

ST STEPHEN'S HOME SERVICE – SUNDAY 30th AUGUST
2020

INTRODUCTION

Peter thought he had got it! Jesus had asked his friends who they thought he was. "You are the Messiah!" declares Peter, and Jesus congratulates him on his God-given insight. But a moment later he is having to extract his foot from his mouth when it becomes painfully obvious that his understanding of what it would mean for Jesus to be Israel's (and the world's) saviour was radically different from Jesus' own.

How prone we are to thinking we understand God, that we somehow have his ways sewn-up. But God can never be held in man-made boxes!

Today, St Paul and Jesus himself challenge us to reflect deeply on our understanding of what the Christian life is really all about. So pause for a few minutes to ask yourself, "What does following Christ mean to me?" And be prepared to be nudged in a new direction!

CALL TO WORSHIP

As we come to worship and praise

Father God, we welcome you.

As we come together in friendship,

Father God, we welcome you.

As we come to listen and learn,

Father God, we welcome you.

As we bring all that is on our hearts and our minds,

Father God, we welcome you.

Father God, you are here now,

And we welcome you.

TURNING AGAIN TO GOD

Loving God, you made us and you love us.

We know that we have sometimes got things wrong.

For the things we have said or done which have caused pain,

and for the things we could have done to help others but didn't,

forgive and heal us and them.

Give us the strength to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, by the power of your Spirit.

May the Father forgive us

By the death of His Son

And strengthen us

To live in the power of the Spirit

All our days.

Amen.

CELEBRATING GOD'S WORK IN HISTORY (PSALM 105:1-6,23-26,43-45)

O give thanks to the Lord and call upon his name;

make known his deeds among the peoples.

**Sing to him, sing praises,
and tell of all his marvellous works.**

Rejoice in the praise of his holy name;

let the hearts of them rejoice who seek the Lord.

**Seek the Lord and his strength;
seek his face continually.**

Remember the marvels he has done,

his wonders and the judgements of his mouth,

**O seed of Abraham his servant,
O children of Jacob his chosen.**

Then Israel came into Egypt;

Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.

**And the Lord made his people exceedingly fruitful;
he made them too many for their adversaries,**

Whose heart he turned, so that they hated his people
and dealt craftily with his servants.

**Then sent he Moses his servant
and Aaron whom he had chosen.**

So he brought forth his people with joy,

his chosen ones with singing.

**He gave them the lands of the nations
and they took possession of the fruit of their toil,**

That they might keep his statutes

and faithfully observe his laws. Alleluia.

**NEW TESTAMENT READING (Romans 12:9-end, New
Living Translation)**

[St Paul paints a really inspiring – and challenging – picture of what a truly Christian life could look like in practice.]

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honourable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,

"I will take revenge;
I will pay them back,"
says the LORD.

Instead,

"If your enemies are hungry, feed them.

If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap

burning coals of shame on their heads."

Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING (Matthew 16:21-28 NRSV)

[Peter has just declared that Jesus is God's anointed King, but it soon becomes clear that his understanding of what this means is very different from Jesus'.]

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must

never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

'For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION (by Margaret Mandrell)

"You are the Messiah"

I don't know what picture comes to mind when you reflect on the concept of the Messiah. Those who like me, look forward to the performance of Handel's Messiah each year in the Cathedral, probably have some of the words embedded in

their consciousness. The coming of the Messiah is foretold by the prophets, then announced to the shepherds. Christ's Passion and Resurrection are movingly portrayed, "he was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." The second act concludes with the Hallelujah chorus promising that "he shall reign for ever and ever". We are then taken to see a vision of the world made possible by Christ's victory over death with the promise of eternal life.

The Bible has been described as God's love letter. Often we see it as a book of rules, a series of moral guidelines, or ancient history, but it tells us of what went wrong with humanity, how God took steps to sort out our mistakes, and how, in the end, God's love invites us to be part of the story. The Bible tells us what God is really like and how his ways are different to human ways. He is able and willing to bring out the best in each of us and is working to change individuals and the world. It is sin which spoils our lives and separates us from God, and Jesus who rescues us and restores us to a relationship with God. Faith involves trust in God's unconditional love and kindness and is received through grace. Trust is believing in God's promises, and acting in obedience, even though sometimes we become impatient, hoping that God has indeed heard us and will answer us.

