

Sunday 24th January 2021 Jehovah Tsidkenu: The Lord our Righteous Saviour

WELCOME

Welcome to this time of Worship. Wherever you are, however you are feeling God welcomes each one of us into His presence to gain strength for the journey of life, to learn more of His character and to experience the joy which His intimate, loving, forgiving presence with us brings. Paul says this in Romans 3:21-24 and I'm reading it in The Message translation. ²¹⁻²⁴ *But in our time something new has been added. What Moses and the prophets witnessed to all those years has happened. The God-setting-things-right that we read about has become Jesus-setting-things-right for us. And not only for us, but for everyone who believes in him. For there is no difference between us and them in this. Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.*

What joy Jesus' birth brought to those around then. What joy His birth, life, death and resurrection brings us today as we celebrate His presence with us – Emmanuel God with us - the God setting things right in human form. Joy to the world the Saviour has come.

HYMN 320 Joy to the world

Joy to the world the Lord has come let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room and heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and heaven and nature sing

Joy to the earth the Saviour reigns your sweetest songs employ
While fields and streams and hills and plains repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy repeat, repeat the sounding joy

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
He come to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found
Far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness the wonders of His love
The wonders of His love the wonders, the wonders of His love

PRAYER OF ADORATION, CONFESSION and THANKSGIVING

Lord God Almighty, beautiful beyond description, holy, pure, majestic, unknowable in all your totality yet through your Fatherly love, so real to us, you come in life changing life enhancing life fulfilling love,

that love shown through your Son our brother, shown to us by His Spirit in our lives and in the world around us we praise you: **Thank you Lord – we celebrate with joy**

For the world in which you have placed us, for the people with whom we share our daily experiences of life: **Thank you Lord – we celebrate with joy**

For those who provide for our needs and comfort us in our despair, for those who lift us when we are down who accept us as we are and forgive us even when we are wrong:

Thank you Lord – we celebrate with joy

For those whose words and deeds make the love of God real for us, for those whose lifestyle is so shaped by the presence of the Father that they are beacons of hope in a dark, dark world:

Thank you Lord – we celebrate with joy

For those who have told of the One who lived, died and was raised to make us whole, for those who told us the stories of Jesus, for those who brought us to you Lord Jesus: **Thank you Lord – we celebrate with joy**

For those whose warmed hearts have revealed the renewing and enabling power of the Holy Spirit, for those lives which demonstrate the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit's presence

Thank you Lord – we celebrate with joy

For our life in Christ and the fellowship of his people, for freedom to worship and good news to share for opportunities to share the Good News: **Thank you Lord – we celebrate with joy**

For our gathering together yet apart in the name of Christ, for our oneness in him and the promise of wholeness both now and to come, for the God who had the first word and assures us that he will have the last, for the one who is worthy: **Thank you Lord – we celebrate with joy**

We your children acknowledge your love and saving power today and as we acknowledge this we ask your forgiveness for the times when we have put our own needs before your way. Give us the grace to acknowledge you once more as King of our lives so that we may receive the help you offer. In Jesus name we pray saying together the prayer He taught; 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 Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom the power and the glory forever. Amen.

READING Jeremiah 23:1-8 (NIV)

Read by Harry Dooley

The righteous branch

23 'Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!' declares the LORD. ² Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: 'Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,' declares the LORD. ³ 'I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. ⁴ I will place shepherds over

them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,' declares the LORD.

⁵ 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David^[a] a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Saviour. ⁷ 'So then, the days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when people will no longer say, "As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt," ⁸ but they will say, "As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them." Then they will live in their own land.'

HYMN 484 Great God your love has called us here

Music Moira and Jamie Mitchell

Great God, your love has called us here, as we, by love for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear, though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed.
We come, with all our heart and mind your call to hear, your love to find.

We come with self-inflicted pains of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains, by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined yet seeking hope for humankind

Great God, in Christ you call our name and then receive us as your own,
not through some merit, right or claim, but by your gracious love alone.
We strain to glimpse your mercy-seat and find you kneeling at our feet.

Then take the towel, and break the bread, and humble us, and call us friends.
Suffer and serve till all are fed, and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings, to fill all worlds, to crown all things.

Great God, in Christ you set us free your life to live, your joy to share.
Give us your Spirit's liberty to turn from guilt and dull despair
and offer all that faith can do while love is making all things new.

REFLECTION

I'll set shepherd-leaders over them who will take good care of them. They won't live in fear or panic anymore. All the lost sheep rounded up!' GOD's Decree. ⁵⁻⁶ "Time's coming"—GOD's Decree "when I'll establish a truly righteous David-Branch, a ruler who knows how to rule justly. He'll make sure of justice and keep people united. In his time Judah will be secure again and Israel will live in safety. This is the name they'll give him: 'GOD-Who-Puts-Everything-Right.' (The Message translation of Jeremiah 23.)

Don't we long for the day when God will come to put everything right? In these days of some fear, the possibility of panic, of that feeling of overwhelming helplessness, don't we long for the peace that God offers people through His presence with us?

