

WELCOME

The God who is love welcomes us to this service of worship today. A welcome to all in the building and all joining us online. We read in the 1st letter of John chapter 4 that ⁹ *God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him.* ¹⁰ *This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.* Our first hymn reminds us that it is through God's amazing love for us that we have access to Him and His power to help us live our lives in a way which shows love.

HYMN 396 - AND CAN IT BE

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood
Died He for me who caused His pain
For me who Him to death pursued
Amazing love how can it be that Thou my God shouldst die for me x 2

He left His Father's throne above
So free so infinite His grace
Emptied Himself of all but love
And bled for Adam's helpless race
Tis mercy all immense and free for O my God it found out me x 2

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray
I woke the dungeon flamed with light
My chains fell off my heart was free I rose went forth and followed Thee x 2

No condemnation now I dread
Jesus and all in Him is mine
Alive in Him my living Head
And clothed in righteousness divine
Bold I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Christ my own x 2
Music Thomas Campbell The Bouquet, 1825 Harmonised in Primitive Methodist Hymnal, 1889

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Amazing love Almighty God, a love that sets all people free, a love which knock gently at the door of our lives inviting our response. Father in heaven we worship You the One who in love created all things, the One who in love offers Your Saving Power to your creation through Jesus Your Son our brother, the One who in love sustains all things through Your Holy Spirit. We bow before you Father Son and Spirit bringing you our adoration.

We bow down and confess You are Lord in this place and in our lives. Easy words to say Lord God not easy words to put into practice for we recognise that we fail You often in our words our actions our lack of words and lack of action. We come to seek Your forgiveness this morning in order that we might follow in Your way once more. We bring You thanks for the good things that You have encouraged us to do in the past, and are encouraging us to do in the present. We commit ourselves anew to follow You into the future in the hope of Your eternal Presence with us. As we commit ourselves we give you our money too, here in the church and through the bank. Take it and use it to show the world Your love and commitment in ever new ways. In Jesus' name we pray saying 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 **1 Peter 1: 3-9, 13-16**

Read by Donella McCann

A Living Hope

³Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Because of his great mercy he gave us new life by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with a living hope, ⁴and so we look forward to possessing the rich blessings that God keeps for his people. He keeps them for you in heaven, where they cannot decay or spoil or fade away. ⁵They are for you, who through faith are kept safe by God's power for the salvation which is ready to be revealed at the end of time.

⁶Be glad about this, even though it may now be necessary for you to be sad for a while because of the many kinds of trials you suffer. ⁷Their purpose is to prove that your faith is genuine. Even gold, which can be destroyed, is tested by fire; and so your faith, which is much more precious than gold, must also be tested, so that it may endure. Then you will receive praise and glory and honor on the Day when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸You love him, although you have not seen him, and you believe in him, although you do not now see him. So you rejoice with a great and glorious joy which words cannot express, ⁹because you are receiving the salvation of your souls, which is the purpose of your faith in him.

A Call to Holy Living

¹³So then, have your minds ready for action. Keep alert and set your hope completely on the blessing which will be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. ¹⁴Be obedient to God, and do not allow your lives

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to be shaped by those desires you had when you were still ignorant. ¹⁵ Instead, be holy in all that you do, just as God who called you is holy. ¹⁶ The scripture says, “Be holy because I am holy.”

REFLECTION

Living in the World

This is the second last week of E100 and it is entitled Living in the World. What do we expect as Christians living in a world which is not our home, we’re just a passing through as the spiritual goes and yet it is a world that we are called to live in, to interact with, to be a witness to. Over the past few weeks we’ve been thinking about Paul’s take on how to live in the world and what to expect and also what not to expect. But Paul is not the only apostle around so this week we will be reading passages from Peter from John and from James as well as Paul’s most famous passage 1 Corinthians 13 – love. Throughout the readings two themes run constantly.

a) First and foremost we are to be a people who have a **LIVING HOPE** because we have an eternal assurance. The readings talk about the new life in Jesus which gives us that living hope. We are a new creation, we are no more in condemnation, we can be, no it’s stronger than that – we **WILL** be confident in God’s presence. What a statement that is. Confident in His presence – not because of anything we have done but because of what the Lord has done for us, what He continues to do for us and what He promises He will do for us. Surely hope is what we need and what our world needs. No security in jobs, world affairs, finance, relationships, climate change – all because the world has chosen to ignore the Master’s rules for living.

