

Sunday 8th August 2021 E100 Decline and Fall

WELCOME

We come to worship today with the message of Paul from Romans ringing in our ears.

Roman 3:23 ff. (The Message). Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners 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.

²⁵⁻²⁶ God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin. Having faith in him sets us in the clear. God decided on this course of action in full view of the public—to set the world in the clear with himself through the sacrifice of Jesus, finally taking care of the sins he had so patiently endured. This is not only clear, but it's now—this is current history! God sets things right. He also makes it possible for us to live in his rightness.

We have this holy, pure God who has actively given us the opportunity to be in His Presence, worshipping Him in the beauty of His holiness.

HYMN 201 Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness

Bow down before him his glory proclaim

Gold of obedience and incense of lowliness

Bring and adore him the Lord is his Name

Low at his feet lay thy burden of carefulness

High on his heart he will bear it for thee

Comfort thy sorrows and answer thy prayerfulness

Guiding thy steps as may best for thee be

Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness

Of the poor wealth thou canst reckon as thine

Truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness

These are the offerings to lay on his shrine

These though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness

He will accept for the Name that is dear

Mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness

Trust for our trembling and hope for our fear

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness
Bow down before him his glory proclaim
Gold of obedience and incense of lowliness
Bring and adore him the Lord is his Name

John Samuel Bewley Monsell (1811-1875)

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Almighty God, pure, holy, majestic, totally other, yet so close to us, Your people, too, we worship You with our hearts, our minds, our souls, acknowledging that we know such a small part of who You are.

We come thirsty, longing for a deeper experience of You and Your ways.

We worship You, the God who, in Your mercy, has provided us with a way of coming into Your presence. Jesus' life, death and resurrection allow us to come close to You, experiencing the comforting, challenging, forgiving love which You offer. Lord Jesus Christ we worship You, acknowledging You to be the One who saves us from the effects of our sin and who brings us ever nearer to God the Father Almighty.

Holy Spirit, the One given after Jesus had physically left this world, we worship You, the One who day by day leads us and guides us to live in God's way here on earth, gently urging us to follow You through into the new life lived in Your presence forever.

Forgive us when we fail to heed Your call, forgive us when we turn our backs on Your love, forgive us when we fail our brothers and sisters who live in this world, failing them by our sinful, selfish actions and inaction.

You tell us that as we turn in sorrow and repentance to You, You do forgive us, restoring us to Your ways once more. Restoring God, Father, Son and Spirit we worship You.

As a token of our resolve to follow you once more we give you our offerings and ourselves. Please use them to bring glory to Your name. 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

READINGS 1 Kings 8:22-30

Read by Ann Blundell

²² Then in the presence of the people Solomon went and stood in front of the altar, where he raised his arms ²³ and prayed, "LORD God of Israel, there is no god like you in heaven above or on earth below! You keep your covenant with your people and show them your love when they live in wholehearted obedience to you. ²⁴ You have kept the promise you made to my father David; today every word has been fulfilled. ²⁵ And now, LORD God of Israel, I pray that you will also keep the other promise you made to my father when you told him that there would always be one of his descendants ruling as king

of Israel, provided they obeyed you as carefully as he did. ²⁶ *So now, O God of Israel, let everything come true that you promised to my father David, your servant.*

²⁷ *“But can you, O God, really live on earth? Not even all of heaven is large enough to hold you, so how can this Temple that I have built be large enough?”* ²⁸ *LORD my God, I am your servant. Listen to my prayer, and grant the requests I make to you today.* ²⁹ *Watch over this Temple day and night, this place where you have chosen to be worshiped. Hear me when I face this Temple and pray.* ³⁰ *Hear my prayers and the prayers of your people when they face this place and pray. In your home in heaven hear us and forgive us.*

Matthew 6:7-13

⁷ *“When you pray, do not use a lot of meaningless words, as the pagans do, who think that their gods will hear them because their prayers are long.* ⁸ *Do not be like them. Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him.* ⁹ *This, then, is how you should pray:*

‘Our Father in heaven: may your holy name be honoured;

¹⁰ *may your Kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

¹¹ *Give us today the food we need.* ¹² *Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us.* ¹³ *Do not bring us to hard testing, but keep us safe from the Evil One.* ^[b]

REFLECTION

We call this time the service of worship – what does that actually mean for us, a time perhaps when we can come away from the cares and worries of our world and our lives, a time when we can thank God for all the things He has given us and done for us, a time when we can know His forgiveness for the things that we have got wrong, a time when we can encourage one another in the journey of faith, when we can show our community that God is worth knowing about and following. Worship is all of those things and so much more!

