Not now, darling,’ he offered, ’not just now. Perhaps mummy might know.’ Graham had vowed he’d never say that, but you have to sometimes – don’t you? Isn’t it written somewhere in the job-description of being a dad? And with a shrug and a resigned smile, off went an enquiring Chloe, having to learn to live with her unanswered query.

Graham closed his eyes, relaxing into the soporific heat emanating from the two-barred electric fire – with its hypnotic artificial coal-effect - that filled the grate. It really was too warm. He didn’t actually need the second bar. But the embrace of the warmth was so welcome at the end of a long day and after a big meal. He drifted into that pleasant, sleepy state that was a more than welcome antidote to a hard day at the office. And, as he did so he pondered ...

‘How does the fire work?’ The question had stuck, planted in his mind by a little sower of seeds. Graham didn’t know the answer, and tried to drag his own childhood learning to the front of his mind – along with any helpful adult learning that would do the job too. But he couldn’t work it out. And, indeed, unless pestered further by she-who-always-asks-questions, he decided he didn’t really need to know.

All he knew was what he knew – such a wonderful invention as a two-bar electric fire was working wonders on his weary body and tired mind.

Didn’t the bars glow and the coal-effect shine when he flicked a switch? Wonderful thing, electricity! All he knew was what he knew ...

And, when the bars glowed, wasn’t he surrounded by the warmth they created? Wonderful thing, heat! All he knew was what he knew ...
And, when he saw the light and felt the heat, didn’t that prove the fire was working? Wonderful thing a two-bar electric fire. All he knew was what he knew …

Did he really need to understand how it all happened? Graham decided he didn’t … All he knew was what he knew … That would have to be enough for now.

‘How does the fire work?’ Graham pondered the question as he gently let himself go into sleep. The light, the unseen warmth, the hidden power making it happen. Light, warmth, power … power, warmth, light … power, light, warmth … not one without the other … each a part of the whole … All he knew was what he knew … That would have to be enough for now, as a tired daddy slept peacefully by the fire.

‘How does the Trinity work?’ the preacher asked at the start of her sermon in church the following Sunday. ‘A good question,’ Graham thought. But he never heard much of the sermon, for the church was too warm, and he was struggling not to let himself drift off to sleep … But for some reason or another, he kept thinking about power, light, warmth … light, warmth, power … power, warmth, light … power, light, warmth … not one without the other … each a part of the whole … three in one, and one in three …

Graham was wide awake by the time the Offering was taken. But he’d made a decision. God the Trinity? No, I’ll leave that to the vicar. But ‘How does the fire work?’ Well, if Chloe comes out with that one again, he would just tell her not to worry, and just to enjoy the fact that it works. After all, he only knew what he knew, didn’t he?
St Patrick’s Breastplate

This hymn is attributed to St Patrick, and, in particular, is well known for its section which begins ‘Christ be beside me ...’ The words are a translation of a Gaelic poem called ‘St. Patrick’s Lorica’ or breastplate. (A ‘lorica’ was a mystical garment that was supposed to protect the wearer from danger and illness, and guarantee entry into Heaven.) Cecil Alexander penned these words at the request of H. H. Dickinson, Dean of the Chapel Royal at Dublin Castle. There was a desire that a gap in the Irish Church Hymnal be filled with a metrical version of St. Patrick’s ‘Lorica’. A carefully collated copy of the best prose translation of it was prepared. Within a week, this exquisitely beautiful, as well as faithful, version of St Patrick’s Breastplate was completed.

I bind unto myself today
The strong Name of the Trinity,
By invocation of the same
The Three in One and One in Three.

I bind this today to me forever
By power of faith, Christ’s incarnation;
His baptism in Jordan river,
His death on Cross for my salvation;
His bursting from the spicèd tomb,
His riding up the heavenly way,
His coming at the day of doom

I bind unto myself today.
I bind unto myself the power
Of the great love of cherubim;
The sweet ‘Well done’ in judgment hour,
The service of the seraphim,
Confessors’ faith, Apostles’ word,
The Patriarchs’ prayers, the prophets’ scrolls,
All good deeds done unto the Lord
And purity of virgin souls.
I bind unto myself today
The virtues of the star lit heaven,
The glorious sun's life giving ray,
The whiteness of the moon at even,
The flashing of the lightning free,
The whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
The stable earth, the deep salt sea
Around the old eternal rocks.

I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, His might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need.
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, His shield to ward;
The word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.

Against the demon snares of sin,
The vice that gives temptation force,
The natural lusts that war within,
The hostile men that mar my course;
Or few or many, far or nigh,
In every place and in all hours,
Against their fierce hostility
I bind to me these holy powers.

Against all Satan's spells and wiles,
Against false words of heresy,
Against the knowledge that defiles,
Against the heart's idolatry,
Against the wizard's evil craft,
Against the death wound and the burning,
The choking wave, the poisoned shaft,
Protect me, Christ, till Thy returning.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the Name,
The strong Name of the Trinity,
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One and One in Three.
By Whom all nature hath creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:
Praise to the Lord of my salvation,
Salvation is of Christ the Lord.
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Additional Resources

Resourcing Mission

www.resourcingmission.org.uk is host to Starters for Sunday as well as key mission resources from the Church of Scotland, for download and purchase, and has an online booking facility for Mission & Discipleship events (eg National Youth Assembly). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. We welcome all feedback so if there is something you’d like to see on this new site that isn’t already there, please use the ‘Website Feedback’ option on the ‘Contact Us’ page.

Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in Prayers. You may also be interested in looking at our publication Pray Now 2013. Please click here.

Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week’s themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music magazine Different Voices which can be found here.

Preaching Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. If you would be interested in looking at our free materials on how you might preach, please click here to see our Preachers Perspectives web page where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.
Scots Worship Resources

Psalm 8

Invocation o the Halie Tarantie, frae Carmina Gadelica

Come Gentle Spirit – a prayer of invocation

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to Rev Tom Gordon for providing us with this Sunday’s material.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.