Home Service Sheet 11th June 2023

Call To Worship  Psalm 33:1-5

Shout for joy in the Lord, O you righteous!

    Praise befits the upright.

Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre;

    make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!

Sing to him a new song;

    play skilfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

For the word of the Lord is upright,

    and all his work is done in faithfulness.

He loves righteousness and justice;

    the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, we sing and proclaim Your praise and glory with our lips, and through our actions. You alone are worthy to receive glory from the whole of creation. In Your Word You speak to us of how the very rocks would cry out in praise if our worship was silent. Everything that You have made is here to show us who You are, and point us to our need to know You. Through Your Word, O Lord, You have revealed to us the one way of salvation in Your Son, Jesus Christ, through His death on the cross. You have poured out Your grace and mercy upon us that we may be saved through faith in Him, and we thank You again today for the depth of Your mercy that reconciles us to You. Hear this prayer, for we ask it for Jesus’ sake, amen.

Hymn Depth of Mercy by Charles Wesley

<https://youtu.be/GPdJfsz-Q2Y>

Depth of mercy, can there be mercy still reserved for me?

Can my God His wrath forbear? Me, the chief of sinners, spare?

I have long withstood His grace, long provoked Him to His face;

Would not hearken to His calls: grieved Him by a thousand falls.

There for me the Saviour stands, shows His wounds and spreads His hands;

God is love, I know, I feel, Jesus pleads, and loves me still.

Why to me this waste of love? Ask my Advocate above.

See the cause in Jesus’ face, now before the throne of grace.

If I rightly read Thy heart, if Thou all compassion art,

Bow Thine ear, in mercy bow; pardon and accept me now.

Now incline me to repent; let me now my fall lament:

Now my foul revolt deplore; weep, believe, and sin no more.

Or Depth of Mercy by Charles Wesley, adapted by Bob Kauflin

<https://youtu.be/yQlZsUjcUH0>

Depth of mercy, can there be mercy reaching even me?

God the Just His wrath forbears; me, the chief of sinners, spares.

So many times my heart has strayed from His kind and perfect ways,

Making clear my desperate need for His blood poured out for me.

Give me grace, Lord, let me own all the wrongs that I have done.

Let me now my sins deplore, look to You and sin no more.

There for me the Saviour stands, holding forth His wounded hands;

Scars which ever cry for me, once condemned but now set free.

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 Hosea 6:1-11

“Come, let us return to the Lord;

    for he has torn us, that he may heal us;

    he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

After two days he will revive us;

    on the third day he will raise us up,

    that we may live before him.

Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord;

    his going out is sure as the dawn;

he will come to us as the showers,

    as the spring rains that water the earth.”

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?

    What shall I do with you, O Judah?

Your love is like a morning cloud,

    like the dew that goes early away.

Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets;

    I have slain them by the words of my mouth,

    and my judgment goes forth as the light.

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,

    the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

But like Adam they transgressed the covenant;

    there they dealt faithlessly with me.

Gilead is a city of evildoers,

    tracked with blood.

As robbers lie in wait for a man,

    so the priests band together;

they murder on the way to Shechem;

    they commit villainy.

In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing;

    Ephraim's whoredom is there; Israel is defiled.

For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed.

Reflection

Hosea was a rather unusual prophet. Like all other Biblical prophets, he was called by God to speak His Word to the people. However, Hosea’s life was also to be a visual demonstration of what was happening spiritually amongst the Israelites of his day. God directed Hosea to marry a woman of ill-repute, who would go on to betray him, and be unfaithful to him. This marriage was to be a sign to the people of their relationship with God, to whom they had been unfaithful through idolatry and disobedience. In chapter 5 of his prophecy, Hosea pronounces God’s word of judgment against the priests and leaders of Judah, but it is not all doom and gloom.

At the end of Hosea chapter 5 we hear God saying, “I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.” (Hosea 5:15) Despite the sin and rebellion of God’s people, there was still a glimmer of hope for the future. God makes it clear that if the people will recognise their guilt for the sins they had committed, and then seek His face sincerely, He will hear them and forgive them. To use the language of the New Testament, they could confess their sin to God, with repentance, and they would then be forgiven. This key message is proclaimed more clearly to us in our reading from chapter 6 today.

God makes it clear that it is He who is in control of all things, including the punishment of those who sin against Him. However, in doing so, God’s purpose is to bring the people back to Himself. “Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us” (v.1). So often God punishes His people not to make them suffer, but rather to draw them back to Himself. We are familiar with this approach ourselves, are we not? Children learn lessons more quickly if we show them the consequences of bad choices, but them lovingly offer them a way back. God, as our loving Heavenly Father offers forgiveness to all who turn to Him in faith with repentance.

In verse 6 God shows the people how He wants them to live their lives. In the past there has been a regular pattern of sin and rebellion, with sacrifices to atone for it. However, this is what God truly desires, “steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” To put it another way, prevention is better than cure. The relationship God wants with His people is one of commitment and faithfulness, and not one that blows hot and cold with periodic spiritual adultery. This is what we are called to in Jesus Christ – not just faith in Him, but faithfulness to Him day by day for our whole lives.

Hosea goes on to proclaim that there will be serious consequences, though, if the people will not repent and turn to God. Israel had rejected God some time ago, but the tribe of Judah had done better (or perhaps more accurately, not quite as badly). However, the time had been appointed for Judah’s judgment too if they would not repent of their sinful rebellion against God. Sadly, history tells us that they did not heed God’s message through the prophet Hosea. They may have responded in the short term, but before too long they were back to their old evil ways of idolatry and open rebellion against God.

Into this world and situation God sent His Son, Jesus, a few hundred years later. Truly He would be the One to call people back to God, paying the price for their sin through His sacrifice on the cross, by which God’s just requirement and wrath were satisfied. Note the wording in verse 2 of our reading from Hosea. We read, “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.” Although this originally would have referred to God restoring His people after a short time, I believe that this is a foreshadowing of God raising Jesus from the dead on the third day. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection we may live before God, counted as righteous and clean in God’s sight. What wondrous news for all who will truly believe and repent of their sin. God is gracious and merciful to forgive us our sins because of Jesus – hallelujah! Amen!

Prayer

Gracious God, Your promises are true, and we can fully trust in You. Indeed, O Lord, for You remained faithful to Your people, Israel and You have assured us in Your Word that You will remain faithful to all who trust in Your Son for salvation, for which we give You eternal thanks and praise. Heavenly Father, it is also very sobering to realise how quickly Your people, Israel, strayed from Your ways and fell into spiritual adultery. We pray that we may walk faithfully with You, by Your Spirit who guides us into all truth. May we live in ways that truly honour Your Name and point others to You through the witness of our lives. Help each of us to grow in grace, and in a knowledge of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we may increasingly be evermore Christ-like in our actions, attitudes, thoughts, and motives. This we ask in His precious name, amen.

Benediction

Send us out today, O Lord, with an ever growing awareness of Your love, grace and mercy towards us in Jesus. May Your Spirit empower us to witness to Your wondrous work of grace in our lives, that others may come to You with faith and repentance, and be saved. This we ask for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, and to Your glory, amen.