For that to happen though our relationship with God the Father, the Creator needs restored to what it was originally. The prophet Jeremiah told the wayward people of his day that God would send someone to bring them back into the fold of God's eternal love.

Christians believe that someone is Jesus. We have good news to share with others – we are not to be left on our own, nor in our sinful, wayward state.

Christianity: boring, untrue, irrelevant? That's the title of the first part of the Alpha series, the series that invites people to consider why is Christianity so important to this world? What answer would you give to that question, for a lot of people are asking it. I believe that Christianity is a religion about relationships, a relationship between God and people, a relationship between people - and how our world needs to hear about how to conduct relationships in these days.

Look at the headlines, one after another tells of the breakdown of relationships, deliberate or otherwise. Greed, pride, a desire for power, righteous indignation over our plight, all influence most of our relationships with one another. Where does Christianity fit in to all of this? God as our righteousness, God who puts everything right - what of him? Where does he fit in?

The Bible tells us that we were made to be friends with God forever. It tells us that when we don't have that relationship our lives are unfulfilled - they may be filled with lots of things but at the heart they are empty. Bob Geldof - a person who has done so much good for others, a person who has on the surface got it made, entitled his autobiography, "Is that it?" Kenneth Williams wrote in his diary, "I wonder if anyone will ever know the emptiness I feel?" I wonder if for some of us those are our sentiments today?

Our relationship with God has been broken. We are not living the way God intends us to live. We have our priorities all wrong. As Paul says, there is no one who is righteous, no one who is wise or who worships God. All have turned away from God, they have all gone wrong, no one does what is right not even one. Our words, our actions, our thoughts accuse us every day of our lives.

Think for a moment - imagine that a book has captured every moment of your life. There would be some pretty amazing things there, loving relationships, real achievements. Acts of kindness, moments of generosity and selflessness, but there would also be many things you would never want anyone else to see or hear. Things that you yourself are ashamed of. Why is it that we so often hurt the people we love the most and why is it that when we try to rectify matters we so often make them worse?

None of us like to think that we are that bad, in fact we look at other people and see that they are much worse than we are and give ourselves a pat on the back. But the Bible says all of us have sinned and all of

us are far away from God's saving presence. Someone has put it like this, the liar, the murderer are short of God's glory, but so are you and me. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine and you on top of an Alp, but you are as little able to touch the stars as they.

So none of us is righteous and yet that is what God asks us to be before we can enter his presence, because he himself is righteous. Everything he does is good, he is just and fair in all his relationships. He is always true to himself. Right living, right relationships are integral to his being.

He grieves so much that we, created to be his friends have abandoned him. But in his grief he chooses to act in a way that provides his people, us, to come back into his loving presence forever. As Christians we believe that God acts to save his people - that is how the Good News Version of the Bible translates righteousness.

God's activity, God's righteousness is seen in his action to save his people. God doing something decisive that humanity could never do for itself.

And throughout history we can see that to be true, his saving action with Moses and the Israelites, his saving action bringing his people out from Babylon, and his promise seen in Jeremiah that one day a righteous person would walk this earth, would provide a way for folk to come back to God. This passage speaks of one who will embody the righteousness of God transferring that to his people.

Jesus the Good Shepherd, the one who told the story of the shepherd going out searching for the one lost sheep and the party that was had back in the fold when he returned with the lost one is God's answer to the problem of the human heart. The Shepherd that God sends is one who is proactive, who ensures that the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of his flock are catered for. He comes looking for you and for me. No matter how far or how little we have strayed, Jesus comes looking, searching, calling our name, calling us to come to him. And if we are too weak then he will gently lift us up into his arms and carry us home.

Listen once more to what God says he will do in Jeremiah. ***I will gather my people, I will bring them home, I will appoint rulers I will choose a king who is righteous, I will never punish them again.*** Why is he going to do this? In order that we his people will be safe and live rightly in peace at home with God forever.

I defy anyone to look back over their life and to say there is nothing that they would not change given the chance. God from the beginning of time has told us that there are consequences to going our own way, doing our own thing - death - the absence of God with us. The righteousness of God demands that that happens.

But the Good News is that God, in his righteousness, provides a way out of our situation. Jesus, who when he died, took all our sins on himself. It was as if he took the book detailing all the good and all the bad in my life which is a barrier between me and God from me and so there was now a barrier between him and God - that is why he cried out on the cross – ***“God why have you abandoned me.”*** By doing this he has given us the opportunity to be in contact with God, our relationship with him can grow and deepen. Of course we know that Jesus defeated death which allows him to help us come into God’s presence together with him.

