

# TRINITY SUNDAY - Hallelujah People

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Preacher: Graeme Sells

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it's good to be with you this afternoon as we together celebrate 152 years of ministry in this great district.

I first came here from Adelaide when I was a small boy at the age of four. My mother was visiting a sick auntie who lived in Wilson's Road.

And we came to a meeting here in the church and the hall. It was either a Mother's Union meeting or a Women's Guild meeting, I'm not quite sure. I can't remember much about Holy Trinity except that during that time my brother took me to Luna Park.

And that's much better in my memory than anything else. I want to thank Paul for his generous invitation to be with you. And it's a real delight. Dr Harry Ironside was a famous American preacher of the 40s and the 50s.

And one day Dr Ironside went into a restaurant and ordered his meal. But just before the meal arrived at the table, another man came along and asked if he might sit at the same table.

[ 1 : 08 ] Not at all, said Dr Ironside. Please feel free to sit here. Eventually Dr Ironside's meal arrived and as was his custom, he bowed his head to say grace before he ate.

When he lifted up his head, the man said to him, do you have a headache? Ironside said, no, I don't. The man then said, well, is there something wrong with your meal?

Dr Ironside said, no, why? Well, said the man, I saw you sitting there with your head down and thought you must be sick or there was something wrong with your food.

Dr Ironside replied, I was simply saying thanks to God for my food. I was saying grace. The man said, oh, you're one of those, are you? Well, I want you to know I never give thanks.

I earn my money by sheer hard work and the sweat of my brow. I don't have to give thanks to anybody. When I eat, I just start right in. Dr Ironside was a little taken aback, but he said, oh, you remind me of my dog.

[ 2 : 09 ] That's what he does too. Not the most tactful reply, is it? But it's important for all of us to be thankful. It's important to remember to be thankful.

You and I know that when we look at the scriptures, time and time again, we see that praise and adoration and thanksgiving are important aspects of a living faith in God.

And sometimes the words of thanksgiving and adoration and praise are interchanged in the scriptures. And one of the words used in the Hebrew is the Hebrew word halel, from which comes the word hallelujah.

And it has behind it the idea of praise, thanksgiving and adoration. And it has behind it also the idea of making a noise to God. And this comes out, of course, especially in Psalm 150, where we're told to give thanks to praise God with all kinds of instruments, aren't we?

With trumpets and harps and lyres and drums and flutes and cymbals, loud cymbals too. In the scriptures of the Old Testament, we get the basic idea that life is to be punctuated by these outbursts of praise.

- [ 3 : 22 ] And these outbursts of praise come from a basic mood of joy, which is to be one of the characteristics of God's people. Hallelujah means praise the Lord.
- It's used mostly in the book of Psalms and just four times in the book of Revelation. It was part of a standard call to worship in the temple and, of course, eventually made its way into synagogue worship as well.
- Now, we Christians have taken it up as part of our worship. And we especially remember that when we come at the greeting of our services at Easter time, when we say, Christ is risen, hallelujah.
- And our response is, he is risen indeed, hallelujah. And one writer has said that hallelujah is not only an expression of thanks for God's incredible past benefits, but it's prophetically thanking him for all he's going to do in the future.
- So we look back and we look forward. Could you just imagine what it was like in Old Testament times, going along to the temple to worship God on the Sabbath day?
- [ 4 : 31 ] There will be great excitement by everyone, crowds of people, young and old, anticipating an exciting worship experience. There would have been much preparation by the people as they geared themselves up to have a good time with God and a good time with God's people.
- They didn't have a car, so they joined in a procession of people which got larger and longer as the temple came in sight. And Psalm 42 records it like this.
- I went with the crowds to the house of God and led them as they walked along, a happy crowd, singing and shouting praise to God. Why am I so sad?
- Why am I so troubled? I will put my hope in God and once again I will praise him, my Saviour and my God. Now in fact this psalm was written by a man who was held captive in another land.
- He was reflecting on great times with God and great times with God's people. And even though he's really quite despondent at this time as he writes, he comes back praising God.
- [ 5 : 42 ] He was part of this exciting procession and as they walked along they would have come across two choirs who would have been singing this stuff as well. And they were doing the pre-service singing and they would have been singing antiphonally or going from one side of one choir to another or alternate verses.
- And sometimes there would be a cantor or a soloist and they would be singing this song to the Lord. And as well as the music of instruments and singing there would have been dancing, sacred dancing.
- And the house of the Lord would have really rocked on the Sabbath day as these people went up to worship. And there was this great sense of expectation and wonder and excitement and praise and thanksgiving on the part of the worshippers.
- Several years ago I conducted a Cambodian wedding and more recently my wife Anne also conducted one as well. And these weddings commence with a procession down the street headed by the groom and there's much excitement and anticipation.
- And they have a band of traditional instruments and plenty of food and drink and the beginning of great festivities and it's a great occasion. And sometimes I wonder do we have that excitement and expectation as we come to worship God and as we come to fellowship with God's people.
- [ 7 : 01 ] Do we come to praise God or do we come to grouch? Do we come expecting it all to happen and I'll just soak it in? Is there a sense of expectation that today I'm coming to the presence of the living God and I am amongst his people?

