**Home Service Sheet 8th October 2023**

**Call To Worship                 John 15:1-5**

Listen to the words of our Lord Jesus, who said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

**Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank You and praise You for making Yourself known to us and for opening up the way of salvation to us. In Your love, You created this world and everything in it, and by Your grace You stepped into this world in the Person of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Through His death and resurrection You paid the price for our sin that we might be forgiven and reconciled to You. Lord, You have called us to abide in You so that we might become part of Your family, and for that we thank You. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and our lives in step with Your Word, as Your Holy Spirit helps us to understand it. May we live to Your praise and glory today and every day, amen.

**Hymn                                     Abide with me**by ***Henry Francis Lyte***

<https://youtu.be/NTT5HGSaO-Y?si=nTqgls9BSFaLXriA>

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.  
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.  
  
Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see;  
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

I need Thy presence every passing hour.  
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?  
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?  
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.  
  
I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;  
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.  
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?  
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.  
  
Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.  
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;  
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

**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                     Joshua 7:1-15**

But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel.

Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, “Go up and spy out the land.” And the men went up and spied out Ai.And they returned to Joshua and said to him, “Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few.” So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.

Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, “Alas, O Lord God, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan!O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?”

The Lord said to Joshua, “Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings.Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. Get up! Consecrate the people and say, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the Lord, God of Israel, “There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you.” In the morning therefore you shall be brought near by your tribes. And the tribe that the Lord takes by lot shall come near by clans. And the clan that the Lord takes shall come near by households. And the household that the Lord takes shall come near man by man. And he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel.’”

**Reflection**

Through the years of wandering in the desert between Egypt and Canaan you might think that the Israelites would have learnt the important lesson about obeying God. The first actions of the Israelites in the Promised Land give us cause for hope, as they follow God’s instructions to the letter in defeating the city of Jericho and its inhabitants. However, at the beginning of our reading today we discover that this was not entirely so. One man disobeyed God’s command to destroy certain things from Jericho, and his name was Achan. One important detail for us to note here is the fact that God’s anger burned against all of the Israelites because of the actions of one man.

At the simplest level, Achan disobeyed God and this was a sin. Sin often has consequences, and this was the case here. We read how Joshua prepared to attack the next city in Canaan, a small one called Ai. Following the advice of some spies a relatively small number of men were sent to defeat the city, but this resulted in an embarrassing defeat with over 30 Israelite deaths. What had gone wrong? We are not told that Joshua or the men did anything wrong, but we are told that this was a consequence of Achan’s sin. Nonetheless, Joshua does the right thing by humbling himself and seeking God in prayer.

Joshua’s prayer is recorded for us in some detail. His prayer recognises that God is in control and has the right to do whatever He wants to do, and yet we also hear frustration and bewilderment. Why has God brought the Israelites into this foreign land, only to be defeated and killed by the locals? As far as Joshua is aware at this point the Israelites have done nothing to provoke God to anger. However, God responds and reveals to Joshua why this terrible defeat has happened. In verse 11 we have God’s summary of the problem, “Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings.”

We are only told that one man has sinned, but this has consequences for all of the people. This is the same basic point that we are all sinners because of the sin of Adam in Eden. It is because of one man’s sin that we are separated from God, and yet from this side of the cross there is the good news that through the actions of one Man, Jesus, our sins may be forgiven and we may be reconciled to God. This points us towards God’s mercy and grace, and certainly that is also evident in our Bible reading today. Ultimately God is merciful to Israel once they deal with the individual who has disobeyed God’s command.

If you read on in Joshua chapter 7 you will find out exactly what happened to Achan. He received the punishment that his sinful actions deserved. This reminds us of the seriousness of sin, and its consequences. Thankfully for us, though, Jesus has paid the price for our sin so that we do not have to die because of our disobedience to God’s commands and the breaking of His covenant. Ultimately it is best to obey God and His commands, as the Scriptures show us time and again. The prophet Samuel spoke to King Saul after he had disobeyed God and said this, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.” (1 Samuel 15:22)

In our call to worship, from John’s Gospel, we heard Jesus emphasising the importance of abiding in God, which includes obeying His commands. However, we mustn’t forget that we are incapable of perfectly obeying God’s law. As hard as we might try to obey, we fail, and that is why we needed Jesus to die in our place and take upon Himself the burden of our sin. God’s grace and mercy are extended to us in Jesus so that we no longer have sin that pollutes us and separates us from God, as the Israelites did because of Achan’s actions. We can come to God through His Son Jesus, confess our sins and turn away from them, knowing that He will forgive us. Amen!

**Prayer**

Gracious God, we thank You for the new covenant that You have made with Your people that is sealed by the blood of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You that even though we are sinners we can be forgiven and reconciled to You. Help us Lord to seek to live in obedience to You that we may show You our love and devotion for all that You have already done for us. Enable us to share this wonderful, good news with others that they may also be reconciled with You. We pray for all those brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who have witnessed for You, and we pray that You would continue to build Your Church. We ask these things in the Name of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, amen.

**Benediction**

Loving God, fill our hearts with praise and thanksgiving today that we may we bring You the glory You deserve. Send us out in the knowledge of the love of the Father, the obedience of the Son and the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen.