**Home Service Sheet Sunday 3rd December 2023 (Advent Sunday)**

**Call to Worship:**                  **Psalm 80:1-7**

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
    you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.
   Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,
stir up your might
    and come to save us!

Restore us, O God;
    let your face shine, that we may be saved!

O Lord God of hosts,
    how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
You have fed them with the bread of tears
    and given them tears to drink in full measure.
You make us an object of contention for our neighbors,
    and our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts;
    let your face shine, that we may be saved!

**Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank You and praise You for being with us through the best and worst of times alike. Your faithfulness knows no end, and Your love goes beyond our understanding. You stand above all other beings, alone worthy of praise and glory! Help us today to recognise You as the one true God who has created all things. Remind us of Your grace, mercy and love for us that You demonstrated so clearly through the coming of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. May You truly be enthroned on the praises of Your people today. In Jesus’ Name we ask this, amen.

amen!

**Hymn                                     Come Thou long-expected Jesus**by ***Charles Wesley***

<https://youtu.be/WBGx_4PxO3g?si=DJtSop1M81X87Nwv>

1)    Come, Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee.

2)    Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

3)    Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious Kingdom bring.

4)    By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne.

**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                     1 Corinthians 1:3-9**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**4**I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, **5**that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge - **6**even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you -  **7**so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, **8**who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9**God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Reflection**

The early church in Corinth was possibly the most mixed up and problem filled of all the fellowships we learn about in the New Testament. Between the two letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that have been preserved for us in Scripture, he addresses issues of belief, practice, moral failings and disorderly worship gatherings. To find so many different causes for concern in one church fellowship seems to have been unusual, and yet because of this the Biblical letters give us really helpful teaching on how to deal with all kinds of issues in the Church today. If the Corinthians got through that with God’s help then we can too!

In these opening verses of this letter Paul writes about God’s generosity in giving good gifts to His people, expressing heartfelt thanks to God for all that He has given. Paul also gives us a hint about what is to come, and why we need to be patient and wait for God. In verses 7 and 8 he wrote, “you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is very much in keeping with the central theme of Advent Sunday – the return of Jesus. However, it also gives us a helpful pointer about how to cope with the waiting before Jesus returns.

Paul clearly wrote, following the teachings of the Lord Jesus, that Jesus could return to the earth at any moment. Yet, we are the best part of 2000 years on from that date and as yet the Lord has not returned to judge. The reality is that although Jesus may return today or tomorrow, it could still be another 1000 years or more. With that kind of waiting involved we need patience and perseverance. If we know what time someone is coming to visit us at home we know when to get the kettle filled up and the biscuits out on a plate. However, if they’ve simply said they call in at some point then it’s much more difficult to be as ready.

Paul reassures us that Jesus will sustain us to the end. In other words, He will be with us, strengthening and supporting us until He returns to rule. The Scriptures give us quite a few details about what to expect before He returns and, to summarise, it isn’t all going to be plain sailing! There will be persecution of God’s people, natural disasters and false teachers in the Church trying to lead people astray. Yet, if we remain steadfast in following Jesus, with His help, then we do not need to worry. Everything will turn out well in the end when Jesus establishes His Kingdom.

We can also be comforted by what Paul reminds us about in verse 9. He writes that “God is faithful”. He is consistent and can be fully trusted to do exactly what He has said He will do. As Christians we have a sure and certain hope for the future precisely because God is faithful and cannot lie. He has revealed to us some wondrous glimpses of the world to come through His Word and this should fill us with joyful anticipation. The Apostle Paul writes elsewhere of His desire to be with the Lord rather than here on earth. If you think that friendships and love shared here on earth are good (and they certainly can be) then life with God is going to be so much greater still!

Having said that, there are still things for us to be doing here and now before Jesus returns. We have been given gifts and been equipped by the Holy Spirit for works of service as members of His Church. Let us seek to use those gifts with which He has blessed us, whether they be ones of encouragement, hospitality, administration, preaching or whatever else they may be. There is still time for people to come to faith in Christ before it is too late for them, so let us continue to proclaim the wonderful truth of the Gospel, with the help of the Spirit. Amen!

**Prayer**

Gracious Father, thank You for enriching us in all possible ways, in Christ Jesus our Lord. May Your Spirit help us to live in ways that are pleasing to You in all that we say and do so that Your name is glorified in us. Father God, we confess that we could not even draw another breath without Your strength. Thank You that You have covered us with Your Son’s righteousness, for His name's sake, and have promised to keep and sustain us through every season of life, until we stand in His presence and are presented to You as blameless. Enable all of Your people to finish the work You have given us to do, for Your praise and glory. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

**Benediction**

Heavenly Father, thank You that You are a faithful God, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Thank You that You have called us into fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. May we live to His praise and glory, day by day. In Jesus' Name we pray, amen.