**Home Service Sheet 18th June 2023**

**Call To Worship                 Psalm 100:1-5**

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!
    Serve the Lord with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing!

Know that the Lord, he is God!

     It is he who made us, and we are his;
     we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
     and his courts with praise!
     Give thanks to him; bless his name!

For the Lord is good;
     his steadfast love endures forever,
     and his faithfulness to all generations.

**Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, as we look at the creation around us in all its majesty, variety and beauty, our hearts and minds turn to You, the One who has created all things. In Your Word we learn that if we did not cry out in praise to You, the very rocks and the whole of creation would compose its own symphony of praise to You. This day we ask that our worship may be acceptable in Your sight, O God. Fill us with joy as we read Your Word, and cause us to seek Your glory as we

 to it with faith and obedience. To You, the only true God, be blessing, honour, glory and power forever. Through the Name of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ we pray this, amen.

**Hymn                         Blest be the tie that binds**by ***John Fawcett***

<https://youtu.be/hVGE2R2wq5w>

Blest be the tie that binds

Our hearts in Christian love;

The fellowship of kindred minds

Is like to that above.

Before our Father’s throne

We pour our ardent prayers;

Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,

Our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes,

Our mutual burdens bear,

And often for each other flows

The sympathising tear.

When for a while we part,

This thought will soothe our pain,

That we shall still be joined in heart,

And hope to meet again.

This glorious hope revives

Our courage by the way,

While each in expectation lives,

And longs to see the day.

From sorrow, toil, and pain,

And sin we shall be free;

And perfect love and friendship reign

Through all eternity.

**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 Readings                   Exodus 19:1-9**

On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord.And the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.”

**1 Peter 2:1-12**

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation - if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

**Reflection**

In the Bible, God’s people are described in a number of different ways. Sometimes it is a positive picture of what God has called or made them to be, whereas on other occasions the language is that of criticism and rebuke. What all of these descriptions reveal to us, though, is the fact that God relates to us together, at least some of the time. Yes, we are all given the gift of faith to believe in Jesus as individuals, but more often the Bible talks about us as one people, rather than many individuals. We are called a building, a body and a bride, amongst many other things, but in our Bible readings today the focus is on us being a holy, or chosen, people and a kingdom of priests.

In our first reading, from the book of Exodus, God speaks to Moses and instructs him to proclaim a message to the people. God reminds the people that it is He who has brought them up out of the land of slavery (Egypt), and if they will obey Him then He will love and protect them. He will make the Israelites a “treasured possession”, “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6). This is such a wonderful promise that God made to His people, but we should note that it is dependant upon their behaviour, or obedience. If the Israelites will do this, then God would fulfil His promise.

In theory this sounds great, but we know that there was a bumpy ride ahead for the Israelites. They agreed that they would do what God asked of them (v.8), but all too soon they grumbled against God and Moses, disobeyed His commands and this resulted in them wandering through the desert for 40 years. Disobedience to God has consequences, and that is still true today. By His grace and mercy they are not eternal consequences if we have faith in His Son, Jesus, but in this world there will be natural consequences to doing wrong. If we steal something that belongs to someone else we will likely be arrested, fined and sent to prison – these are examples of natural consequences of disobedience. However, if we ask God’s forgiveness and repent of our sin He will forgive us and save us to eternal life.

Thankfully, because of Jesus, we can reap the rewards of the promise that God made to His people, Israel. Jesus was perfectly obedient to God’s law, and fulfilled the covenant between God and man. We are therefore promised that we will be God’s treasured possession, whom He will love, care for and protect. We are also called to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation”. We see this language repeated in our New Testament reading from Peter’s first letter. He writes, “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (1 Peter 2:9) Note how Peter describes this as a present reality for those who are in Christ. Through Jesus, or built on the foundation of Jesus, we are already a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

So what does it mean for us to be these things? Firstly, it shows us that we are all equal in the sight of God. We have different roles and gifts that God has given to us, but no one is more important than any other in the Church (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-31). God, through the writing of Peter, does not say that some of us are priests, but rather He says that we are collectively a priesthood of all believers in Christ. We are called royal and holy, too, neither of which we are humanly speaking. Again, it is because of what Jesus has done on our behalf that we can be called holy and royal – children of God the King. Peter also reminds us that there is a purpose to this, and that is to bring glory to God!

Ultimately both Moses and Peter are talking about the Church, because it is the Church that is the people of God now. We are all children of Abraham by faith, and because of this we are counted as spiritual Israel by God. The Church’s first priority is to God and to His commands. By doing this we are bringing glory to God, and that is God’s ultimate purpose. Peter also makes it clear that your new identity in Jesus has practical consequences that we need to work out. He writes, “I urge you… to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable” (vv.11-12). Holiness is practical and needs to be lived out through the power of the Holy Spirit within us. God has transformed us and calls us to witness to Him and to the Gospel, all to His glory! Amen!

**Prayer**

Loving Heavenly Father we thank You for including us as Your chosen servants, called and sanctified. Enable us, in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of the Lord Jesus, to be good and faithful witnesses to You each day. May You be glorified and exulted in our lives, and in all that we say and do, may we sing forth Your eternal praises and glory, from this day forward and for evermore. Heavenly Father, thank You for Your goodness and grace to both Israel and to the Church. None of us deserve Your grace and yet You reached down from heaven and lifted us up into heavenly places - and we have become one in Christ. Help us to walk worthy before You all the days of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

**Benediction**

Heavenly Father, we thank You for making us Your treasured possession, a royal priesthood and a holy nation in Christ Jesus. We thank You for Your grace and mercy towards us in Your Son, and we ask that You would send us out in the power of Your Spirit to live and serve You day by day, all to Your praise and glory! In Jesus’ Name we ask this, amen.