

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021 E100 The church begins

## **WELCOME**

God welcomes us to worship today both in person and on line. This is the God that the Psalmist talks about in Psalm 118 when he says this <sup>21-25</sup> *Thank you for responding to me; you've truly become my salvation! The stone the masons discarded as flawed is now the capstone! This is GOD's work.*

*We rub our eyes—we can hardly believe it! This is the very day GOD acted — let's celebrate and be festive! Salvation now, GOD. Salvation now! Oh yes, GOD—a free and full life!*

**HYMN425            The Saviour died but rose again.**

### **The Saviour died, but rose again**

Triumphant from the grave;  
And pleads our cause at God's right hand,  
Omnipotent to save.

Who then can e'er divide us more  
From Jesus and His love,  
Or break the sacred chain that binds  
The earth to heaven above?

Let troubles rise, and terrors frown.  
And days of darkness fall;  
Through Him all dangers we'll defy,  
And more than conquer all.

Nor death nor life, nor earth nor hell,  
Nor time's destroying sway,  
Can e'er efface us from his heart,  
Or make His love decay.

Each future period that will bless,  
As it has blessed the past;  
He loved us from the first of time,  
He'll love us to the last.

## **PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION**

Lord God Almighty, You are the giver of all life. We see all around us evidence of Your hand at work

For the beauty of the earth, the majesty and order of Your creation You have set everything in its place, the seasons give order to our existence. We give you thanks and praise for the evidence of harvest time when the new life seen as spring approaches becomes fruitful. Thank you for the gift of creation.

**We worship and adore you**

You sent Your Son into this world which people have defiled. You sent Him to renew Your order to the earth. You sent Him to bring hope for the future. You allowed Him to go to His death on the cross because without His death there would have been no Resurrection and without Resurrection there would have been no opportunity for new life. Thank You for the gift of Your Son. **We worship and adore you**

Your Spirit has been present in this world since time began, breathing life into creation, bringing people to an awareness of You, bringing life and vitality to the world. You sent Your Spirit to change and transform us, to comfort and challenge. Thank You for the gift of Your Spirit. **We worship and adore you.**

Lord God Almighty, we are Your people. When we worship you and look to You we see how unlike You we are, and yet You have told us that we are made in Your image. Forgive us Lord for all that we do and say and think which mars Your image within us. **Lord have mercy upon us**

You are the giver of new life. You have promised new life to all who follow You.

Thank You for the assurance which You give us that allows us to walk this earth as forgiven people. As a token of our thanks we give ourselves anew to You to use to bring Your kingdom here on earth. Please bless the gift of our time, our talents and our money. To You be all glory and power and might for ever. In Jesus' name we pray and say together the prayer He taught, 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**

*Acts 2:38-47*

*Read by George Jack*

<sup>38</sup> Peter said to them, "Each one of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For God's promise was made to you and your children, and to all who are far away—all whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

<sup>40</sup> Peter made his appeal to them and with many other words he urged them, saying, "Save yourselves from the punishment coming on this wicked people!" <sup>41</sup> Many of them believed his message and were baptized, and about three thousand people were added to the group that day. <sup>42</sup> They spent their time in

learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers.

### **Life among the Believers**

<sup>43</sup> Many miracles and wonders were being done through the apostles, and everyone was filled with awe. <sup>44</sup> All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. <sup>45</sup> They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. <sup>46</sup> Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

### **REFLECTION**

Jesus never came to start a religion – rather he came to start a relationship. So says the author of the E100 series. I wonder what your reaction to that is? I think I'd like to change one word of the statement. He didn't come to START a relationship he came to RENEW a relationship.

We know, that in the beginning, relationships between God and people, and between people and people were perfect. But then the "I" of me got in the way and from then on the relationships between God and people and each other were fractured, broken but not irreparable. That is the Good News of the Gospel. Because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus our relationship with God our Father can be restored and in that restoration comes the possibility of our human relationships with one another being transformed too. That is the Good News that the disciples of Jesus were set to share with their friends, their neighbours, their country and their world. They were well aware that this would be an impossible task for them to do on their own and Jesus was well aware of this too. He told them to wait together for His Holy Spirit to come – His Spiritual Presence with them for ever.

Faith in God is **not** a private matter. In everyone's life comes times of struggle, doubt, pain and darkness. It's at times like these that we need others around to help us. We also need others around to help us celebrate the good things in life. Imagine a wedding with only two people?

Our readings this week tell of different followers of Jesus following his instructions and allowing people to experience the life changing transformation that Jesus' love brings to folks lives as they put their trust in Him.

Pentecost is often seen as the beginning of the church and in one sense it is because it is the beginning of the Christian church – but of course it follows on from the church of the Jews - God's special people. We find the Christians doing several things which helped the church to grow, which helped relationships to deepen.

