

Sunday Morning Worship
Readings, Reflection & Prayers for 12th January



Isaiah 43.1-7

But now thus says the Lord,
 he who created you, O Jacob,
 he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
 I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
 and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
 and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
 the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
 Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.
Because you are precious in my sight,
 and honoured, and I love you,
I give people in return for you,
 nations in exchange for your life.
Do not fear, for I am with you;
 I will bring your offspring from the east,
 and from the west I will gather you;
I will say to the north, 'Give them up',
 and to the south, 'Do not withhold;

bring my sons from far away
and my daughters from the end of the earth—
everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.'

This is the word of the Lord

Acts 8.14-17

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

This is the word of the Lord.

Luke 3.15-17, 221-22

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Reflection by Margaret Mandrell

One of my most vivid memories from my early teenage years was the evening I was baptised by full immersion at the Baptist Church in a cotton town in Lancashire. I was well prepared for the event by teaching and reflection, and I was fully engaged in the proceedings. As I came out of the water, we sang "O Jesus I have promised to serve thee to the end" and this has remained a precious hymn to this day. As a small child in Sunday school I saw the picture of Jesus in the river Jordan with the Holy Spirit as a dove resting on Him after his baptism by John in the river Jordan.

The Israelites were rescued from slavery in Egypt and crossed the reed sea and there is a lovely phrase in Exodus which says "I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession." Exodus 19.4-5. God showed grace, undeserved kindness, to his people and called them to be holy, to live differently. Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan to enter the Promised Land, and this can be seen as a symbolic baptism, as they passed through the water in faith and obedience to God's will. They entered into this land after 40 years in the desert, the land of milk and honey, the land of rest. The priests carried the Ark of the Covenant to the edge of the Jordan, entered it, and the water stopped flowing, allowing everyone to cross safely, before it resumed its flow. This demonstrated the power of God, the God of Creation, who could establish his own order on the world.

In our reading from Isaiah we have the assurance from God that He created his people and is able to be with them as they walk through the waters, alluding to the two crossings of rivers, when the people were saved and redeemed, and given new opportunities. Then we are told that he has called them by name, and that they are His. He will be with his people when they experience difficult times, and despite dangers and trials, he will sustain them. He says that they are loved and precious but should hold God in awe and reverence.

Sin is the breaking of divine or moral law, especially by a conscious act, when we do something wrong or by not doing something we should. In Old Testament times the Chief Priest would select a goat to carry the sins of the people into the desert wilderness, getting rid of them, absolving the people and symbolically bearing their collective sin and guilt. Sacrifice was common in many religions as gifts to the gods. In Israel, however, sacrifice was seen as God's gift to His people. Perfect animals were chosen and the blood of the sacrifice atoned or covered sin, so that people could approach the holy God. In the New Testament Jesus is described as the perfect substitutionary sacrifice.

Jesus came to earth because he knew that we, as human beings, give into temptation and do things which hurt ourselves, other people and God. Jesus was baptised by John as he began His ministry, not because He had sinned, but in order to identify with us. His baptism also supported and endorsed the actions of John. The Jews had used repeated ritual washings to symbolise cleansing and to baptise converts, but the baptism performed by John marked a new beginning with God. Immersion in water is a dramatic way of representing the idea of washing away sin, burying your old life and being immersed in the life of Christ. Repentance, turning away from sin, and choosing to follow Christ is at the heart of the Bible's challenge that anyone who believes in God will be changed and can enjoy fullness of life through forgiveness and cleansing from sin.

God has been present in creation, saving His people from the flood, oppression and slavery in Egypt, and as they entered the Promised Land. He was with Jesus as He entered the waters of the Jordan to be baptised. He showed His love for each one of us through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. When we feel overwhelmed by cares and responsibilities which seem too hard to bear, we can be comforted by the knowledge that God is able to **bless and sustain us, and that He loves us and cares for us.**

Prayers

Let us pray to God our Father, the One Who created and Who formed each of us, the Lord, our God, the Holy One, our Saviour.

To the bidding: : Lord, in Your mercy,
Please respond: **Hear our prayer.**

Father God, we thank You that You are the One Who has summoned us by name, that we are Yours. Thank You that You see us as precious and honoured. Thank You that You love us. Thank You that You are with us in the storms of life and when we feel afraid. Thank You that You hold us for eternity. Help us to hold on to these truths this week and beyond.

Silence

Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Father God, we pray for Your Church throughout the world, and especially for our brothers and sisters who are persecuted for their faith in You. Help them and us to find in You all the strength that we need, to glorify You as Your children, to follow Your call, as Your Son Jesus did, and to face the week ahead, confident in Your absolute authority and power over all our circumstances.

Silence

Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Father God, we pray for Your church here in Worcester. We ask You to pour out Your Spirit afresh today, as You did in Samaria all those years ago, that we may know the greatness of our calling, and sense the Holy Spirit's guiding every day. May our church be a place where all can find the tenderness and welcome, the wisdom and care, and the love and fellowship that You offer so freely to us, Your children.

Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Father God, we thank you for the beauty of Your creation. 'The whole earth is full of Your glory.' Give us wisdom and reverence to use the resources of nature wisely, and please help us to care gently and with justice for Your earth. We pray for all those affected by the wildfires in California, and those in other parts of the world who are under threat.

Silence

Lord, in Your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Father God, bless and guide Charles our King and all who are in authority over us. Grant them wisdom, good motives, clear judgement, and a deep desire to work as servants for the good of all, and especially for the good of the weak and vulnerable, and we pray for a government that can meet our needs as a society. We pray too for our world, for peace, for true reconciliation, and for healing in places of war and famine.

Silence

Lord, in Your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Father God, we ask You to give hope, patience, and courage to the sick, and strength, wisdom and gentleness to those treating and caring for them. From our own community we pray especially for Christine Dunne, Bill Jones, Leon and Valda Bailey, Ken and Joyce Pringle, Ann Hunt, Anuwat Wanggane, Alan Coe, Jack Tubby, Gloria, Roger Jones, Patricia Ash, Ryan Day, Brenda Hlland, David New, Sue Wright, Meriel Orton, Rosie Goddard and Adrina and Alan Price, and in a moment of quiet we bring before You those others on our hearts today who need Your healing power.

Silence

Lord, in Your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

We remember the recently departed Reginald Faulkner and June Hume and we pray for all who mourn. We remember with love and gratitude those whose anniversary falls at this time: Gordon Watkins, Matthew Graham, Richard Bolton, Michael Francis, Ron Phillips, Di Richards, Ann Quiney, Ken Quiney and Eileen Sutton, and we remember with love and gratitude those others who we love but see no longer. We thank You that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, and we commend them all into your unfailing and eternal care. Grant us with them, a share in your eternal kingdom. May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

Silence

Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Merciful Father,
accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.