**Home Service Sheet For 5th May 2024**

**Call to Worship:**                  **Psalm 98:1-6**

Oh sing to the Lord a new song,
    for he has done marvellous things!
His right hand and his holy arm
    have worked salvation for him.
The Lord has made known his salvation;
    he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.
He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
    to the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen
    the salvation of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
    break forth into joyous song and sing praises!
Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
    with the lyre and the sound of melody!
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
    make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord!

**Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, You alone are worthy to receive all the praise and all the glory, for You alone have created the heavens and the earth and everything in them. It is You alone who has made it possible for us to be forgiven our sins and be reconciled to You through the death of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in our place. No-one can compare with You, and there is no other Name by which we may be saved. Accept our praise and worship today, for we bring it in the Name of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus, amen.

**Hymn**                                     **Fairest Lord Jesus**(Author unknown)

<https://youtu.be/oHaciIyYH2o?si=mhvyd8ItJ_R6Dsq->

Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature, O Thou of God and man the Son;

Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honour, Thou my soul’s glory, joy, and crown.

Fair are the meadows, fairer still the woodlands, robed in the blooming garb of spring;

Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer, who makes the woeful heart to sing.

Fair is the sunshine, fairer still the moonlight and all the twinkling, starry host;

Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer than all the angels heaven can boast

Beautiful Savior, Lord of the nations, Son of God and Son of Man!

Glory and honor, Praise, adoration, now and forevermore be Thine!

**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                     Acts 9:1-19**

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.”And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.”But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;and taking food, he was strengthened.

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

**Reflection**

Our reading today covers the ‘conversion’, or perhaps illumination, of a zealous young Pharisee named Saul. Earlier in the book of Acts we are introduced to this man as someone who looked after the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen to death (Acts 7:58). At the beginning of chapter 8 we hear more about Saul’s acts of persecution, in which he was directly involved in dragging off men and women to prison. Persecuting the early Church was seemingly Paul’s main purpose in life, not because of any desire for an easy life with the Romans, but rather because he believed that Christians were spreading lies about the true God.

At the beginning of our reading today, we read that Saul was seeking permission to continue his persecution as far away as Damascus. This was a journey of over 130 miles from Jerusalem to Damascus, and due to the conditions, the journey would likely have taken at least three days, if not four. Saul’s enthusiasm was great and undoubtedly his reputation preceded him wherever he went in his quest to persecute Christians. Thankfully we live in a time and place where persecution against Christians is not as severe, although there are signs that things are beginning to get much worse for those who proclaim and live by Biblical principles.

Saul travelled towards Damascus, but before he arrived, he had a very strange encounter on the road. Luke describes this as follows, “suddenly a light from heaven shone around him… falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Vv.3-4) This is not an everyday occurrence, and Saul could do nothing about it! One moment he was travelling with a clear destination and purpose, the next he found himself on the ground, both blinded and blind-sided by a voice from heaven. His conversation with this voice must have both shocked and terrified him. Jesus revealed Himself to Saul and told him to wait for further instructions in Damascus.

It’s interesting to note that Saul neither questioned the voice nor tried to argue with it. Instead, he did as he was instructed, as those travelling with him led him into the city. We must remember that this is a description of what happened to Saul, and not a pattern we should expect to be repeated today. Having said that, Jesus continues to reveal Himself to people through the Scriptures, the faithful preaching of them and proclamations of the Gospel. There are still people coming to believe in Christ each and every day, having their sins forgiven and entering into eternal life. Saul is described as being unable to see for three days and not eating. His encounter with the Lord Jesus clearly had a profound effect upon him that would change his life forever.

So how did God speak to Saul and commission him to proclaim the Gospel that he had been persecuting people for believing and speaking about? Interestingly, God used a local Christian believer named Ananias, who, at first, was decidedly skeptical and afraid to approach Saul. He knew about Saul’s history and reputation, so it’s easy to imagine why he would be reluctant to go and find this great persecutor of the Church. God, however, spoke these words to Ananias, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.” (V.15) This shows us that God is in control and can do exactly what He wants to do. In other words, you can’t argue with God!

Ananias obeyed God, went to find Saul, and was used by God to restore his sight. Saul, the great persecutor of God’s Church, would go on to become one of the strongest Christian missionaries and would write many of the books found in the New Testament. What is impossible with humanity, God can and will accomplish! This story of Saul should encourage us that our God can change the least likely of people, transforming their thoughts and lives. We may know people who are far away from God, but by the work of the Holy Spirit God may draw these people to Himself and cause them to share the Gospel with others. Through this God is glorified and His Church grows! This is Christ’s body, of which we are a part, and we have our part to play too. Amen.

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank You for Saul of Tarsus who was a man who recognised Who Christ truly was. We pray that if we have any false notions about Who You are, or if we are going down the wrong path that You would make known our faults and bring us to a right understanding of Who You are. Father, in Your Word, You direct us to worship You in spirit and in truth and we ask that we may do precisely this. Heavenly Father, we pray that we may know Christ and the power of His resurrection at work in us. Give us the grace to participate in the fellowship of His suffering, knowing that in this world we will face trials and tribulations, dangers and maybe death, for His Name’s sake. Thank You that the sufferings of this world are but for a moment, and that by Your grace You have promised to perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish us in Christ Jesus our Saviour. To Him be all praise and glory, amen.

**Blessing**

Faithful God, make our hearts bold with love for one another. Keep on pouring out your Spirit upon all Your people, that we may live in accordance with Your ways and sing Your and proclaim Your glory. Amen.

Attachments area

[Preview YouTube video Fairest Lord Jesus (Hymn 107) - Phil Webb and the Grace Community Church Congregation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHaciIyYH2o&authuser=0" \t "_blank)

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