

Sunday 18th July 2021

WELCOME

Jesus said, "If you love me you will obey what I command. And I will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever – the Spirit of Truth." (John 14:15) God's Presence with us forever through His Holy Spirit – that is something to sing and shout about. This Giving Glorious Almighty God is the One who welcomes us to worship this morning as we welcome one another either virtually or in person. We welcome too the Gift of the Holy Spirit with us.

HYMN Holy Spirit we welcome you

Rod and Myra Ward

Holy Spirit we welcome you, Holy Spirit we welcome you,
move among us with holy fire

As we lay aside all earthly desires hands reach out and our hearts aspire

Holy Spirit Holy Spirit Holy Spirit we welcome you

Holy Spirit we welcome, Holy Spirit we welcome you,

let the breeze of your presence blow

That your children here might truly know how to move in the Spirit's flow

Holy Spirit Holy Spirit Holy Spirit we welcome you

Holy Spirit we welcome you Holy Spirit we welcome you

Please accomplish in me today some new work of loving grace I pray

Unreservedly have your way

Holy Spirit Holy Spirit Holy Spirit we welcome you.

C Bowater © 1986 Sovereign Lifestyle Music Lts

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Almighty God you are so holy, so pure, so big, so bright, that we can never know you fully, we can never understand your ways and yet we see glimpses of your love for the world, for your people The dark dreary weather we sometime have often seems to drag our spirits down and then the sun pops up and smiles appear on folks' faces,. We believe that your light of love shines onto the world to enable us to see you better, to allow our spirits to be lifted out of and up from the regular routine of our lives which sometimes seems dull. Your light of love shines in the way in which you cared for your special people the Israelites, from the love which Jesus showed while on earth, to the love which we find through your Holy Spirit's work in our world and in our lives today. Lord God we think of some of the kindnesses shown to us this past week by folk and thank you for them.

Lord God there are flickering flames of your light shining out into all our communities, into all our world – wherever your people are living, working, playing, you too are present. We worship you the world wide God, the God who has entered into this life physically and now comes through your Spirit day by day to bring strength, wisdom, energy and hope.

Forgive us we pray when we ignore you, when we deliberately defy you, when we are too busy to appreciate your presence. We come to you today as your children to our Father asking that you will forgive us and remind us of the new opportunities you present to us together with you. In Jesus name we pray 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. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

READING

Exodus 19:1-9

Read by Alison Blackadder

¹The people of Israel left Rephidim, and on the first day of the third month after they had left Egypt they came to the desert of Sinai. There they set up camp at the foot of Mount Sinai, 3 and Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. The LORD called to him from the mountain and told him to say to the Israelites, Jacob's descendants: 4 "You saw what I, the LORD, did to the Egyptians and how I carried you as an eagle carries her young on her wings, and brought you here to me. 5 Now, if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own people. The whole earth is mine, but you will be my chosen people, 6 a people dedicated to me alone, and you will serve me as priests." 7 So Moses went down and called the leaders of the people together and told them everything that the LORD had commanded him. 8 Then all the people answered together, "We will do everything that the LORD has said," and Moses reported this to the LORD. 9 The LORD said to Moses, "I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will believe you from now on." Moses told the LORD what the people had answered.

REFLECTION

Our readings for the next week are all to do with the Israelites having escaped from Egypt with God's help making their long and weary way to the land that God promised them. The big story is all about God promising them His presence with them as long as they follow His ways. We're going to read about the 10 commandments, the people's passion and willingness to follow them and God before the downfall with Aaron and the golden calf – how easily and quickly people forget how good God has been to them when difficulties arise. We're then going to move on towards the River Jordan, the emergence of Joshua as leader, the miraculous crossing then the battle of Jericho.

Each of the different stories this week tells of God's intervention, God's promise of His presence as the Israelites turn to Him, willing to follow Him. But again and again we read in the Bible of God's equal

willingness to let people go their own way, suffering the consequences as a result and we read the results in the Bible. That should give us cause for thought when we think about straying away from God, His love and His way.

Our Exodus reading reminds us of three attributes of God

His loving kindness and protection. “I carried you as an eagle carries her young on her wings and brought you here to me,” God says. Think strength and stamina, think travelling purpose, think comfort and protection. Think parent, father, mother. Think end of the journey – I brought you here to me – the place of ultimate security, ultimate peace, ultimate reconciliation.