Having turned away from their sins as Peter had told them to do – a turning away which meant a change of mind but also a change of action – both are needed they then joined the others to

**LEARN** Such was their thirst for knowledge that they spent their time reading God’s Word, having it explained to them in ways they could understand. The Bible is such an important part of the life of a Christian. Timothy reminds us that it is *useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults and giving instruction for right living so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.*

That is why we’ve been doing this Bible Reading Challenge. As it come to an end it would be good for folk who’ve kept up the study to think about using Bible reading notes which encourages folk to read the Bible on a regular basis. Nothing like as big a chunk as you have been reading but good nevertheless to keep studying. I’ve advocated WordLive from Scripture Union before – it is an easy app to download or you can get the notes in paper form too either Daily Bread or Encounter with God. The website address is <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>

That is why we have study groups at different times of the year so that we can learn from one another. They also mean that we can learn to speak of our faith in an unthreatening setting before we try it out in public! There is a lot of hilarity at these groups and a spin off is also the way in which each person looks out for the other.

There’s a real challenge for each one of us here. Prof. Barclay says this, “We should count it a wasted day when we do not learn something new and when we have not penetrated more deeply into the wisdom and the grace of God.” The best way to do that is to study and meditate on God’s Word allowing it to deepen our relationship with Him, thereby deepening our relationships with others.

For that is the second mark of the early church – it was a church which was willing to **LOVE ONE ANOTHER.** They spent time together eating, enjoying each others company, learning about one another, the cares and sorrow, the happiness and joy. Their relationships with one another deepened because their relationship with God had been restored. It was a really happy church – a joy and happiness that was infectious! They were also willing to share their belongings with one another as required. If they saw someone in need and they were able to help, they did. That is always a huge challenge but such was their love for one another that giving was sacrificial and willing.

They joined each other to **PRAY.** Another vital Christian activity. Prayer, a time to listen to what God is saying, a time to react to what God is saying, a time to bring the concerns of the individual, the church and the community to God to ask for His help.

People who have been prayed for often say that they have been helped by God sometimes physically, sometimes emotionally but mostly spiritually. Prayer is vital for strengthening our relationship with God. Without it our relationship remains static and stale and indeed in time shrivels up. It is also one of the

things that Christians find the hardest to do. You'd think we'd be ecstatic about spending time with our Heavenly Father getting to know him better, allowing Him to love us and allowing that love to transform us. The Devil though knows how important prayer is, how vital it is and tries every trick in the book to stop us. Encouragement from each other is important and vital. There are times when it is difficult to see any difference being made through prayer. We're told by Jesus to keep on persisting in prayer until we get an answer – an answer which might be yes, might be not yet and also might be no. Others can help us keep on praying and indeed they can pray for us when we find it difficult to do so. Seeing God answer prayer is another way of being encouraged – and when that happens it's good to share that so that others can be encouraged too.

I'm very interested in the way that the activities of the church are set out. After learning, after loving one another, after praying, miracles happened and they joined each other to

**PRAISE** Worshipping God takes our minds off ourselves and sets them onto God, His goodness, His mercy, His forgiveness, His patience, His love. Worshipping together brings us into His presence in a different way from being there on our own. Each is necessary! The last activity of the new church which is mentioned here is the willingness to

**WITNESS** – to draw people in. It was an attractive church – so attractive that people were added to the group every day. What a challenge to the church in the west for that is still happening in the churches in other parts of the world!

Our readings this week take us beyond the boundaries of what seemed correct at the time. The original church was Jewish but it wasn't long before God stimulated people to include all nations too. We might remember from way back when we were looking at the Old Testament that God's plan was to have a special people – the Jews – who would live their lives in such a way that would bring ALL nations into His presence, His love and His forgiveness.

**HIS LOVE IS FOR ALL WHO BELIEVE.** I wonder how much we believe that statement? I wonder how much that statement stirs us to act – to pray, to reach out, to those we know who don't yet know the Good News. God longs to use us to bring those outside the fold into the fold, to bring the lost sheep back to where it belongs. God asks us to be obedient to His call to witness but do you notice the last sentence of the reading – it is the **LORD HIMSELF** who added to their number. The Holy Spirit is the one who challenges folk to change, - our job is to bring them into the presence of God so that they can have the opportunity to meet with Him.

This reading today gives us the ideal church – it didn't last that way for long, before relationships became skewed and fractured, but the amazing fact is that God still used them in mighty ways and He wants to use us too in mighty ways – even with our warts and failings! Let us take courage and comfort from His

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willingness to use us and pledge to allow Him to do just that so that the glory of His love will be revealed to those who yet live in darkness. Amen

**HYMN 198            Let us build a house**

**Words removed for copyright reasons**

**PRAYER OF INTERCESSION            HYMN We lay our broken world            read by Iona MacNeill**

We lay our broken world in sorrow at Your feet

Haunted by hunger, war and fear oppressed by power and hate

Here human life seems less than profit, might and pride

Though to unite us all in You You lived and loved and died

We bring our broken towns, our neighbours hurt and bruised

You show us how old pain and wounds for new life can be used

We bring our broken loves friends parted, families torn

Then in Your life and death we see that love must be reborn

We bring our broken selves confused and closed and tired

Then through Your gift of healing grace new purpose is inspired

O Spirit on us breathe with life and strength anew

Find in us love and hope and trust and lift us up to You.

**Anna Briggs (1947 - )**

**HYMN 286            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

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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

Tomothy Dudley Smith (1926 - )

## **BENEDICTION**

**Live in union with Christ Jesus as Lord, be rooted in Him, built in Him.**

**Grow strong in the faith;**

**Let your hearts overflow with thankfulness.**

**Go knowing the blessing of the Presence of Almighty God in your life today and everyday.**