Home Service Sheet for Sunday 19th June 2022

Call To Worship:                Psalm 44:1-8

O God, we have heard with our ears,
    our fathers have told us,
what deeds you performed in their days,
    in the days of old:
you with your own hand drove out the nations,
    but them you planted;
you afflicted the peoples,
    but them you set free;
for not by their own sword did they win the land,
    nor did their own arm save them,
but your right hand and your arm,
    and the light of your face,
    for you delighted in them.
You are my King, O God;
    ordain salvation for Jacob!
Through you we push down our foes;
    through your name we tread down those who rise up against us.
For not in my bow do I trust,
    nor can my sword save me.
But you have saved us from our foes
    and have put to shame those who hate us.
In God we have boasted continually,
    and we will give thanks to your name forever.

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, You have surrounded us with Your love and light by drawing us into relationship with You. You have revealed Yourself to us in grace and mercy through Your Son, Jesus Christ, and for that we than You and praise You. Help us to recognise Your presence with us now and throughout the days to come, we ask. May this time of worship be acceptable in Your sight and help us to understand and apply Your Word as we read it. All this we ask in Jesus’ Name and to Your glory, amen.

Hymn                            Teach me Thy way, O Lord by Benjamin Mansell Ramsey
<https://youtu.be/rZCbQFTswrs>

Teach me Thy way, O Lord, teach me Thy way!
Thy gracious aid afford, teach me Thy way!
Help me to walk aright, more by faith, less by sight;
Lead me with heavenly light: teach me Thy way!

When doubts and fears arise, teach me Thy way!
When storms o’erspread the skies, teach me Thy way!
Shine through the cloud and rain, through sorrow, toil, and pain;
Make Thou my pathway plain: teach me Thy way!

Long as my life shall last, teach me Thy way!
Where’er my lot be cast, teach me Thy way!
Until the race is run, until the journey’s done,
Until the crown is won, teach me Thy way!

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.

1st Bible Reading:              John 3:16-21

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

2nd Bible Reading:              Titus 3:1-8

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly  through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

Reflection

It is absolutely true that God loves us more than we could ever hope or imagine, and He has demonstrated His love for us so extravagantly by sending His Son Jesus to die in our place on the cross. Probably the best-known verse in the whole Bible, John 3:16, assures us of this. However, its important to read that verse in its full context. Verse 17 follows this up by telling us that God did not send His Son, Jesus with the purpose of condemning people to judgment. Often this is as far as many go in reading this section of John’s Gospel, but it doesn’t end there. Verses 18 to 21 show us the full picture, emphasising the way in which God calls us to respond to His great love.

In verse 18 John explains that it is because of believing in Jesus that we will not be condemned at the judgment. This belief is saving faith that understands who Jesus is, believes that He did what the Scriptures say He did for us, and recognises our sin that needs to be repented of and forgiven. However, there is a contrast here with those who do not believe in Jesus. They are ‘condemned already’. At face value this can seem unfair, but it really is not as by our very actions every one of us deserves to be condemned by God. It is only because of His grace and mercy that any of us are forgiven and adopted into God’s family. If you want to talk about what is unfair about God’s judgment it is that some of us will not stand condemned because of what Jesus did in our place.

John also speaks of God’s light coming into this world through His Son, as he has already done at the very start of the Gospel. This light exposes all this is wicked and wrong in this world and in people. One of the best illustrations of this is thinking about what happens when you lift a paving slab and let the daylight shine on the ground underneath. Immediately all the creepy crawlies that live underneath that stone scurry away as quickly as their little legs can carry them. That is what it is like to have your sins exposed by the light of God’s Word and the work of God’s Holy Spirit. Verse 21 ends with the contrast, “whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” If we are walking with Jesus, having believed in Him for salvation, then we will love the light that God shines into this world and into our lives. It will reveal what He has been doing in and through us by His Holy Spirit.

We might feel a little uncomfortable about the language that John uses here, as he uses the word ‘works’. We know from Paul’s letter to the Galatians that we are saved by faith and not by our works, so what does John mean by ‘works’ here? I believe that its important to note that these works are ‘carried out in God’. In other words, although we may have done good things, it is nonetheless God who has been at work in and through us, causing us to do these right things. They are not our own efforts, and they certainly can’t put us right with God. This is where our second Bible reading from Paul’s letter to Titus comes in (Titus 3:5).

Paul lays out several specific good works that believers, and specifically Titus, are to put into practice as they seek to follow and obey Jesus. There are a few similar lists of good behaviours in Paul’s other letters in the New Testament, and they give us a very good idea of the practical issues that believers faced in the First Century. Some of the actions listed are perhaps more obvious than others. Not being quarrelsome with others seems like common sense, but obeying rulers and authorities can be difficult, especially in our modern democratic world. Having said that, there are exceptions when those in power tell us to things that are contrary to God’s ways. Under those circumstances we must disobey our rulers or government, but we must also be ready to face the consequences of doing so (e.g. imprisonment, fines etc.)

There is also a clear implication that such good behaviours were not typical of believers before they came to believe in Jesus. Paul contrasts this with how we used to be in verse 3, describing our former ways as ‘foolish’. Through belief in Christ we grow and mature so that we live differently in obedience to God and His Word. Our reading concludes in verse 8 by instructing “those who have believed in God… (to) be careful to devote themselves to good works”. All Christians are called to holiness or doing good works. Doing good is one of the best pieces of evidence that we are truly disciples of Jesus. If we consistently do what is right then it demonstrates the work that God’s Spirit has done within us, leading us into all truth, reminding us of God’s Word and empowering us for acts of service. Doing good works is no substitute for faith, but it is the fruit of true faith in Jesus Christ that all of us should be producing day by day. Amen!

Pastoral Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your glorious plan of redemption and for saving each of us by grace through faith in Christ. Thank You for loving us so much that while we were still sinners You sent Jesus to save us from our sin, and not to condemn us because of our sin. Thank You that there is now no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus, and we pray that we may live our lives to Your praise and glory. We thank You Lord, for Your long-suffering mercy, goodness and grace towards all humanity. Heavenly Father, we increasingly recognise the evil and wickedness in which this world is drowning. We ask that people would not believe the lie that they have committed a sin too great to be forgiven. Rather we pray that You would grant to them the gifts of faith and repentance. May they come to the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, and be saved by trusting in Him, because in Him alone are the words of eternal life and the forgiveness of sins. Use us as light in the world to point lost men and women to Jesus. Help us to shine the light of Your love into many hearts today, knowing that the time for Your return draws ever closer. In Jesus' Name we pray, amen!

Benediction

Loving Lord, we thank You for this time or worship, and for the wonders You have shown us from Your Word. Send us out in grace and peace to live in accordance with Your ways that we might proclaim the glorious Gospel to the world around us. May Your blessing be upon us today and every day. Amen.