My own possession/people – what do you value most highly. Is it to do with past history, is it to do with who gave it to you, is it precious for what it does for you now? What would you do to preserve your most treasured possession? God stuck with His people through thick and thin and looking back from our perspective we realise that He was not only willing to do that, He was willing to send Jesus into the world to live to die and to rise again so that we might have the promise of that eternal security, peace, protection. The story of faith is a story of winding paths, dead ends, u turns, sometimes seemingly dark places. My minister said this when I was going through a particularly dark time, “We often use the phrase there’s a light at the end of the tunnel – to bring us some sense of hope. But in fact tunnels are not always straight and so although the light is there we don’t always see it!” God’s promise is that as we turn to follow Him we will find Him.

You will serve me as priests - People who will bring God to those they meet and who equally will bring the people they meet to God. . Peter the Apostle reminds us that we are *a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God. (1Peter 2:10)* What a responsibility, what a privilege.

Israel’s assertion is that she will keep these conditions – said easily but not kept easily. How quick are we to say yes to God without giving it true thought? Jesus was very clear that people should think things through thoroughly before we commit to following him.(Luke 14:25ff). We can never say that God asks for blind faith and commitment. He wants us to consider and then commit.

We’ll see though in the coming week that the people fall away from their promise to follow. We think we live in an instant society and we do – we want results and we want them now. But actually it’s part of the human condition from the time of the fall. We want, and we want now. When things don’t happen we get impatient and often try to help things along – almost always with disastrous results. We found that with Abraham and we will find it with Aaron, the people and the golden calf. Moses goes AWOL or so the people think. They take things into their own hands and disaster follows.

What of Moses in all this? There he was, still in God's close and intimate presence, still finding out what it was that God wanted the people to do, when God himself told him to get back down the mountain and super quick sort his, Moses' folk out, because He, God, was wanting to destroy them for their stubbornness. This is the same God who not so long ago was willing to bring them close, willing to provide them with security. There are difficult passages for us in the Bible. We long to think of God as love who is always merciful but there are things we do not know of God. We stand in awe and fear of him rightly. His ways are not our ways.

Before Moses hot foots it down the mountain though he prays for his people, reminding God that they are God's people. He reminds God of the promise He has made, He reminds God of His actions in bringing the people out from Egypt and the effect his action to destroy them would have, not only on the people but on the countries around. Sometimes God calls us to plead with Him, to remind him of the promises he has made, to plead for him to act with mercy – remember Abraham pleading for Sodom. That takes courage, it takes effort, it takes faith, it happens when we have a relationship with God. Back down the mountain, Moses speaks God's word to the people, he asks for commitment and promises to plead for God's forgiveness. As he's doing that he even is willing to forfeit his own life so that others may have that close relationship with God back once more. That remind you of anyone?

We His people here in the 21st century must never forget that God is holy, He is awesome and He is to be revered. We can never fully explain His actions – it's so easy to want to rationalise them and explain them away but sometimes we have to bow before him and say we don't know why He does certain things or requests certain things. We want so much to share a God who loves, who forgives who changes and transforms – and all that is right and proper. But in only doing that we are in great danger of trivialising our sin, the wrong that we do and the effect that it has on other people but also the effect that it has on God. You who are parents, know the pain and anguish when your children fail to follow your ways, when they deliberately go against you. That pain is minute in comparison to the pain and anguish God experiences when we his children fail to follow. And when we trivialise our sin and its effect, we diminish the amazing power of His willingness to forgive, we domesticate God and try to fit him into our mould, when what He asks is for us to be willing to be conformed to **His** mould.

Moses helped his people recognise the seriousness of their sin and he asked forgiveness for them. We too have a Saviour who is willing to bring our sorrow before God's throne so that we too may be forgiven.

The 10 commandments given – not so that the people might be saved – that had already happened when God brought them out of Egypt but rather this was to be the grateful response to that saving and in so doing they would gain the benefits of a close relationship with God.

The final readings for the week will see Joshua take over as leader, the people will cross the Jordan having first waited patiently on the bank for the right time and in crossing the Jordan one man from each

tribe would pick up a stone from the river bed and once in the Promised Land a cairn would be erected. This would be a reminder to the people and their descendants of how God did honour his promise to bring them to the land flowing with milk and honey! And it would be an encouragement to them to keep their side of the bargain – to live their lives with God in charge. All of us need reminders of how God has provided for us. Each of us is very guilty of forgetting very quickly. The cairn was there as a permanent reminder to the Israelites. We too need a reminder and what a reminder we have. The Holy Spirit – the Spirit of God willing to work in our lives to remind us of God’s promises, to show us God’s forgiveness and to guide us in His ways.

