**Home Service Sheet for Sunday 1st September 2024**

**Call To Worship                 Isaiah 41:8-10**

But you, Israel, my servant,
    Jacob, whom I have chosen,
    the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
    and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, “You are my servant,
    I have chosen you and not cast you off”;
fear not, for I am with you;
    be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
    I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

**Prayer**

 Almighty God, Creator of the universe and everything in it, we bring You our praise and thanksgiving today. Through the darkest and most difficult of times, You are our strength and protection. Wherever we may go, we know that You will always be with us as You have promised to us in Your Word. In You, O Lord, we are secure and You have chosen us to be Your people through the completed work of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us today to remember all that You have done for us, and all that You have promised for us in the future. Fill our hearts with joy, love and thankfulness we pray. In Jesus’ Name, amen.

**Hymn**                                     **Thy hand, O God, has guided**by ***E H Plumptre***

<https://youtu.be/esJ7WWqG-dI?si=-cCrarKpXaLxW6bT>

Thy hand, O God, has guided Thy flock from age to age;
The wondrous tale is written full, clear on every page.
Thy people owned Thy goodness, and we their deeds record;
And both of this bear witness: one church, one faith, one Lord!

Through many a day of darkness, through many a scene of strife;

The faithful few fought bravely to guard the nation’s life.

Their Gospel of redemption – sin pardoned, man restored

Was all in this enfolded: one church, one faith, one Lord!

Thy mercy will not fail us, nor leave Thy work undone,

With Thy right hand to help us the victory shall be won;

And then, by all creation, Thy Name shall be adored

And this shall be our anthem: one church, one faith, one Lord!

**The Lord’s Prayer**

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, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, amen.

**Bible Reading                     Acts 28:28-31**

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” [And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, having much dispute among themselves.]

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

**Reflection**

 How should a good book, or a compelling story, end? Should everything be wrapped up nice and neatly, or is it ok to leave unanswered questions? Different people have different opinions about this, depending on whether these issues will be resolved in the next story that follows on. The book of Acts seems to end quite abruptly, with a number of questions still to be resolved. How did the Church continue to grow throughout the known world? What happened to Paul and the other apostles? Church histories have given us the answer to some of these questions, but there are still some that remain unanswered.

One of the possible reasons for Acts ending where it does, is that this describes what was happening as Luke was writing. This was the most up to date news, and he couldn’t tell us what was still to come in his future. There is a group of church fellowships today known as the Acts 29 network, whose name makes the crucial point that church history is still unfolding and will continue to do so until Jesus returns in glory. Acts 28 is not the end of the story! Paul has just proclaimed the Gospel message to the leading Jews in Rome and explained it from the Scriptures.

Last week we heard about the mixed response to the Gospel, with some believing and others doubting that Jesus is the promised Messiah and hope of Israel. Now the message is to be proclaimed to the Gentiles, in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. This pronouncement of Paul, that we read in verse 28, clearly riled the Jews and perhaps even turned some against the Gospel. Sometimes we don’t know how other people will respond to the Gospel, but ultimately that is not our responsibility. Our Christian calling is to share the message, but it is God who works inside people so that they receive the gift of faith.

Sometimes we can feel discouraged when people we have prayed for over many years still don’t respond to the Gospel message with faith. We can take it personally or get upset about their lack of response, but we must remember that God is always with us. As our call to worship from Isaiah reminded us, God has called us, protects us, strengthens us, and upholds us at all times and in all circumstances. Paul kept on sharing the Gospel whenever he had the opportunity to do so (v.30). As long as we have life and breath let us also continue to tell people about Jesus.

Scripture does not tell us how Paul’s life ended, but it does tell us that he remained faithful even in prison, and under house arrest in Rome. Paul’s focus was not on his own circumstances and suffering, but rather on God’s plans and purposes. I believe that we can learn a lot from Paul in this respect. We may not have been called to travel through many lands preaching and proclaiming the Gospel, but we are called to share the Gospel message where we are with the people we meet. Let us not focus on our own troubles and try to come up with excuses as to why we can’t talk about Jesus with our friends and neighbours.

Today, remembering that Jesus has promised to be with us to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20), let us be encouraged to live out our lives as Christ’s people. May we not be embarrassed or worried about what other people may think about us. Let us continue to speak the Gospel truths about sin and salvation in Jesus Christ alone, even if this might lead to imprisonment for us. What the world increasingly calls ‘hate speech’ is, in fact, the perfect expression of the perfect love of God for all people seen in the giving of His Son to pay the price for the sins we have all committed. May we be aware of the emboldening that the Holy Spirit gives to all God’s people! Amen!

**Prayer of intercession**

 Gracious God, we thank You for giving us Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. We thank You also for making Yourself known to us through the glorious Gospel message of reconciliation and forgiveness we find in Jesus. Help us and all Your people to share this good news with others that they may be drawn into Your Kingdom and adopted into Your family. Grant us strength and courage when we face opposition and persecution for Your sake, we pray. May Your Holy Spirit guide us and strengthen us to walk in Your ways every day of our lives. This we ask in the Name of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, amen.

**Prayer of Blessing**

Heavenly Father, thank You for Paul who had such confidence and boldness to share the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. May our lives be lived with such dedication and commitment to our Lord and Saviour, that our life's cry would be: "To live is Christ and to die is gain." Amen.