**Home Service Sheet 15th October 2023**

**Call To Worship                 John 9:1-5**

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

**Opening Prayer**

Thank You, Heavenly Father, for lifting us out of the kingdom of darkness into Your glorious kingdom of light. We ask today that the light of Your love and grace would shine in and through us, and may we be used by You as a reflection of the true Light that lights all those that come into the world. In Your light, O Lord, we see everything in truth and beauty, and Your wonder and holiness is illuminated for us so that we might see You and worship You. Lord Jesus, May we recognise You as the true Light of the world! Help us today to listen closely to Your Word, that it may truly be a light to our feet as we seek to walk with You today and every day. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

**Hymn                                     O Church Arise**by ***Stuart Townend & Keith Getty***

[*https://youtu.be/Uhz8Hz4LYcU?si=tKNzX5908U1L8q1n*](https://youtu.be/Uhz8Hz4LYcU?si=tKNzX5908U1L8q1n)

O Church, arise, and put your armour on; hear the call of Christ our Captain.
For now the weak can say that they are strong in the strength that God has given.
With shield of faith and belt of truth, we’ll stand against the devil’s lies;
An army bold, whose battle-cry is Love, reaching out to those in darkness.

Our call to war, to love the captive soul but to rage against the captor;
And with the sword that makes the wounded whole, we will fight with faith and valour.
When faced with trials on every side we know the outcome is secure,
And Christ will have the prize for which He died, an inheritance of nations.

Come see the cross, where love and mercy meet, as the Son of God is stricken;
Then see His foes lie crushed beneath His feet, for the Conqueror has risen!
And as the stone is rolled away, and Christ emerges from the grave,
This victory march continues till the day every eye and heart shall see Him.

So Spirit, come put strength in every stride, give grace for every hurdle,
That we may run with faith to win the prize of a servant good and faithful.
As saints of old still line the way, retelling triumphs of His grace,
We hear their calls and hunger for the day when with Christ we stand in glory.

**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                     Ephesians 3:7-13**

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. **8**To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, **9**and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages inGod, who created all things, **10**so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. **11**This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord, **12**in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. **13**So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

**Reflection**

This week our Bible reading begins with the Gospel, and it is the Gospel that makes us Christians and members of God’s family. Could we briefly outline the Gospel in a few simple words if were asked about it by someone? According to Paul’s letter to the Romans, the Gospel is that Jesus is Lord, and rose again on the third day (Romans 10:9). Saying that Jesus is Lord is shorthand for Him reigning over everyone and everything and acknowledging our allegiance to Him. To say that Jesus rose from the dead is also to say that He died on the cross, paying the price for our sins. The death and resurrection of Jesus requires a response of belief, love and obedience from us.

Paul tells us that God had made him a minister (servant) of the Gospel, not because he deserved to be one, but rather because God granted it to him as an undeserved gift. This reminds us that holding any position within the life of the Church is a calling to servanthood rather than a position of privilege. Paul was a servant of both Jesus and the people, with whom he shared the Gospel message. In verse 8 Paul also tells us that his specific call was to preach to the Gentiles rather than the Jews, which we might find quite surprising considering his own Jewish heritage, upbringing and education, but if anything, it further illustrates Paul’s reliance on God’s grace.

Paul continues by writing about the “unsearchable riches of Christ” in verse 8, and the “mystery hidden in God” in verse 9. The first of these is likely a reference to the benefits of the Gospel – forgiveness of sins, eternal life and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The second phrase may be referring back to the earlier mystery of how Jews and Gentiles become one people through faith in Christ. What we can be sure about, though, is that all of this comes from God and is entirely underserved by people. There is also a purpose in God making this all known through the Church, and that is that the “rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” would know of God’s wisdom.

Often when we think about those in positions of influence, whether politicians or business leaders, we struggle to recognise a lot of wisdom in the decisions that they make. They often seem to be focused on their own careers or making money for themselves. But are these the kinds of rulers and authorities about which Paul writes here? No, because he identifies them as being ‘in the heavenly places’, clearly suggesting that these are spiritual beings rather than human beings of flesh and blood. For comparison, Paul wrote about our position as Christians in chapter 1, verse 3 saying “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”.

“In the heavenly places” there referred to our spiritual state because of salvation through Christ – the fact that we are now part of God’s family. So which spiritual beings is Paul referring to in verse 10, and why do they need the Church to reveal the “manifold wisdom of God”? Elsewhere in this letter Paul refers both to angels and the devil and his fallen angels (demons). It may well refer to all spiritual beings. This can make sense because ultimately all created beings, including the angels, were created by God to bring Him glory. So often in the Psalms, and elsewhere, we are encouraged to remember what God has done, or think about His character so that we might respond with praise and thanksgiving and give Him the glory He desires and deserves.

If we go on to connect this to Paul’s encouragement in verse 13, where he tells the Ephesians not to lose heart when they hear of his imprisonment and suffering, then we may see how the Church can point to God’s glory. From the world’s perspective the Gospel and the Church demonstrate weakness, but it is through this that God’s strength and wisdom is revealed, and God’s salvation is received. God must be truly magnificent and wise to bring about His plans and purposes through the Church, warts and all! As Paul records some words of Jesus elsewhere, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9) God can and will be glorified through His Church and those of us who are members of it. Amen!

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we are filled with awe when we realise the unfathomable, unsearchable and boundless riches of Christ Jesus. By Your grace and through faith we have all received of Your fullness, and for that we thank You. As we think back over the course of our lives, we recognise that we have nothing that could commend us to You and by rights I should be condemned to hell. By rights, we are the worst of all sinners and are not worthy to be called Your children, and yet while we were still sinners, Christ died for us and You saved us. May we share that glorious knowledge of Your grace and mercy with this world of darkness that Your light may shine. May Your Church truly be a city on a hill that draws others to You and brings You glory. Amen!

**Benediction**

Gracious God, send us out today with boldness to proclaim the Gospel, and gentleness to speak of You with others. Grant us courage to always walk in the light of Your ways however dark this world may be. May we bring glory to You through all our words, deeds and thoughts. Amen.