Home Service Sheet for Sunday 10th July 2022

Call To Worship:                Psalm 25:1-5

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust;
    let me not be put to shame;
    let not my enemies exult over me.
Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
    they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
    teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth and teach me,
    for you are the God of my salvation;
    for you I wait all the day long.

Opening Prayer

O Lord, our God, we give You praise and glory today for You lift us up and grant to us Your love and mercy. Heavenly Father You are faithful to us through the ages and in You we can trust forever. May You enable us to worship You as You desire today – through Your Spirit and in all truth. Lord, Your Word is truth and through it You teach us and help us to grow in faith. Help us to listen and obey You today. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

Hymn                            Now thank we all our God by Martin Rinkart
<https://youtu.be/sR6Kajdtt3M>

Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done, in whom His world rejoices;
Who, from our mothers’ arms, hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns with Them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

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:          Colossians 1:1-8

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing - as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Reflection

Over half of the books in the New Testament were written by the Apostle Paul, who had been a persecutor of the Church, but God had transformed on the road to Damascus. Today we are going to be spending time reading his letter to the church in Colossae. The city was a well-known population centre in the ancient region of Phrygia, which today is part of modern-day Turkey. It would have been a typical outlying Roman city with plenty of trade and a Roman religious flavour. As far as we know, Paul had not visited this city at the point he writes this letter, and so the people to whom he writes would only have known Paul by reputation.

Like most of the New Testament letters, Paul’s letter begins with typical greetings which tell us who was writing, and who they were writing to. Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus, who God had called to this role. He also mentions Timothy, so it is reasonable to say that he is imprisoned with Timothy when he is writing this. The Colossians Christians, in turn, are described as ‘saints’ or ‘holy ones’. That is to say that they have been made holy through their faith in Jesus Christ, as are each of us. He also calls them ‘faithful brothers in Christ’. In other words, they have remained faithful in following and obeying Jesus after their initial step of faith, and that is something to which we are also called.

Paul’s greeting to the church is “Grace to you and peace from God our Father”. We shouldn’t over analyse these kinds of greetings because they are just the First Century equivalent of “I hope this letter finds you well” or something like that. We certainly shouldn’t try to build theology from this! Instead we need to focus on the main contents of the letter which begins at verse 3. Paul is keen to show the Colossians that he has heard of them and has been praying for them with thankfulness. Verses 7 and 8 indicate that Paul has heard about them from Epaphras who had planted the church in Colossae, and the report he had heard was a positive one.

It is good to be encouraged, and that is certainly something that we find in our Bible reading today. The Colossians had heard the Gospel message, received it with joy and placed their faith in Jesus Christ. They had then continued in faith and had begun to grow and mature as Christians bearing good fruit and sharing the Gospel so that the church was growing. Perhaps we need to hear this kind of encouragement as Christians today because many of the headlines about the Church tend to be negative, or at best quite neutral. Yet, there are many positives too. We have heard the good news of Jesus and responded to that message with the faith that the Holy Spirit has gifted to us. We have been growing in faith, learning more about God through His Word, and we have been putting that into practice through the way that we live. This is good and is exactly what we are called to be like through Jesus Christ.

We can also be encouraged to thank God for one another. Paul specifically thanks God for the faith and fruit of the Colossian believers. Perhaps prayers of thanks are one of the easiest to forget when we speak to God in prayer, but these prayers are essential. We need to remember that all good gifts come from God, and its good to acknowledge that. In verse 5, Paul also draws our attention to the future hope all Christians have in Jesus. Whatever happens in this world, we have eternity with God to look forward to. Paul shows us where to look for the details of this hope too.

We are to look to “the word of the truth, the gospel”. Is this one source, or two we might wonder? The word of truth most likely is a reference to the Scriptures, and certainly the Gospel is found in God’s Word. By reading the Scriptures, understanding them with the illumining of the Holy Spirit, and obeying them we will receive all the benefits of following Christ including eternal life. By looking to God’s Word with faith and obedience we will “bear fruit and increase” (v.6). This is what the Colossian believers found to be their lived experience, and it can be ours too. The normal Christian life involves us continuing to grow in our knowledge of God and our love for God. This is what we should be seeing in our lives today as we follow Jesus. Amen!

Pastoral Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You that we have heard and responded to Your Gospel of grace and that by believing in Him, we have a hope reserved for us in heaven. May this blessed hope overflow in an unshakable trust in Your word of truth and a deep love for Your people. We pray that we also may be good and faithful servants who abide in Your love each day. May we bring forth the precious fruit of faith, love, hope and righteousness. Help us to grow in grace, and in a knowledge of You - to Your praise and glory. In Jesus' name we pray, amen!

Benediction

Gracious and Ever-Loving God, we thank You that we have heard Your Word of truth, the gospel, and we have responded to it with faith. Today may we continue to bear fruit and grow in faith and love that our lives may truly be pleasing to You. Amen.