

# St James United Church



Message for June 15, 2025

Trinity Sunday

“A Bright Star in the Night” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Proverbs 8:1-4 and 22-31; John 16:12-15; excerpt from J.R.R. Tolkien, *Return of the King*, “The Land of Shadow”

These are dark times – armed conflict between Israel and Iran, not to mention the blocking of aid to Gaza, protests in the US met with a military response, concerns at home over legislation tabled by our government, continued wars in many other parts of the world... I feel like Sam in *Return of the King*, unable to sleep because he is overwhelmed at what is coming. It's an understandable response. Another is to be Frodo, asleep in the safety of the brambles, and so for a time choosing not to think about what's going on. Today's perfect for that. After all Trinity Sunday is an esoteric, idea-focused Sunday, so I can distract us all and explore it historically, consider how the church fathers developed this theology from texts like Proverbs 8 and John 16 and how those texts highlight relationship making God like a divine community; or I could get philosophical and talk about what we mean by “person” not an individual like we are but more about agency or will, and so this community is a sharing of co-equal relationships, an eternal flow of self-giving love; or I could reflect on it from a prayer perspective, how it was the experience of God as beyond us and so the focus of prayer, yet at the same time within us inspiring us to pray, and also walking with us in Jesus, that inspired the church fathers to propose trinitarian theology in the first place. These are all possible approaches. But I need to wake up at some point, come out of the brambles and face the shadow that seems to be enveloping our world.

As I do that, I am no longer Frodo but Sam and when he crawled out of the brambles, he didn't only see the encroaching shadow but also a bright star which restored his hope. This invites me to look for a star as well. I find it when I take an additional step from just thinking about God as Trinity to pondering how to apply this teaching in my life. I think of earlier texts that the church fathers looked to as they developed this theology, considered Genesis 1 and 2, the references to spirit and word, and how God made us in their image and likeness, breathed into us. This means we share in God's energy, that God imprinted on us a yearning to be in community, to share with others, that seeing our equality is our spiritual default. That also gives me hope.

As I say that, name how community, equality, relationships of mutual care are our default setting, it is over-written by other viewpoints, a need to dominate and control others that energises the shadow, what we would traditionally name as sin. Sadly, some of the people pushing that view are Christians, despite Jesus earlier in our John reading praying not only that we'll be one with God, but we'll be one with each other too. No wonder Jesus promised to send the Spirit to remind us of everything he taught us, to fill our hearts with grace and so to bring us back to

ourselves. Thankfully the Spirit does this not like an old school dad ready to forcefully “remind” his kids when they do something wrong, but a more tender, nurturing dad, more like my day as you heard in our “Learning Together” time who sits his little one on their knee and helps them think about the other person when they have hurt them, or reminds them to think about others before they act, to draw on the empathy disparaged by some right now. We get this too when we’re grown and, in a moment of uncertainty, call home and dad listens and with words of encouragement helps us come up with answer for ourselves, or when he is gone, we still hear his voice in our hearts, offering important life lessons. That Spirit does this for us gives me hope.

And I have one more source of hope, which comes from the Spirit through my dad and one of his life lessons. He was a scientist, studied botany before he was a doctor. He liked to be outside, believed we could learn a lot by paying attention to the natural world. I agree with him, not just scientifically but spiritually too. I look to the bible to be reminded of what Jesus taught but also look to the world, holding the belief that the first book of scripture is creation. We get a sense of this in Proverbs 8, Wisdom present as God makes the universe, rejoicing in it all, including us, affirming that we aren’t the only ones God-breathed, but that divine life suffuses all things. We are children of nature as well as of God and so can draw on nature’s lessons too. So what do we learn? That nature loves diversity, becoming increasingly differentiated; that it’s mostly collaborative, like bees relying on flowers or soil kept healthy with minerals and microbes; that we are to care for one another, like stronger trees giving nutrients to weaker ones; that domination is not our default despite what some folks believe, everything partnering with everything else, even predators; that though predators take, they rarely take more than they need; that nothing is wasted, everything taken up to enrich the whole; that creatures are what they are, don’t try to be something they’re not, or judge others for not “fitting in”. Now it isn’t all kumbaya. There is predation. Heck “prey animals” eat plants. And some people point to that and claim that gives us license to do the same and then some. But we’re so much more than that. It’s why the wisdom in later chapters of Proverbs builds on the wisdom in nature, affirming that integrity, generosity and caring for others, not predation, dominance and selfishness are the hallmarks of a good life, that living with empathy and caring is how we honour who God is and who God made us to be.

In these shadowed days it feels like we have forgotten this wisdom, effectively forgetting who we are, but Jesus promised that the Spirit would keep lifting us up on God’s knee where we would be reminded that we are made for community and care, both as children of God and children of nature. That is my hope, and not as some dream. Not only are we made to be in relationship, created for community, but remember that we are part of one, here, in other places in our lives, where we are not just Sam or Frodo but Sam and Frodo, who eventually make it to Mount Doom and the ring of domination is destroyed. They do it by working together and so can we. That is my bright star in this time of shadow. Amen.