Home Service Sheet for Sunday 15th January 2023

Call To Worship: Psalm 40:1-3

I waited patiently for the Lord;

he inclined to me and heard my cry.

He drew me up from the pit of destruction,

out of the miry bog,

and set my feet upon a rock,

making my steps secure.

He put a new song in my mouth,

a song of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear,

and put their trust in the Lord.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, as we hear the Psalmist tell us of how You rescued Him from the troubles and anxiety of this world, we also remember how You are with us through all that we face in this life. We know that we can trust in You because You hold all things in Your hands, and You know the end from the beginning. Help us to grow in our trust in You today and may we respond to all that You have done for us by faith and with love. You have placed songs of praise in our hearts and minds – enable us to express that praise each day to Your glory. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

Hymn Down in the Valley by William Cushing

https://youtu.be/lAI6ufzwHQM

1 Down in the valley with my Saviour I would go,

Where the flowers are blooming and the sweet waters flow;

Everywhere He leads me I would follow, follow on, walking in His footsteps till the crown be won.

Follow! follow! I would follow Jesus! Anywhere, everywhere, I would follow on!

Follow! follow! I would follow Jesus! Everywhere He leads me I would follow on!

2 Down in the valley with my Saviour I would go,

Where the storms are sweeping and the dark waters flow;

With His hand to lead me I will never, never fear, dangers cannot fright me if my Lord is near.

3 Down in the valley, or upon the mountain steep,

Close beside my Saviour would my heart ever keep;

He will lead me safely in the path that He has trod, up to where they gather in the rest of God.

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 1:29-42

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptising with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” 32 And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptise with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptises with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

35 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38 Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” 39 He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. 40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

Reflection

During the season of Advent we typically spend at least one Sunday focusing on God’s servant and prophet, John the Baptist. He came as the forerunner of the promised Messiah, Jesus, with a message of the coming Kingdom of God that Jesus would usher in through His life, death and resurrection. Today’s Bible reading tells us of Jesus coming to John to be baptised and the start of Jesus’ public ministry with the calling of His first disciples. Up until this point, since Jesus was born at Bethlehem, we are told very little about His life. This is mainly because there is next to nothing we need to know about it. He was born in accordance with prophecy, was obedient to the Father’s will and was without sin, and those are the details that matter.

Although John and Jesus were cousins it would seem likely that they had seen little of each other – Scripture doesn’t describe any meetings between their first meeting, while still in the wombs of their respective mothers, and Jesus’ baptism. Notice how John points others towards Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (v.29). This echoes the explanation of Jesus’ name given to Joseph by the angel, “you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21). Above all else, we need to remember that this is the main reason God sent His Son to this earth – to save us from our sins through His death on the cross.

It is clear that John understands exactly who Jesus is, and this must have been revealed to him directly by God. Not only did he know that Jesus was the Messiah, but he knew what kind of Messiah He would be, and also who He was – God in the flesh. This is the only explanation as to why John says that Jesus “was before me” (v.30). It is interesting to note how John explains how he knows Jesus is the Messiah because it points us to a wondrous fact, and that is that faith is entirely a gift of God, and not something that comes by human effort. Our salvation comes by faith, and this is completely the gracious work of God that does not rely on us.

Also in our reading today we see John pointing others towards following Jesus. In fact, two of John’s disciples become the first disciples of Jesus (vv.35-37). Like John, we should also be pointing others towards Jesus because salvation is found in no-one else. He truly is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This also shows us the continuity between the ministry and message of John and Jesus. There was no rivalry or jealousy on John’s part because he knew that he was simply following God’s will and thus would lead to the decrease of his influence and ministry as that of Jesus increased (John 3:30). It wasn’t about John, but rather it was all about Jesus. As Christians we must also recognise that life should not be centred on us but rather on the Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ.

John goes on to record for us what these two disciples first said to Jesus in verse 38, “Rabbi… where are you staying?” To us it probably seems like an odd, personal and slightly impertinent question. If someone asked us that today we’d probably be a bit worried and put off by it. However, in the First Century Jewish context this is not as strange as it might seem to us. Typically a rabbi would take on several disciples at a time and they would, in effect, live with him and follow him every hour of the day. They would learn much from watching everything he did and said, and through this they would become more like their teacher. In a sense, this is what Christian discipleship is all about – becoming ever more like Jesus in everything we do, say and think.

We can also read Jesus’ response to this question in verse 39, “Come and you will see.” The call to each of us who places our faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord is to follow Him, it to ‘come and see’. Following Jesus leads to a very different life, laying aside those things which are in opposition to God’s ways, and focusing on whatever is in keeping with God’s will. The Apostle Paul gives us some helpful practical advise about following Jesus in his letter to the church in Philippi. He writes, “whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me - practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:8-9) Following Jesus means getting to know exactly what Jesus is like and imitating Him with the help of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Prayer

Dear Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank You that whosoever will, may follow Jesus and find the answer to every question they have, in Him. Thank You that Jesus is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world, and He is the Lamb on the throne Who has secured our redemption through His sacrificial work on the Cross. Thank You for the example of John the Baptist who pointed people to Jesus and for the two disciples that discovered that He held the answer to every aching question they had. May we not only follow Jesus but point others to Him, the One in Whom are the words of eternal life. In Jesus’ Name we ask this, amen.

Benediction

Gracious God, help us to keep on following Your Son, the Lord Jesus, every day in all that we do, say and think through the direction and illumination of Your Holy Spirit. This we ask to Your praise and glory, amen.