Home Service Sheet 29th October 2023

Call To Worship  Psalm 20:1-9

May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble!

    May the name of the God of Jacob protect you!

May he send you help from the sanctuary

    and give you support from Zion!

May he remember all your offerings

    and regard with favour your burnt sacrifices! Selah

May he grant you your heart's desire

    and fulfil all your plans!

May we shout for joy over your salvation,

    and in the name of our God set up our banners!

May the Lord fulfil all your petitions!

Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed;

    he will answer him from his holy heaven

    with the saving might of his right hand.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses,

    but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

They collapse and fall,

    but we rise and stand upright.

O Lord, save the king!

    May he answer us when we call.

Opening Prayer

You, O Lord, are our strength and shield. You are our very present help in times of trouble. If we look to You and listen to Your Word we will be secure for eternity, and for that we thank You. Help us to trust in You, rather than the things of this world so that we will find Your strength for this life. Gracious God, You are worthy to receive all praise, glory, blessing and honour for all things have come from You and all are Yours. You have blessed us with so many good gifts and have graciously given us Your Son that our sins can be forgiven. Father, we thank You for Your love, mercy and grace by which we are adopted into Your family. Help us to live as Your people and to Your glory this day and forevermore, amen.

Hymn A Mighty Fortress by Martin Luther

<https://youtu.be/zhMFifugZ8o?si=i7ds3Nn11PGGbPGc>

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;

Our Helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing

For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe,

His craft and pow’r are great, and, armed with cruel hate;

On earth is not his equal!

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,

Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God’s own choosing.

Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He,

The Lord of hosts His name, from age to age the same,

And He must win the battle.

And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.

The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him,

His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure;

One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;

The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth.

Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also.

The body they may kill; God’s truth abideth still

His kingdom is forever.

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 2 Kings 2:15-25

Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him opposite them, they said, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. And they said to him, “Behold now, there are with your servants fifty strong men. Please let them go and seek your master. It may be that the Spirit of the Lord has caught him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley.” And he said, “You shall not send.” But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, “Send.” They sent therefore fifty men. And for three days they sought him but did not find him. And they came back to him while he was staying at Jericho, and he said to them, “Did I not say to you, ‘Do not go’?”

Now the men of the city said to Elisha, “Behold, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees, but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful.” He said, “Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it.” So they brought it to him. Then he went to the spring of water and threw salt in it and said, “Thus says the Lord, I have healed this water; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it.” So the water has been healed to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke.

He went up from there to Bethel, and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, “Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!” And he turned around, and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the Lord. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys. From there he went on to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

Luke 4:24-30

And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.

Reflection

Change is often difficult for people to accept. In a sense that is a theme that we find in both of our Bible readings today, firstly as God has taken the prophet Elijah to be with Himself and anointed Elisha to succeed him. In our New Testament reading Jesus has just announced His Messiahship in the synagogue at Nazareth, and the Jewish people have not taken it well. All of us have our routines and expectations of daily life, and when that is disrupted by change we can become confused, angry and upset. It’s quite a natural human response because our foundation for life has been removed and this unsettles us.

In the time of Elijah and Elisha there were other prophets, but in our reading today we see them failing to understand what God had done. They recognised that God had chosen Elisha and saw that the Holy Spirit now rested upon him. However, they could not understand what had happened to Elijah so they insisted on going to look for him, despite Elisha telling them that God had taken him directly to be with Him. This was beyond their understanding, but after three days of fruitless searching they realised that Elijah had indeed gone. Perhaps they should have simply accepted the word of the new prophet, Elisha?

Elisha further demonstrates that he is God’s prophet by performing a miracle with the water supply at Jericho. The word that he spoke, that God had given to him, came to pass. With this evidence provided everyone should have realised that Elisha was God’s man and so was not to be trifled with. However, some local youths thought otherwise. In perhaps one of the oddest incidents recorded for us in the Old Testament they see him and shout abuse at him – ‘Buzz off, baldy!’ to paraphrase verse 23. This showed great disrespect for Elisha, but more than that it was disrespect towards God who had called and equipped Elisha as a prophet. There were to be dire consequences for these young men, as we read that following Elisha cursing them, they were torn apart by bears!

So what are we to learn from this strange passage of Scripture? First of all, we are to believe the Word of God. God spoke to His people Israel through the prophets in times past, and then through His Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). By doubting His Word, we are doubting God, and ultimately this leads to destruction, if not in this life, then certainly at the judgment (see John 3:18-19). Secondly, it points us towards the need to treat God with respect and reverence. God is truly awesome and to be feared because He is the Creator of this world for whom nothing is impossible. Psalm 20 reminds us of how we should live, contrasting it with the foolish ways of others, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.” (Psalm 20:7-8)

In our New Testament reading we find the Jewish men of Nazareth refusing to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They had seen Him grow up and knew Him as the son of Joseph the carpenter (although we know better). How could this man be the Messiah? They were offended by Him and what He has said to them. In response they tried to carry out their own kind of mob justice by throwing Him off a cliff, but this was not the right time for Jesus to die. Again, the people of Israel were rejecting the very Word of God. It’s a pattern we see throughout Scripture with only a faithful remnant of the people recognising what God was doing and faithfully embracing that. That is what the two examples Jesus mentions show us.

In the face of change and the unexpected we need to put our trust in God and His Word. Time and again He has proved Himself through the signs performed by His prophets and His Son. He had shown Himself to be trustworthy by perfectly fulfilling the prophetic words He had given to His servants, the prophets. The key for us is to look in the right place for our foundation in life. People today may not be looking to horses and chariots for their security, but they might look to family, friends, governments or money. They are just as unreliable in the end. Instead, we need to place our trust in the one solid foundation, Jesus Christ, and by doing so we have all we need to face change or anything else this world might throw at us. Amen.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for keeping us safe and secure in Your Son, Jesus Christ. We thank You for enabling us to trust in Him and enter into eternal life as Your children. Today we pray for those who are not yet believing in Christ for salvation. May You work in their hearts and minds by Your Spirit to grant to them the gift of faith by which they may be saved. Help us as Your people to be gracious and constant in our witness for You. Build Your Church, Lord Jesus, and empower us to always seek Your glory. We pray too for our world and for those who are going through tough times. We ask Your healing for those who are unwell, Your strength for those who are weak and Your direction for those who are confused. For ourselves, O Lord, we pray that You would help us to be aware of Your presence with us and grant us the strength to help those in need. This we ask in the Name of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, amen.

Benediction

Almighty God, send us out today trusting in Your holy Name. May we be filled with Your grace, love and peace that others may also be drawn to trust in You. In Jesus’ Name we ask this, amen.