As that happens we will find our lives begin to change, our relationships with one another become more fulfilling. We become more aware of the wrong things that we do and can ask Jesus to help us sort them out. As we know the love of Jesus in our lives he changes us from the inside out. Someone has said that the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart and as Jesus pours his love and right living into us we are given a clean life, new values, we are given a new status - children of God. Children grow into adults, who as they change grow, that change is influenced by the people they are with. If we accept that Jesus has taken all our wrong doing then that means that we are in God's presence and he will affect the rest of our lives. His right living will become our right way of living. I am not the person I once was, I am not the person I want to be but I know that with God's help I will become more like him and when he calls me to meet him face to face he will welcome me home as his child. A work in progress. As someone said at the inauguarati I am more than I was I am less than I want to be. That confidence allows me to go out into his world to help others see their need of him, of his righteousness in their lives and to point them to the only way that they can receive it - Jesus.

As a Christian of many years I still need reminded of this every day. It’s a slow process but like cooking in a slow cooker my prayer is that as I spend time with Jesus my life will become softer, more tender and more life enhancing for others. What is true for me is true for you too. Let us take God at his word, reminding ourselves that he will provide the way for us to live rightly with him forever. As we do that we go out to influence our world. Amen

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Read by Elma Hendrie

Heavenly Father, we come before you with hope in our hearts. Hope because of all that You have done for us. We see that You have been faithful to Your people in the past and therefore we put our trust in You for the future. We see that You have kept the promises which You have already made and so we know that You will remain true to the promises which You make to us today. You O Lord are the rock of our faith, the place of safety where we may shelter. Though all the world may change, You remain constant in Your love, Your care and Your support. For this O Lord we give You thanks.

Frustration Lord God, frustration, a feeling of helplessness, an anxiety for the future are all words on many lips just now including our own. We long for this pandemic to be curtailed and for life to return to some sort of normality. We say a big thank you to you for giving skills to those who have researched and made the vaccines. Thank you that you are providing ways in which the vaccines will reach all who need to have it. We pray for all involved in the roll out from the companies, to the Governments, to the feet on the ground. We pray for our own Health Centre and Health Board as they seek to serve us the public. Please give them wisdom and keep them safe.

You call us to trust you, to remember afresh the love that You have for the world. Each one of Your children here is important to You. We pray for those whose way of life could only be called an existence. For the refugees, asylum seekers, for those in countries where the governments live in wealth and security, but where the people live in fear and degradation, for those whose homes have become areas of conflict and disharmony. Lord God stand with them in their times of trial. Bring to them the Good News of your willingness to help, giving them your strength throughout. Please provide them with hope for the future.

America, Lord God in such turmoil as Presidencies change. Please come with your truth, your words of comfort and challenge to both the outgoing president Donald Trump and the new President Joe Biden. Bring your way of right living to the people and the government where respect is honoured, where differences are debated with peace and good humour and the result accepted. Remove from that land Lord God the hatred that is being seen when the “other side” wins. Please help everyone come to see what is true and honourable.

We pray for our church, the body of Your people here across the world. We too are broken by divisions, each thinking that their way is the only true way. Bring your truth to bear Lord God. Help us to rejoice in our diversity, seeing You at work in our brothers and sisters across the world. May Your Spirit unite us in our desire to work for You so that we provide an example to our world.

We pray for those we know who are struggling this week with problems at home, with illness, with loneliness and pain. For some difficult decisions need to be taken this week, and for some that will cause heartache and despair. You tell us Lord God to cast our worries and cares upon You. You tell us that You are there to help us through the difficult times. Sometimes Lord God we find it difficult to believe that and yet we can do no other than to put our trust in You. You alone are our strength and shield. Speak words of comfort to those who are weary and sad. Remind them of Your steadfast love. As they feel Your Presence with them may they be encouraged and strengthened. We name those we know before you now....

We give You thanks for all who have helped us on our Christian journey, especially for those who are now at home with You. Together we are a part of the worldwide church praising You on earth and in Heaven. These prayers we make in the Name of Your Son Jesus Christ Amen.

HYMN 120 God we praise you God we thank you

Music Moira and Jamie Mitchell

God, we praise you. God we bless you. God, we name you sovereign Lord.

Mighty King whom angels worship, Father, by your church adored:

all creation shows your glory, heaven and earth draw

near your throne singing 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord of hosts and God alone!'

True apostles, faithful prophets, saints who set their world ablaze,

martyrs, once unknown, unheeded, join one growing song of praise,

while your Church on earth confesses one majestic Trinity:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God, our hope eternally.

Jesus Christ, the King of glory, everlasting Son of God,

humble was your virgin mother, hard the lonely path you trod:

by your cross is sin defeated, hell confronted face to face,

heaven opened to believers, sinners justified by grace.

Christ, at God's right hand victorious, you will judge the world you made;

Lord, in mercy help your servants for whose freedom you have paid:

raise us up from dust to glory, guard us from all sin today;

King enthroned above all praises, save your people, God, we pray.

BENEDICTION

May the God who created you in love and for love fill your life with his love, increase your faith,

strengthen your hope, that you may walk before him in peace. Go, knowing the blessing of the Right

Living God, Father, Son and Spirit transforming you today and every day, amen