**Home Service Sheet for Sunday 26th January 2025**

**Call To Worship: Jeremiah 23:1-6**

“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’

**Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, in this time of devotion help us to worship You. In the midst of our feelings and fears grant us the capacity to love You with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Help us to hear Your Word and respond to it in faith with obedience as our acceptable act of worship. Lord, we know that we have sinned against You in our actions, words and thoughts. We are truly sorry and ask now for Your forgiveness. Compassionate and Ever-Loving God, in Your mercy, remove the scales from our eyes and lead us to faith and repentance. Thank You Lord. May we rejoice now in the unity that we all share in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen!

**Hymn:**  **Blest be the tie that binds** by ***John Fawcett***

[***https://youtu.be/hVGE2R2wq5w***](https://youtu.be/hVGE2R2wq5w)

Blest be the tie that binds

Our hearts in Christian love;

The fellowship of kindred minds

Is like to that above.

Before our Father’s throne

We pour our ardent prayers;

Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,

Our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes,

Our mutual burdens bear,

And often for each other flows

The sympathising tear.

When for a while we part,

This thought will soothe our pain,

That we shall still be joined in heart,

And hope to meet again.

This glorious hope revives

Our courage by the way,

While each in expectation lives,

And longs to see the day.

From sorrow, toil, and pain,

And sin we shall be free;

And perfect love and friendship reign

Through all eternity.

**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: John 17:1-26**

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify themin the truth; your word is truth.As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctifiedin truth.

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

**Reflection**

Today’s world is one that is often marked out by division and disunity. Yes, there is war and the tensions of fighting factions in some nations, but often it goes much deeper than that. There is rivalry between sports fans and political activists, but even that is only scraping the surface. The media likes to highlight differences between peoples and report tensions over whatever is the topic of the day. Attitudes to vaccines, the colour of peoples’ skin or economic differences. Against this backdrop we are going to be thinking about unity today, and specifically Christian unity.

In our Bible reading, John records Jesus praying “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one” (v.22). Our Lord is praying for His disciples then, and throughout history, asking that they may be one as God is One. The question that this raises for me is what kind of unity is Jesus praying for. To understand this, I believe we need to back up and explore the context of His prayer. First of all we must note that Jesus prays this on the night that He was arrested, which in turn led up to His crucifixion. This is one of the last things Jesus does freely before His death for us on the cross.

Secondly, we need to look at what else He prays about. Jesus prays that the Father would glorify Him, as He had glorified His Heavenly Father. What is about to happen will happen because God has planned it that way and has a most wonderful purpose for it. Through Jesus’ death, our Lord is glorified. Jesus prays for all those whom the Father has given to Him – disciples who have heard His teaching and continued to follow Him. Verse 8 indicates that they have received Jesus’ words of truth and through them have recognised who He is – the Messiah, the Son of God. He prays for their protection from spiritual danger in this world, but not for physical protection.

Thirdly, Jesus prays “Sanctify themin the truth; your word is truth.” (v.17) I believe that this line of the prayer is particularly important and helps us to understand what kind of unity Jesus is praying for. Jesus’ unity is one that is based upon the very Word of God, or the truth. Unity that is based simply on a common name, such as ‘Christian’, is not what Jesus prays for. That is a superficial unity that plasters over the cracks without getting to the root cause of them. On many things God’s Word is very clear, and we cannot have unity with those who disagree with, or reject, that Word.

Salvation is found through faith in Jesus Christ alone, and not through Islam, Hinduism or the Mormon Church. Jesus was fully human and fully divine, born of the Virgin Mary. All sin is sin, and without God’s forgiveness and repentance humanity is rightly condemned to hell. These are core truths that we find in God’s Word. If we do not agree with the Scriptures then we cannot have unity with God, or with other Christians. In the Church of England a creed is recited each week in church services, and this contains many of those essential Gospel truths around which we can unite as God’s chosen people.

We should also note that the truth of God’s Word also makes us holy. If we hear it, understand it, believe it and obey it we are made more and more holy. We, as God’s people, are called to be a holy people, dedicated to the One holy God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has created us and knows what is best for us. If we will listen and obey then true Gospel unity is something that will increase amongst us. Another aspect of true Christian unity is that it leads to evangelism. Other people will see the unity we have in Christ, listen to the Gospel message of truth and come to believe for themselves. Through this the whole Church will grow.

Finally the unity for which Jesus prays is not simply for this life. “Father, I desire that they also… may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” (v.24) This prayer is for all eternity, and through the answering of this prayer we are made family in Jesus. We are all connected together as members of God’s family through the Gospel of truth and grace. Let us celebrate true Christian unity, and be encouraged that we are all family because of what Jesus has done for us at the cross. Amen!

**Pastoral Prayer**

Gracious God, we come before You wanting to echo the prayer of Your Son, the Lord Jesus, in the garden of Gethsemane. Just as You are One, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, may we all be one with You. Lead us all into Your truth of the Gospel so that we may be united around the core of the faith. We pray for all teachers and preachers of Your Word, asking that You would keep them faithful to the Gospel truth, relying on You rather than on human wisdom alone. Help each of us, as Your people, to listen with discernment, comparing what is said in Your Name with what we read in Your Word. May we also proclaim the truth of the Gospel to friends, neighbours and family, that through our witness others may come to a true knowledge of You and love for You. This we ask in Jesus’ Name, and for His glory, amen.

**Benediction**

Heavenly Father, send us out now to live as Your children of light in this dark world. May the fruit of the light of Christ be found in all that we do and say. This we pray in Jesus’ Name, amen!