Is there a sense of expectation and excitement about that? One of the members of my diocesan services team is Dr Irene Donoghue Klein and she is our cross-cultural worker.

And Irene tells me that when she goes into a Sudanese home she's always offered a glass of water which she always accepts. But before Irene drinks the water the whole family gets down on its knees to thank God for this precious glass of water.

Now in Australia we tend to take that all for granted don't we? But not the Sudanese. And Irene tells me that every time this happens she says I feel so ashamed I'm not more thankful for the so-called simple things of life.

For us it comes out of the tap with no problem. Now you and I know that there will be times there will be times when we come along to worship with problems that need solving or issues that need sorting out.

[ 8 : 24 ] And maybe there will be some sort of relationship difficulty that we're working through and we should feel free to come with that load to God. And when it happens of course we need the comfort and blessing of God and the encouraging fellowship of God's people.

I remember going to an evening service in one of our parishes and the worship leader said leave your problems outside. We're here to worship and praise the Lord.

Now that's not exactly good theology and nor is it good pastoral care. In the Old Testament the people of God in their worship experience despite times of intense struggle and intense difficulty had the tremendous attitude of joy and praise to God particularly for his creation.

And I wonder if we got that sense of excitement and expectation about those issues too. In the New Testament particularly in the records of the early church we see that those early Christians despite difficulties and persecution expressed their joy and thanksgiving in attendance at worship.

And Luke tells us that when Jesus ascended into heaven they worshipped him and went back to Jerusalem filled with great joy and spent all their time in the temple giving thanks to God.

[ 9 : 45 ] And in that marvellous passage in Acts chapter 2 verses 42 to 7 where it's recorded these great characteristics of the early church in Jerusalem we're told they were eating their meals with glad and humble hearts praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people.

And they used the Psalms to express their praise and they began to write some beautiful hymns of praise and thanksgiving of their own. And in fact we have some of those in Philippians and in the book of Revelation and some of those great early songs.

Now if we were to take a quick overview of the scriptures and follow through the theme of thanksgiving and praise we would see that God is to be praised and given thanks in a variety of ways.

Yes, he's to be given thanks with music and instruments and song. He's to be given thanks in testimony for God's goodness to us and we've done that today here.

With prayer we're to give thanks in public as well as in private. Sometimes that thanksgiving is to be quite emotional. It's to be given to God for our salvation through Jesus Christ.

[ 10 : 57 ] We're to thank God for all his marvellous works. We're to thank God for his majesty. We're to thank God for his holiness and his greatness.

We're to thank God in thanksgiving for Jesus' death on the cross which we remember particularly as we gather for the Lord's Supper. I don't know about you but the older I get and when I come to a service of Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper I become overcome with emotion.

Particularly as I sing some of Wesley's great hymns. You see I never cease to wonder at the amazing grace of God. So there should be a delight within us as we praise God and we give thanks to God for 152 years of ministry in this place.

Someone has said that a definition of praise and thanksgiving could be described as a warm homage or loyalty to God given by his creatures in worship and thanksgiving for his goodness and blessing.

Several years ago I was in central Queensland doing some work in the Diocese of Rockhampton for the Bishop as a consultant and as a leader in some church growth workshops and for me it was a fascinating experience and the most amazing place was the Bush Church Aid Society Parish of Winton and you know some of it because of your support for the Queens.

[ 12 : 27 ] Winton is 960 kilometres from Rockhampton. The parish is one and a half times the size of Victoria with a total population of less than 2,000. A thousand of them live in Winton.

Banjo Patterson wrote while seeing Matilda in Winton and the local clothing store still has some of its stock marked in pounds, shillings and pence. And the BCA folk minister in this very difficult area with more than 30 at worship on a Sunday.

People travel up to 100 kilometres to church. Four men meet on Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 6 o'clock to 7 o'clock to pray for their witness in the town.

One woman travels 200 kilometres every two weeks to go to the Know Your Bible study group. Some of the community heavies use their influence as Christians to reach out.

The school headmaster, the clerk of courts and the matron at the hospital. You see, it costs something to worship God in this community. And in fact, newcomers park their cars a couple of blocks away and walk because of fear of being ridiculed.

[ 13 : 36 ] Temperatures, of course, are in the 40s for weeks at a time in the summer months. There's no rain for five months of the year. And the bore water comes out of the ground at 87 degrees centigrade and so nobody has a hot water unit.

They have a cooling tower. It's difficult to water the garden. It's a tough community where locals graze sheep and cattle and hunt wild pigs or fuzzic for opals.

And the kids have to go to boarding school for year 11 and 12. Yet with all these difficulties, as I worship with this congregation, it was really great.

There was a black Samoan lady with frizzy hair on the piano. There was a guitar and there was a violin. And people shared their ups and downs and answers to prayer during the service.

There was this great enthusiasm to get on with the job of sharing their faith with lifestyle evangelism. There was this commitment to grow despite the difficulties of climate and finance and the premises and long distances.

