**Home Service Sheet Sunday 10th December 2023**

**Call to Worship:**                  **Psalm 85:1-7**

Lord, you were favorable to your land;  
    you restored the fortunes of Jacob.  
You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
    you covered all their sin.  
You withdrew all your wrath;  
    you turned from your hot anger.

Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
    and put away your indignation toward us!  
Will you be angry with us forever?  
    Will you prolong your anger to all generations?  
Will you not revive us again,  
    that your people may rejoice in you?  
Show us your steadfast love, O Lord,  
    and grant us your salvation.

**Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we praise You and thank You for opening up to us the way of salvation. In Your loving kindness, grace and mercy You sent Your only Son, the Lord Jesus, into this world. Through His death on the cross You have brought us reconciliation to You through faith in Him, and for that we give You our thanks. Help us, Lord, to follow You more closely each day that we may become evermore like Him in our words and deeds. May our lives be focused on bringing You the praise and glory You deserve. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

**Hymn                                     O come, O come, Emmanuel**by unknown

<https://youtu.be/kKu0or0t8Uw?si=38cfmFFGvqujjB9m>

O come, O come, Em­manuel,  
And ran­som cap­tive Is­ra­el,  
That mourns in lone­ly ex­ile here  
Until the Son of God ap­pear.

***Rejoice! Re­joice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Is­ra­el.***

O come, Thou Rod of Jes­se, free  
Thine own from Sa­tan’s tyr­an­ny;  
From depths of hell Thy peo­ple save  
And give them vic­to­ry ov­er the grave.

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer  
Our spir­its by Thine ad­vent here;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death’s dark sha­dows put to flight.

O come, Thou Key of Da­vid, come,  
And op­en wide our heav­en­ly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path of mi­se­ry.

O come, O come, great Lord of might,  
Who to Thy tribes on Si­nai’s height  
In an­cient times didst give the law  
In cloud and ma­jes­ty and awe.

**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                     Mark 1:1-8**

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,  
    who will prepare your way,  
the voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
    ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
    make his paths straight,’”

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

**Reflection**

When does the Gospel of Jesus Christ begin? It’s perhaps not quite as straightforward a question as we might first think. Does it begin with the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, or does it stretch back to the messages God gave to the prophets regarding the promised Messiah? Maybe we need to go back even further to a time before God created the heavens and the Earth and everything in them. Given that God rules over all things and plans everything out from the beginning, He must have known that He would send His Son to save the world even before He created it, and so the Gospel begins as far back as it is possible to go.

In our Bible reading today Mark begins his account of the Gospel with John the baptiser who fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah. John came to get the world ready for the ministry of Jesus by proclaiming a message of repentance. Sadly, this is something that is often missed out of many ‘gospel’ presentations today. What is repentance? It is turning away from one way of living (according to sinful and worldly desires) towards another way (living in accordance with God’s ways with the help of the Holy Spirit). It is a complete change, and it happens consciously. Repentance requires us to recognise that how we used to live was sinful and wrong. It also means that we now want to change.

The Gospel is not simply that God loves us, although of course He does. It is also not just that Jesus died to pay the price for our sin and reconcile us to God the Father, though that is at the very centre of the Gospel. In order for us to receive God’s gift of salvation we must have faith in Jesus and repent of our sins. This is all part of the Gospel. If one part of this was missed out then it would not be good news for anyone. Without the love of God, Jesus would not have come to die for us. Without the death of Christ we would receive the wages of sin ourselves, which is death and hell. Without faith in Christ we could not receive eternal life, and without repentance our sins could not be forgiven.

Although John proclaimed a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, this could not be fulfilled until Jesus died on the cross. He prepared people for God’s perfect solution for humankind’s biggest problem – sin! It is sin that has driven a wedge between us and our holy God. If we continue to live in sin or, to spell it out, keep on practicing the same sins time and time again without recognising they are wrong and desiring to change, then we are truly lost. This is what Paul is talking about when he writes that certain people will not inherit the kingdom of God (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, for example). It is also what the apostle John means when he wrote “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.” (1 John 3:4)

It’s important to realise that this does not mean that we can live without sinning this side of glory. Rather it means that when we do sin, we are convicted of it, pray for forgiveness and repent (change the way we live). John spoke of confessing sins, and this is a right thing for us to do before God in prayer. There may be times when it is helpful to confess our sins to someone else so that they might help us and hold us accountable for the way that we live, but this is not essential. Confessing our sins to God is essential, because only He can forgive us from our sins.

John is quoted by Mark, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:8) This points to John recognising that he was a sinner who did not deserve to receive God’s forgiveness. All of us can only receive forgiveness because God is merciful and gracious. John also knew that his baptism only went so far, and that the baptism Jesus would bring would be different. Jesus would baptise us with the Holy Spirit, which I believe means sending the Holy Spirit to live in us to purify us and make us more like Him. It is the same Spirit who enables us to have faith in Christ and repent of our sins. Amen!

**Prayer**

Gracious Lord, thank You for Your Word and the wonderful truth that You have revealed to us through its pages. Thank You that Jesus set aside His heavenly glory and took upon Himself the humble status of Servant of all for our sake. Thank You that He paid the price for our sin - a price that we are unable to pay. We pray that we may follow in His footsteps and live in humble submission to Your Holy Spirit all the days of our lives, and only do those things that You have set out for us in Your Word. At this season of Advent help us to tell others of the coming of Jesus that they may also come to saving faith in Him. This we ask through Christ, our Lord, amen.

**Benediction**

O God our Father, who sent Your Son to redeem the world and will send Him again to be our

Judge: give us grace to imitate Him in the humility and purity of His first coming that, when He

comes again, we may be ready to greet Him with joyful love and firm faith; through Jesus Christ

our Lord, amen.