Our God calls us to worship Him and Him alone. What is there in your life that detracts from your worship of Him? Our God calls us to whole hearted obedience to Him. What is there in your life that makes it difficult to do? As we think through these challenges this week my prayer is that we will realise the mightiness and utter holiness of our God in a new way, a way which will lead us to turn to him once more knowing that His Spirit is there to help us.

Before the throne of God above we have Jesus pleading our cause and we have the promise of our feeble prayers being taken into the throne room of God by the Holy Spirit. May God be given all the praise and the glory forever Amen.

HYMN 466 Before the throne of God above

Before the throne of God above I have a strong a perfect plea
A great High Priest whose name is Love who ever lives and pleads for me
My name is graven on His hands, my name is written on His heart
I know while in heav’n He stands no tongue can bid me thence depart
No tongue can bid me thence depart

When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within
Upward I look and see Him there who made an end to all my sin
Because the sinless Saviour died my sinful soul is counted free
For God the Just is satisfied yo look on Him and pardon me
To look on Him and pardon me

Behold Him there! The Risen Lamb my perfect spotless righteousness
The great unchangeable I AM the King of glory and of grace
One with Himself I cannot die my soul is purchased with His blood
My life is hid with Christ on high with Christ my Saviour and my God
With Christ my Saviour and my God

Charitie L. De Chenez (1841–1923) Reproduced from *CH4* CD-ROM edition, number 466

CCLI: (A) 600239, (E&Y) 634212, (S) 27185 One License hymns reprinted with permission under: (A) A738334, (E&Y) A 738278. (S)

A-738322 All rights reserved.

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Read by Harry Dooley

Ever faithful Lord, Ever giving Son, Ever present Spirit, for the many gifts you grant us and the opportunity to enjoy these things; for your daily provision and for the constant signs of your healing love; for the hope amidst despair and the light which always shines; for all these things, 'thank you' is just so inadequate but it's all we have: ... to show our gratitude in word, in thought and in action. So thank you, Lord and may our thanks move beyond words to transform us into thankful folk, faithful folk, seeing folk, folk who see need and see the need to act, folk who love to live and live to love, folk who serve you by serving others.

Lord of the world how you must weep over the state of your world today just as Jesus wept as He looked over Jerusalem. A world where greed, hate, intolerance, so divide your world. You have shown us your way of living and we as part of humanity have failed to follow it. Open our eyes that we may see where our lives need to change, for as we pray for our world we recognise that change starts with each individual in it.

Those who govern need so desperately to have eyes, ears, hearts and minds open to your ways in order that their people might be ruled in a way which provides dignity and compassion. We pray for the Governments here in Scotland and at Westminster as well as our local politicians and councillors. Grant them your wisdom, help them make decisions not based on party politics but based on everyone's needs.

Your church too Lord God often shows a poor reflection of your love. We pray for an increased working together and thank you for the way that the churches here in Selkirk and the Valleys are seeking to find ways which will encourage our communities to see you, to experience your love at work in their lives.

Father God you are a sending God – sending your people into all sorts of places that they would never think of going by themselves. The journey you ask us to take with you is one which is full of surprises, excitement, happiness and joy. It is also a journey that will take us through difficulties, danger, sadness and perhaps depression. You ask us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Come now as we name the folk we know who need to know that you are here for them today. Come with your comfort, your eternal care. Be to them what they need today.

Thank you for those who by their lives and love have shown us your way, especially those who are now in your closer presence. In Jesus name we pray Amen

HYMN Tell out my soul

Tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord, un-numbered blessings give my spirit voice
Tender to me the promise of His word in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice

Tell out my soul the greatness of His name, make known His might the deeds His arm has done
His mercy sure from age to age the same His holy name the Lord the Mighty One

Tell out my soul the greatness of His might, pow'rs and dominions lay their glory by
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight the hungry fed the humble lifted high

Tell out my soul the glories of His word firm is His promise and His mercy sure
Tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord to children's children and for evermore

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926) based on the *Magnificat* from *The New English Bible* Reproduced from CH4 CD-ROM edition, number **286**
Words: Timothy Dudley-Smith in Europe and Africa; © Hope Publishing Company for the United States of America and the rest of world. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press. All rights reserved.

BENEDICTION

The glory of God the Creator be yours

The glory of Christ the Redeemer be yours

The glory of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier be yours

Go, knowing the blessing of the glorious Presence of Almighty God in your life today and everyday

Amen