[ 14 : 43 ] You know, I've looked at this church at Holy Trinity here in Doncaster for many years and I'll tell you what I see. I see that this church is in a tremendous location to reach out for Christ in this community.

I see great lay involvement with vision and commitment to reach out to. I see a great staff team with enthusiasm for Christ. a very diverse team with great leadership from Paul.

There's supportive missions beyond the parish boundaries both local and overseas. There's different styles of worship. There's both formal and informal. So there's a terrific plant here with a unique mix of heritage and modern facilities.

And there's lots of good parish ministries taking place for all old ages and for different cultures. And there's generous financial support and of course we could go on and on and on.

And it seems to me that when we are thankful to God, when we offer him praise and adoration, when we're like that, then we are so grateful that we want to reach out even more with the good news of Jesus Christ because there's something to share and to be positive and to give it away.

[ 16 : 04 ] We see new possibilities for ministry. We continue to re-evaluate what we're doing because we want to see more people come to Christ through our ministries.

And sometimes we're even bold enough to drop something out of a parish program because it's not reaching out anymore. You see, when we're hallelujah people, we become visionary, we become committed and we become positive.

So what are the possibilities for Holy Trinity Doncaster as a hallelujah people? Well, I know that you want to glorify God, you want to pray and you want to continually work at growing in faith and godliness through your commitment to strong biblical preaching and teaching.

You want to have a strong evangelistic ministry and you want that to be an evangelistically ministry-minded church that's caring of one another and to reach out to those who are not part of the church family.

I'm sure that you'll want to expand your ministry to international students, particularly Chinese young people, and to also to expand the Mandarin ministry through David and Esther.

[ 17 : 23 ] Perhaps a ministry to the Cantonese will also be a possibility. You see, as I move around the diocese, I see parishes that are healthy and growing are also expanding their ministries to children and young people and children and families.

And they're also more and more involved in community outreach. Newcomers feel welcome. They're integrated into the life of the congregation and I know that's part of your desire here at Holy Trinity as well.

And of course, part of their integration will see more folk in Bible study groups and that means that more folk will need to be trained as group leaders. Some groups may even need to divide so that others can join in and the fellowship and study can be more effective.

The Apostle Paul continually challenged those churches in the New Testament that he had dealings with. Sometimes it was rebuke about false doctrine and behaviour but in the midst of Paul's writings there's always a challenge.

I like the one in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 where Paul says, So Paul, I believe, would say to each one of us as Christians, on with it, get on with the job.

[ 19 : 20 ] On with eagerness, on with enthusiasm, on with vitality and on with generosity. You see, we have a great God who deserves our praise and thanksgiving and adoration because when we do give praise and thanksgiving and adoration we're then motivated to ministry.

I remember five years ago going to a church one Sunday morning and I wanted to actually sit up the back of the church so I could be anonymous but there were no seats at the back so the only seats available were in the second front row just in front of the pulpit.

I sat in the middle of the pew to be joined on one side by a very disciplined family who shushed their kids. On the other side came another family with some noisy kids who had eaten jumping beans for breakfast.

It was quite a contrast and I was actually with the jumpers. And when it came to the Bible reading dad from the disciplined family whipped out his large Bible and he followed the readings intently.

The other family struggled to get the kids involved and they were rather fidgety. And I noticed that disciplined dad's Bible had oodles of underlines and highlights in each page.

[ 20 : 40 ] Eventually before the sermon both lots of kids went out to Sunday school. And it had been pretty cramped up to that point and as the sermon began disciplined dad turned to me a complete stranger and snapped can you move up?

No please or thank you. I was a bit taken aback but I obliged. I missed some of the sermon because I was processing two families.

A disciplined dad who had jumped at me as a visitor to church that morning. If I was a seeker would I come back again?

If I was a bereaved husband who'd lost his wife through cancer would I have felt comforted and at ease? That happened five years ago and I've not forgotten.

I can fortunately remember some of the sermon. It was about Jacob and Esau. The preacher was Paul Barker and the church was Holy Trinity Doncaster.

[ 21 : 50 ] You see everything that we do in church matters. the welcome where we sit the quality of the worship the hymns and the songs the way we behave how we treat children and families the refreshments afterwards the clicks that keep newcomers out.

It's quite complex isn't it? And everyone who's in church needs to play their part in the body of Christ. Yes we do need to praise God we do need to be hallelujah people but we can't leave it to the vicar and the pastoral team.

We're all in this whether we like it or not. James in his short letter says that you and I are to be doers of the word and not hearers only.

Well let me finish with some words from Romans from the Good News Bible chapter 11. Who can measure the wealth and wisdom and knowledge of God?

Who can understand his decisions or explain what he does? Has anyone known the thoughts of the Lord or given him advice? Has anyone lent something to the Lord that must be repaid?

[ 23 : 18 ] everything comes from the Lord. All things were made because of him and will return to him. Praise the Lord forever.

Amen. Let's pray. Gracious God, help us to rejoice and praise you more than we do. Help us to be hallelujah people.

Help us to experience more and more the wonder of your grace. help us give our lives to you more and more, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.