This Christian hope allows us to look forward to **Heaven** standing confidently in God’s presence. Blessings there, no more pain, no more suffering, but also seeing God face to face, being in His presence, experiencing his love without any barriers. I love the Message translation of 1 Corinthians 13: where rather than seeing through a glass darkly we read, “*We don’t yet see things clearly. We’re squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won’t be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We’ll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!*” Surely that’s something worth looking forward to, something worth affecting how we live our life here.

Our living hope also allows us the **Opportunity** of experiencing some of the Heavenly benefits here and now. He offers us his love in the present as well as the future. He tells us that He gives us his Holy Spirit. He is the guarantee of our future life with God but He also brings us blessings and benefits in the present. A bit like a deposit on a car. It’s not ours till later but we get the benefit of driving it right away. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit with us day by day, guiding us and directing us, a Spirit that John will tell us is greater than the world’s spirit. We have the peace of knowing the living God, active in our lives today, bringing us comfort, bringing us challenge, bringing us guidance and support.

Our living hope in the new life which Jesus gives us helps us to know that God is **P**resent in our suffering in our problems. In each of the readings we will find reference to the problems which we will encounter in this world, in this life. Each of us has problems, some that are well known to others some that only God knows about. Our living hope assures us that He allows them to happen so that our faith may grow. That's not the same as saying He made the problems happen in the first place. Good comes out of evil though. Our living hope assures us of God's presence with us through our problems. The world of today has so many problems, disasters, natural and man-made. It is a world which is breaking, creation groaning with longing to be renewed. The promise is that one day there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Till then we don't know the answer to why, but we are reminded that Jesus suffered and died and yet came back to life so defeating the power of death. God in Jesus present in our suffering gives us the living hope that our suffering will be defeated one day.

Our living hope allows us the opportunity to express our **E**nthusiasm for God and his love. We can rejoice with a glorious joy that not even words can express. This living hope which we possess allows others to see an enthusiasm for living, a joy through trouble and pain, a quiet ring of confidence in our lives which shows others that we know that God has us in his care.

b) The second theme which runs through our readings of this coming week is Our Living Hope gives way to Our **HOLY LIVING**, - our calling in other words.

Because of all that Jesus has done for us we are called to holy living, a holy church. ***"Be holy as I am holy,"*** God says in Leviticus 11:44 and we know that that book is the holiness code. It is the manual for the Jews to be holy. Hagios though means different, means other, different from ordinary things. How can we be holy? Even if we kept the letter of the law, all the rules in Leviticus we would still never be holy. It does not require encyclopaedic grasp of endless directives and prohibitions. Jesus came to show us a new way of being different of being holy.

It's a holiness which flows from the heart - its key is love. Peter calls us to imitate the love of **g**race that saved us, the love of God's **co**mpassion poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Be holy as I am holy - holiness is what God is, what God does and here he calls us to be like him. Impossible you might say but his call to us depends on two facts- His holiness is within our grasp, otherwise he wouldn't ask it of us. It is within our grasp because He, himself is prepared to supply all that is necessary for us to be holy. Holy in our jobs, holy in our families, holy at our leisure.

We are called as individuals and as a church to live distinctive lives, distinctive, counter cultural lives. This holiness comes as a result of being open to the flow of the Spirit. Think of a river. If the river is dammed and blocked off from the source then the water wont flow. If we are blocked off from God then the Spirit is not able to change us. Peter tells us that there are things that we can do which will help us to be open to Him.

Have your minds ready for action, keep alert. Hagios; a life of reverence, an attitude of mind of the one who is always aware that he is in the presence of God. Paul says *do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind.*

Romans 12:2 Note it is God who is doing the transforming. Our job is to have our minds open to his way. That's not easy, traditions crowd in, habits habitually hold you and need to be broken.

