

30th July 2023 – Morning Service

Rev Peter Bradley

Call to Worship

The Lord, who rules and protects Israel, the Lord God Almighty, has this to say: "I am the first, the last, the only God; there is no other god but me."

StF 691 – What shall our greeting be?

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| 1) What shall our greeting be:
Sign of our unity? 'Jesus is Lord!'
May we no more defend, barriers he died to end:
Give me your hand, my friend –
One Church, one Lord! | 3) He comes to save us now:
To serve him is to know
Life's true reward.
May he our lives amend, all our betrayals end:
Give me your hand, my friend - 'Jesus is Lord!' |
| 2) What is our mission here?
He makes his purpose clear:
One world, one Lord!
Spirit of truth, descend; all our confusions end:
Give me your hand, my friend - 'Jesus is Lord!' | |

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of grace and glory, ever worthy of worship, you are near to all who call upon you. As we worship you in your glorious majesty, help us to know your presence among us and to grasp the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ your Son, our Saviour. We ask it in his name. **Amen.**

Judge of all the earth, you do what is right. But we are sinners, prone to do what is wrong. Forgive the selfishness of our actions, our weak concern for justice, our misuse and pollution of this planet, and our lack of care for others. Pardon our offences and make your face to shine on us that we may walk before you in faithfulness, in righteousness and in uprightness of heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

StF 255 – The kingdom of God is justice and joy

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| 1) The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow. | 3) The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
Believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners
