**Home Service Sheet 23rd July 2023**

**Call To Worship                 Psalm 97:1-6**

The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice;
    let the many coastlands be glad!
Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
    righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
Fire goes before him
    and burns up his adversaries all around.
His lightnings light up the world;
    the earth sees and trembles.
The mountains melt like wax before the Lord,
    before the Lord of all the earth.

The heavens proclaim his righteousness,
    and all the peoples see his glory.

**Opening Prayer**

The whole of creation proclaims Your glory, O God, and we, Your people, wish to add our voices in praise of You! Everything comes from You, and You have placed it under the rule of Your Son. All of creation points us to You and Your salvation. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on You, the Creator, Sustainer and Ruler of all things. In Your grace and mercy You have offered us forgiveness from our sins through faith in the death of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and for that we thank You and praise You. May we listen closely to Your Word so that we may respond with faith and obedience and bring You the glory You deserve. In Jesus’ Name we ask this, amen.

**Hymn                                     The God of Abraham praise**by ***Thomas Olivers***

<https://youtu.be/OvTgzJ2nZGo>

The God of Abraham praise, who reigns enthroned above;

Ancient of everlasting days, and God of love.

Jehovah, great I AM, by earth and heaven confessed;

I bow and bless the sacred Name, forever blest.

The God of Abraham praise, at whose supreme command

From earth I rise and seek the joys at His right hand.

I all on earth forsake, its wisdom, fame, and power;

And Him my only portion make, my shield and tower.

He by Himself hath sworn, I on His oath depend,

I shall, on eagle’s wings upborne, to heaven ascend;

I shall behold His face, I shall His power adore,

And sing the wonders of His grace forevermore.

The whole triumphant host give thanks to God on high;

“Hail, Father, Son and Holy Ghost!” they ever cry.

Hail, Abraham’s God and mine! I join the heavenly lays;

All might and majesty are Thine, and endless praise.

**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                     Colossians 1:15-23**

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creationunder heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

**Reflection**

The world in which we live is quite different from the one in which the Apostle Paul lived, wrote letters and ministered. Languages have changed, cultures have changed, and so too have forms of government. Even so, much has remained the same, such as the ability of human beings to find many wrong and sinful ways to live in open rebellion against God. We may not face the same threats to our lives that Paul and the early Church faced as a result of pagan empires opposed to the Gospel, but we still face the same kinds of temptations and opposition that originates with the evil one. However, over and above all this and everything else is Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

Paul’s letter to the Colossians contains many of the same themes as his letter to the church in Ephesus, and so we should not be surprised to find that our Bible reading today is similar to what we have recently heard in Ephesians 1. Jesus is presented to us as the ‘firstborn of all creation’ who is the head of the Church and all created things. In other words, everything is under the reign and authority of Jesus, including governments and rulers. We know from the Bible that we are to obey governments, kings and laws of the land (Romans 13:1-5), but there are limits to this. If there is a conflict between obeying God and obeying the law we are to obey God first, but expect to face consequences for disobeying human authorities in the here and now. This is the order of creation that we see in our Bible reading today. Jesus comes first and our allegiance to Him must be our priority.

To expand slightly on what Paul writes, without Jesus nothing that exists would exist (John 1:3). It was through Jesus that the world was made, and it was for His benefit too. To think of the world without Jesus is basically impossible, and to remember this should help us to live out our lives more focused on Him. Paul writes in verse 19 that in Jesus “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”. Jesus is presented to us here as fully God, in whose human body everything of God lived. Here we are getting into one of those hard to understand areas of theology. God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all God, and yet they are separate Persons with different roles and attributes. Yet in each Person there is the God-ness that unites all three together.

Paul goes on to explain the purpose for Jesus coming to earth in human form. It was at the cross, through the shedding of His blood, that Jesus reconciled all things to Himself. He brought an end to the gaping chasm between God and the creation that happened at the Fall, when Adam disobeyed God. Sin could now be forgiven as Jesus had paid the price, but this is only potentially so until or unless someone has faith in Christ. It is at that moment of faith that God’s forgiveness is realised and applied. Our Bible reading also hints that creation will ultimately be restored to how God intended it to be, although this will not be completed until Jesus returns.

Paul continues by making it clear where believers stand with God through the completed work of Christ on our behalf. We are reconciled to God and presented to the Father as perfect because we are in Christ. This does not mean that we will stop sinning completely yet, but it does mean that we are counted as sinless by God. Nonetheless, this is not an excuse to carry on as we were before we believed in Jesus. Paul writes in verse 23, “if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard”. The ‘if’ here suggests that this is a matter of choice, or free will, as to whether we continue to live out our faith day by day or not.

So what does it mean for us to ‘continue in the faith’? Firstly it is an ongoing and consistent pattern or habit that we consciously practise. Thankfully we are not left to our own devices with this as the Spirit of God helps us to live right. Even so, there is still a responsibility for us to do our part in living this way. Secondly it points us to the Christian life of faith, by which we are to live according to the law of God. Yes, our sins have been forgiven and we have been reconciled to God the Father, but we are still to live in the way that God’s Word lays out for us, as our Lord Jesus also taught His disciples. Christians do not simply believe in Jesus but keep on living just like everyone else around them – they are transformed by Jesus. The best way to keep on in the faith is to read the Word and pray – things we should be doing at least daily. This is our response to God’s grace and mercy laid out in the Gospel, and by living this way we proclaim Jesus as Lord. Amen!

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the glorious truth that in Christ alone our hope is found, and that by His death and Resurrection, we have an assurance that we too will be raised to life again from the dead. Thank You that by grace through faith in Him, we have been given His right standing before You and have been made anew in Christ. We pray that You would keep Your Church pure, and empower her to faithfully proclaim the Gospel. May those who hear Your Word of grace receive the gift of faith from Your Holy Spirit, and be added to the number of Your people. Help us to be courageous in sharing the Good News with friends, family and others. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

**Benediction**

Heavenly Father, thank You that our salvation, sanctification, and glorification, does not depend on what we do but rather on what Christ has already done for us at the cross. Thank You Lord Jesus that You have promised to build Your Church and will one day present us all to the Father in heaven as a glorious Church, without spot, wrinkle, or any fault. Fill us afresh you’re your Holy Spirit that we might live out our lives according to Your ways. In Jesus’ Name we ask this, amen.