Transforming the mind means being active. Know your faith, know what God requires of you and when temptation comes your way as it will, you will be able to stand up to the Devil and his wiles. Put away all wrong thoughts - a thought is just a thought but once it embeds itself into your being it can destroy your will. When evil thoughts float into your mind, banish them and think instead of all that Christ has done for you. And go even further when wrong thoughts plague you then turn your thoughts to worship God. "You call him father," says Peter, ok then worship him as father, think through again and again and again about how you have been saved from eternal separation from God's love by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Remind yourself of the costly sacrifice that Jesus made for you remind yourself that this sacrifice had been known and planned since the before the beginning of time.

Fix your minds on the things that are pure that are holy that are true, fix your mind on Jesus the author and perfecter of your faith. It is not easy to do but the more we do this the less opportunity we give to the Devil to infiltrate and corrupt us. Be self controlled, don't allow your lives to be shaped by those desires you had when you were still ignorant - and what is self control but a fruit of the Holy Spirit. The more we do it the easier it becomes - a good habit forms in us. And do you know the best of it is that the more we think of what God has done for us in Jesus, the more we meditate, the more awed we become, and in that awe a love springs up, wells up inside us a love that changes us from selfish beings with selfish desires to a being who is so in tune with the Father's love that being holy, being other, being different becomes natural. It's a love which purifies our very beings and in that purity a love for others develops and that helps us to help them see the Father's love for themselves.

Living in the world – living in hope, living in holiness so that those around us will want to know why we live such distinctive lives. Amen

HYMN 727 - IN THE BULB THERE IS A FLOWER

In the bulb there is a flower, in the seed, an apple tree;
In cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be,
Unrevealed until its season something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody.
There's a dawn in every darkness bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future, what it holds a mystery.
Unrevealed until its season something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning: in our time, infinity,
In our doubt there is believing, in our life eternity.
In our death a resurrection, at the last a victory,
Unrevealed until its season something God alone can see.

Natalie Allyn Wekeley Sleeth (1930 – 1992)

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Chris Carroll

Let us pray.

You are the Lord God Almighty. When we see the frailty, injustice and ungodliness of this world, we realise that our hope is in You alone. So we bring to you our prayers for ourselves and for others. We do this through Your Son Jesus, who made our direct approach to You possible.

Lord, we are thankful for the relative freedom which we have in our British countries. We bring before You those Christians in other countries who are living under severe persecution by governments and militant groups.

Lord God, You know who they are and where they are.

As we consider these countries, we begin to realise the extent of oppression:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Burkino Faso, Cameroon, Chad, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam.

It is only You to whom we can turn.

We pray for aid agencies, both Christian and non-Christian who make their best efforts to help the oppressed.

We pray for those who have insufficient resources to grow their faith. We pray Lord that by Your grace you would make up the deficiency.

Lord God, You know who they are and where they are.

Let us take a moment to silently name those whom we personally know or those we have heard are having a difficult time because of their Christian faith or because of their holy living.

Also Father God, we pray for ourselves. Please Heavenly Father, by your Holy Spirit the Encourager, give us the desire to increase our faith so that our hope is fixed ever more firmly on You and our confidence in holy living is increased. To help us in our holy living we ask You for Discernment between what is Godly and what is ungodly, so that we are not misled. Strength in the face of adversity. A realisation of the spiritual nature of oppression.

Father God, we are mindful of Your presence with us. Let that knowledge guide our behaviour and our mindset in public and in private.

Finally Lord God and Father, we thank you for that blessed assurance that through faith in Your Son Jesus Christ, that faith leads to riches beyond measure at the time when He is revealed. Amen.

HYMN 561 - BLESSED ASSURANCE

Blessed assurance Jesus in mine
O what a foretaste of glory divine
Heir of salvation, purchase of God
born of the Spirit washed in His blood
This is my story this is my song
praising my Saviour all the day long

Perfect submission perfect delight
visions of rapture burst on my sight
Angels descending bring from above
echoes of mercy whispers of love ...
This is my story this is my song
praising my Saviour all the day long

Perfect submission all is at rest
I in my Saviour am happy and blest
watching and waiting looking above
filled with his goodness lost in his love...
This is my story this is my song
praising my Saviour all the day long
Frances (Fanny) Jane Crosby (1820 – 1915)

BENEDICTION

Go knowing the love of the Father enfolding you, the light of the Son guiding your path and the power of the Holy Spirit being your strength for living today and everyday. Amen