Home Service Sheet 27th August 2023

Call To Worship Psalm 133:1-3

Behold, how good and pleasant it is

 when brothers dwell in unity!

It is like the precious oil on the head,

 running down on the beard,

on the beard of Aaron,

 running down on the collar of his robes!

It is like the dew of Hermon,

 which falls on the mountains of Zion!

For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,

 life forevermore.

Opening Prayer

Loving and gracious God, we thank You and praise You today for inviting us to become one together with You in and through Your Son, Jesus. In sharing true Christian unity we reflect the unity that there is within the Godhead, and represent You to the people around us. May we bring You the glory that You deserve through the lives that we live. Help us to listen carefully to Your Word today, and by Your Spirit enable us to put into practice all that You will teach us from Your Word. This we ask in Jesus’ Name, amen.

Hymn The Church’s one foundation by S J Stone

https://youtu.be/w1YBYrJ8Hzg

The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;

She is His new creation by water and the Word:

From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride;

With His own blood He bought her and for her life He died.

Elect from every nation, yet one o’er all the earth,

Her charter of salvation - one Lord, one faith, one birth;

One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,

And to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.

‘Mid toil and tribulation and tumult of her war,

She waits the consummation of peace forevermore;

Till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,

And the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One,

And mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won;

O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we,

Like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with Thee.

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 2:11-18

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands - remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Reflection

Today we are going to be continuing our walk through Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. You will likely notice that our reading today stops before the end of the chapter, and that is because there is so much to think about in those last few verses, so we will be looking at that separately another time soon. In some Bible translations this section has the heading of, “one in Christ”. In other words, this is at least partially about true Christian Unity, and where that comes from. Certainly it is something that was very important to Jesus as we see from His prayer that we can find in John’s Gospel, chapter 17. Amongst all that Jesus prays on the night He was arrested, He prays that all who follow Him would be one, just as He and the Father are one.

Paul puts it slightly differently in verse 16 of our reading today. He writes that God has reconciled “us both to God in one body through the cross”. The ‘us’ here is the circumcised (Jewish believers in Jesus) and the uncircumcised (Gentile believers in Jesus). Paul is saying that Jesus has made us one body of believers through His death on the cross. From God setting apart the people of Israel from all other peoples there was a difference dividing Jews and Gentiles. This had an outward sign in the body of male Jews – circumcision. This quite literally set them apart from Gentile men, and was a sign of the covenant agreement that God had made with Israel.

Elsewhere Paul writes about the circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:28-29), which is the spiritual sign of God’s covenant with all believers in Christ regardless of their ethnic origin, sex or social status (Galatians 3:28). In Christ, anyone can be one of God’s people regardless of whether they have any outer signs of His covenant agreement or not. Although there was a time when simply being Gentile excluded us from God’s family, that time ended at the cross. Paul writes in verse 13, “now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” No longer is it our blood that must be shed at circumcision, but rather it is the blood of Jesus that was shed for us, that our sins might be forgiven.

In fact, Paul goes even further by showing us that Jesus is our peace (v.14). Although we were enemies of God, Jesus has stood in the gap between us and the Father and has acted in our behalf so that we might have peace with the Father because of what He has done at Calvary. This is not simply the kind of peace that this world strives for, which is simply an absence of war and strife. This is much deeper and more profound than anything like this. Jesus brings about peace between God and us, and peace between all of us who are in Christ Jesus.

Paul goes on to explain that one of the things that separated Jews from Gentiles was the law and the following of it. That is not to say that the law is abolished, because it is not. However, Jesus fulfilled the law, which we could never perfectly keep, and put both Jews and Gentiles on the exact same footing. Whether we are Jewish or Gentile we can only be saved through faith in Jesus. Again, both Jew and Gentile are then empowered and called to do the good works that God has already prepared for us to do to His glory. As non-believers see that we are all one in Christ Jesus, they may be drawn to faith in Christ also.

Where there is true Christian unity that is based upon the truth God has revealed to us in His Word, there will be fellowship and love for another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We all receive the same Holy Spirit of God who will lead us into all truth. It is the same Spirit who grants to us the gift of faith in Christ, and it is He who illumines the meaning of the Scriptures to us so that we know how we should live as God’s people. It is also this same Spirit who grants us access to our Father in heaven. There is only one true Holy Spirit if God, and it is He who inspires us to bring glory to Jesus by granting us unity and fellowship with one another. May we live in accordance with the work of the Spirit within us, amen.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise Your name for Your perfect plan of salvation, which You brought about through the life, death and resurrection of Your only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. We thank You too, O Lord, that in Christ You have united both Jew and Gentile into one Body through His redeeming work on the cross. May we be one in You, even as Jesus revealed that You and He are one, united in the truth of the Gospel. We ask that as others see our true unity and how we love one another, may they be prompted by Your Holy Spirit to ask the reason for our hope, so that we have the privilege of sharing the Gospel with them. This we ask to the honour and glory of Your holy name, amen.

Benediction

Heavenly Father, we thank You that Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, paid the full price for our sin and willingly gave up His life so that we might live with You for eternity. We thank You also that today He is in heaven interceding for us, whilst Your indwelling Holy Spirit is at work within us. Remind us today of Your love, grace and mercy that we might be ever thankful to You. In Jesus' name we ask this, amen.