We, as Christians, are invited to live God's way, and to repent of our sins, and to receive forgiveness. The challenge is to listen to Jesus' teaching, and to put this into practice in our lives. Peter demonstrated great humanity, as he hit the depths of failure and the heights of faith. He was called to leave his fishing nets, and to fish for people instead. He became the leader of the disciples, one of Jesus' closest friends, but often lacked understanding, struggled with forgiveness, and was rebuked by his master. He denied Jesus, but went on to achieve great things, becoming the rock on which the church was built. We, like Peter, are full of contradictions, being a mixture of faith and doubt, Courage and fear. Like Peter, we can become fishers of men, acknowledging Jesus as our Messiah, and seeking to follow him and to serve him.

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION....

Whatever your cross, whatever your pain,
There will always be sunshine after the rain.
Perhaps you may stumble, perhaps even fall,
But God's always there to help you through it all.
I asked for Strength - God gave me Difficulties to make me
strong.
I asked for Wisdom - God gave me Problems to solve.

I asked for Prosperity - God gave me Brain and Brawn to work.

I asked for Courage - God gave me Danger to overcome.

I asked for Love - God gave me Troubled people to help.

I asked for Favours - God gave me Opportunities.

I received nothing I wanted - But I received everything I needed!

May God Bless You with unspeakable joy,

Not only in the world to come, but in this world also.

May your path be bright and full of light everywhere you go.

May God tell darkness that it must flee at your command.

And, I pray your feet will never stumble out of God's plan.

May the desires of your heart come true,

And may you experience Peace in everything you do.

May Goodness, Kindness, and Mercy come your way.

And, may you gain Wisdom and grow in the Lord everyday.

Because I have received kindness, I have been spurred to be kind.

Because I have caught the smile of another person's lips, I have found myself smiling.

Because I have known the joy of receiving, I rejoice in giving.

Because I have felt pain, I know what pity is.

Because I have tasted humiliations, I know what consideration is.

Because I have seen Christ suffering,
I have had the courage to go on.

WHO IS THE GOD IN WHOM WE TRUST?

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

PRAYERS

As followers of Jesus Christ

Let us pray to our loving Father in Heaven.

Father, help us all in your Church to understand

What it really means to love and serve you.

At times of testing, strengthen us;

In unexpected or undeserved suffering, support us;

At the end of our energy, revive us.

Teach us through it all

The inexplicable peace and joy

That comes from doing your will.

Silence

We look to the cross
And see your love for us.

Father, have mercy on us
For the misdirected use of time, money and resources in this world.
Empower us in the struggle against evil,
So that justice and righteousness are established and upheld.
We pray for all leaders who take risks to stand up for what is right:
May they be given courage and inspiration.

Silence

We look to the cross
And see your love for us.

Father, renew our commitment to your loving
In all our relationships, work and prayer.
We call to mind refugees and all who do not know
Whether their loved ones are safe or not;
All whose home are places of violence,
All whose homes are havens of love.

Silence

We look to the cross

And see your love for us.

Father, bring healing and wholeness
To those who suffer in body, mind or spirit.
In sleepless nights or endless days of pain,
Give the grace to persevere with patience,
To find you there with them
And draw hope and courage from your presence.

Silence

We look to the cross
And see your love for us.

Father, may those who have died
Rest in the eternal peace of your presence,
Their burdens laid down and their suffering ended.
We remember with love and gratitude: Jean Wallace, Len Pink,
and Dennis Amos, and ask that they may Rest in Peace, and
Rise in Glory.

Silence

We look to the cross
And see your love for us.

Father, we thank you that in the suffering of Jesus
We see the full extent of your love for us.

Bring the light of resurrection to our lives
Until we learn to praise you even through dark times.

Silence

We look to the cross
And see your love for us.

The Lord's Prayer

We pray as Jesus taught us, saying:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily
bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who
sin against us.
Lead us not into
temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the
power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.**

**Our Father, who art in
heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily
bread.
And forgive us our
trespasses,
as we forgive those who
trespass against us.
And lead us not into
temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,**

Amen.

**for ever and ever.
Amen.**

Merciful Father

**Accept these prayers
For the sake of your Son,
Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen**

ENDING

**Lord, set your blessing on us
as we go forward into the week ahead.
Confirm in us the truth by which we should live;
confront us with the truth from which we wrongly turn.**

**We ask not simply for what we want
but for what you know we need;
and we offer you this day and ourselves
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and evermore.
Amen.**

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