God’s special people the Israelites are having a tough time of it in our readings this coming week. From David’s great victories we will find him in the depths of sin and yet we find God still willing and able to forgive him and use him. We’ll discover Solomon – the wise one and yet towards the end of his life not so wise, the one who drifts away from worshipping and serving the One true God alone. We’ll go on to Elijah – that great mountain top victory of God over the gods of Baal and then reduced to a shivering snivelling wreck as he goes AWOL from his job as prophet and we’ll see God’s tender, loving, compassionate care of him, restoring him, refreshing him, reinvigorating him. And finally we’ll see that going away from God brings consequences – disastrous consequences for the people of Israel.

And yet the story always is... that God in His mercy will provide for His people, a remnant will remain and from that remnant new life will come.

How many of you like climbing? It's really hard work, there are times on the climb when you wonder whether you will make it – and for some those times become too hard and they turn back. But up through the green pastures, on into the scree and rock, seeing the top before you, the top that sometimes seems to be further away than it was a moment ago, before finally arriving at the top bringing an exhilaration. And then just look at the view – assuming the weather is good of course!

Mountain tops are wonderful places. Places when you can hear the silence, when you can look around at the vastness of all that you see, places of wonder, amazement, places where very often you can feel God's presence touching your life. The Celts way back had a way of describing some places as "thin" places – places where it seemed that earth and heaven were so close. Mountain tops are thin places for many people. What's true physically is also true spiritually. There are times in our lives when the worship of God comes so easily because we know His presence close with us. We know His love surrounding us and supporting us. We know His love forgiving us and renewing us, encouraging us and moving us forward. It is all so exciting, exhilarating, invigorating! But then because we live in a fallen world we come down to earth with a bump! We fail, we fall, we stumble along, other things come in the way of our relationship with God, other gods sometimes, the god of work, the god of the golf course, of leisure activities, the god of families, the god of self – so many different things take precedence over the One True God. Outside things influence us – sorrow, bereavement, pain, break ups. Again the list is endless.

Down in the valley it is oh so dark. The slopes so steep that, with no energy, it seems impossible to escape. The Israelites knew all about that, David knew all about that, Solomon and Elijah too.

But Solomon reminds God of His promise to keep the Israelites safe, the promise that they were God's special people. He reminds the people of the necessity to put God first in their lives, to live in His way. He reminds them of God's promise to restore them and to bring them safety in time. And it happens.

The whole history of the special people of God is a reminder to us of His saving power, His willingness to be God.

Solomon's prayer that Ann read for us is very instructive as of course is the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples as they were up a hill.

Praise and prayer are vital for the Christian. Like the umbilical cord bringing oxygen and nutrition to the baby in the womb and taking away the low oxygenated, nutrient-depleted blood so ensuring a safe place for growth, the church praising and praying provides Christians with a safe place for growth.

As Solomon acknowledges, no building, however grand, can contain God. After all up to then God had been taken from place to place in the tent or seen in the pillars of fire and cloud. And yet buildings have a purpose. Anywhere God *is*, is holy and God is everywhere. So does it make any difference where we worship God? Well no in some respects and yes in others. There's something about a sanctuary –

whatever its particular architecture – that can speak to us of God’s transcendence, God’s otherness, God’s mystery. Meeting together in one particular place is very important, I would say is vital as a place of growth, growth not just of the individual Christian but of the church family too.

Many of us have so missed coming together through lockdown. Others have been freed to explore new ways of worshipping God. Now we find ourselves able to be together again we must balance our own individual needs with the collective need of our church family to be together gaining strength from being with one another. Please know that each one of you is missed.

Both Solomon’s and Jesus’ prayer reminds us that our focus first and foremost should be on God, the One who provides for **our** every (individually and collectively) need, the One who is willing, indeed longs for **us** His people to return to Him when we stray. **Our** Father, not my father is a powerful reminder of the need for collective worship.

Solomon’s prayer prayed at the dedication of the first Temple starts with the stirring words, “**Lord God of Israel there is no God like you in heaven or on earth below.**” Jesus’ prayer reminds us too that our focus should always start with God Almighty and our Father. As we lift our focus onto God and His ways, our worries, cares and concerns will be placed within the context of eternity. That doesn’t mean they go away, only we see them from a different perspective.

