**Home Service Sheet 6th August 2023**

**Call To Worship                 Psalm 71:1-3**

In you, O Lord, do I take refuge;
    let me never be put to shame!
In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
    incline your ear to me, and save me!
Be to me a rock of refuge,
    to which I may continually come;
you have given the command to save me,
    for you are my rock and my fortress.

**Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, You alone are our refuge and strength, our ever-present help in times of trouble. You alone are our rock and fortress, and when we are one with You we are truly secure. You alone, O Lord, can save us from our sin and from the evils of this world, and for all of this we give You praise and thanks. You are the Holy One, and to You alone belongs all the glory! Yet, O Lord, we recognise that we are sinners who have let You down through the things that we have done, said and thought. Forgive us our sins, we pray, and make us righteous in Your sight through the work of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to walk in Your ways day by day that we might live to Your praise and glory. In Jesus’ Name we ask this, amen.

**Hymn                                     God is our strength and refuge**by ***Richard Bewes***

<https://youtu.be/bA0zJnW1Rr8>

God is our strength and refuge, our present help in trouble,
And we therefore will not fear, though the earth should change!
Though mountains shake and tremble, though swirling floods are raging,
God the Lord of hosts is with us evermore!

There is a flowing river within God's holy city;
God is in the midst of her - she shall not be moved!
God's help is swiftly given, thrones vanish at His presence-
God the Lord of hosts is with us evermore!

Come, see the works of our maker, learn of His deeds all-powerful:
Wars will cease across the world when He shatters the spear!
Be still and know your Creator, uplift Him in the nations-
God the Lord of hosts is with us evermore!

**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                     Genesis 11:1-9**

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.” So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confusedthe language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

**Reflection**

We live at a time when unity is often seen as the greatest aim for nations and peoples. Organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union seek to bring people together for the common good of all, or at least that is how they would describe their purposes and actions. Within the Church there is much effort put into ecumenism, whereby churches of different traditions are encouraged to work together despite their distinctive and differences. Undoubtedly there are some good intentions behind this work, but all too often there can be a watering down of the truth of God’s Word – something that Jesus prayed against in His wonderful prayer recorded for us in John’s Gospel chapter 17. Jesus clearly shows us that Christian unity is built upon a common recognition of the truth revealed to us by God in His Word.

In our Bible reading today we see the first example of ungodly unity in Scripture – the attempted building of the Tower of Babel at Shinar. In Genesis chapter 11 we read about people coming together to build a great city and make a name for themselves. At first glance we may wonder what the problem is with this. Why shouldn’t people work together to do great things and build a beautiful city? Well, the problem with this was that they were in effect committing the sin of idolatry – putting themselves in God’s rightful place. As far as the people were concerned, they didn’t need God any more as they could do whatever they wanted on their own. This sounds suspiciously like the attitude of the world in which we live today, does it not?

In verses 5 & 6 we read that God saw what the people were doing and was displeased and saddened by their actions. In verse 7 we are shown how God would deal with this situation, “Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.” As an aside, notice how God says “let us”, revealing that God has unity in Himself – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. In John’s Gospel Jesus shows us that He and the Father, although separate Persons, are nonetheless One in unity (John 10:30). In His prayer before His arrest, Jesus prayed that we would be one, just as He and the Father are One (John 17:21), which points us to unity as God intends, built on the unity of God.

So why would God confuse the people and stop them working together? It almost seems a little cruel, and yet it was with the purpose of stopping the people entering into even more sin and wickedness. Sometimes we need saving from ourselves, and that is precisely what God was doing here at Shinar. Up to this point everyone on the earth had a common language, and so they were easily able to communicate with each other. However, after they were given many different languages this became so much more difficult. If you’ve ever been on holiday abroad you will know just how difficult it can be communicating with people who speak a different language.

This, however, is not the end of the story. Many years later, on the day of Pentecost, the confusion of many languages was reversed when the Holy Spirit came and dwelt within the first Christian believers. They received the gift of languages (often translated as ‘tongues’ in English Bible translations) and were therefore able to communicate with all people without the need for translation. In effect God had supernaturally given His people one language again so that they could proclaim and share the Gospel message. This gift of the Holy Spirit is one that is not seen in the Church today. How often are Christians able to speak to others in a known language that they have not learnt? I know of no documented examples of this since the First Century when the Gospel message was being established and validated by God. The practise that some Christians today call ‘speaking in tongues’ is not this gift at all, which makes me strongly doubt that it has anything to do with God at all! In fact it would seem to be ‘babbling’ – meaningless nonsense!

Returning to our Bible reading, we will note that the peoples then separated out again as they couldn’t understand each other. The reasons for, and purposes of, unity matter. If there is a good purpose behind uniting with other people, such as sharing the Gospel or helping those in need then unity can be very beneficial and in keeping with God’s plans and purposes. However, where the reason for unity is evil we should steer clear of it. Organisations that try to dispose of Christian teachings and outlaw them are more like the people at Shinar. So too are those whose approach to God’s Word sounds an awful lot like the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1). They ask ‘did God really say?’ or clever sounding versions of this. If we will stand on the truths of God’s Word and seek unity with God first and foremost then we will not go far wrong! Amen!

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we ask You to teach us all there is to learn from the foolish decisions made by the people at Babel, and the rebellious attitudes they had in their hearts. Help us to make right choices in life and refuse to adopt the sinful ways of this world where people want to do things their own way, independent of You. May we look to Jesus each day, resting our hope and future in Him alone. We pray too for this world and its peoples, that they may recognise the foolishness of their sin and selfishness and turn to You in faith with repentance. Lord Jesus, we pray that You would build Your Church at this time. This we ask to Your praise and glory, amen.

**Benediction**

Heavenly Father, Your Word is truth, and upon it we can rely. Help us to remain faithful to You and Your Word all the days of our lives, we pray. Grant us wisdom to discern when unity is good and godly and should be encouraged. Also help us to know when it seeks to place itself above Your ways and grant us the strength to resist it then. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.