The readings this week are not easy ones to read as the consequences of the sinful actions of the Israelite people and its leaders become apparent. Solomon reminds the people of God’s willingness to forgive time after time. We didn’t read the whole prayer but righting a wrongful conviction, forgiving people who choose the wrong course of action resulting in defeat, living in ways not consistent with caring for creation are a few which are explicitly mentioned; all having Solomon pleading that God will hear and heed his prayers for forgiveness. But more than that, that God will teach them the right way to go and even more than that, that He will provide His presence with them day by day. All themes also alluded in the Lord’s Prayer.

Solomon finishes his prayer by reminding God and the people that God Himself chose to make Israel into his special nation.

Jesus reminds us that, “**You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.** (*John 15:16*).

We too are God’s specially chosen people, chosen by Him to show others His love in action and in word. We come to worship to meet with the Living God, the one who changes and transforms our lives. We come to a service of worship, to bring him praise and thanks, to be comforted, challenged, strengthened

and then, when filled with his power and energy we leave to continue our worship of Him through service knowing that as we do so we go in His name, to do His work, all for His glory. Amen

Notice on church door to be read as folk are going out. As you leave this service of worship, continue to worship Him in service.

As the deer pants for the water so our souls long for God's care and concern for His filling in order that we might do His work in His world.

HYMN 550 As the deer pants for the water

As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you.

You alone are my heart's desire, and I long to worship you.

You alone are my strength, my shield, to you alone may my spirit yield.

You alone are my heart's desire, and I long to worship you.

I want you more than gold or silver; only you can satisfy.

You alone are the real joy-giver, and the apple of my eye. *You alone are my strength,*

You're my friend and you are my brother, even though you are a King.

I love you more than any other, so much more than anything. *You alone are my strength,*

Martin J. Nystrom (b. 1956) Reproduced from CH4 CD-ROM edition, number 550

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PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Read by Fan Heafield

Lord God Almighty, we bow in Your Presence, acknowledging you as the One True God who is willing to provide for all our physical, emotional and spiritual needs. We have sought and received your forgiveness for the way in which our lives so often stray from your love and your way. We invite you now to teach us what to do, how to and when to show the world your way of love. You invite us to work with you and as part of that you ask us to bring you our prayers for others.

Loving Lord fighting continues the world over as people seek to gain control over others. We think particularly of Afghanistan where the Taliban's control is spreading bringing heartache and misery to innocent folk. Come in your mercy we pray Sovereign Lord.

We continue to pray for those affected by famine, drought, flooding and fire all the result of our lack of action in caring for the planet you created so lovingly and carefully. As COP 26 draws nearer inspire all nations to action in ways which encourage others.

All leaders the world over need the wisdom of Solomon and the will to put that wisdom into action. We pray for those far away as we pray for those in our country, the UK government, the Scottish Parliament

and our local councillors. May each be given the knowledge of the best course of action in every situation. We pray that they will be willing to use that knowledge for the good of all.

Thank you for the gifts you give each one of us. As the Olympics draws to a close thank you for all the competitors who have striven so hard over the past years. May they have a sense of satisfaction of a job well done whether they have won medals or not.

Please come alongside all those we know who are finding life joy-filled, easy and good at present. Help us to rejoice with them. Come too to those whose life is hard and filled with heartache. As we name them before you, in your mercy bring them your compassion, healing and help. SILENCE

For ourselves we recommit to your way of living, seeking your blessing as we turn to you for our help and strength. In Jesus' name we pray Amen.

HYMN Our confidence is in the Lord

Our confidence is in the Lord, the source of our salvation

Rest is found in Him alone the Author of creation

We will not fear the evil day because we have a refuge

In every circumstance we say our hope is built on Jesus

He is our fortress we will never be shaken, He is our fortress we will never be shaken

He is our fortress we will never be shaken, He is our fortress we will never be shaken

We will put our trust in God, we will put our trust in God

Noel and Tricia Richards © 1989 Kingsway's Thankyou Music

BENEDICTION

The Holy Spirit fill your whole being, that you may walk in the way of love, joy, peace and glorify the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Go, knowing the sustaining, forgiving, energising Presence of Almighty God Father Son and Spirit at work in your life and through your life today and everyday. Amen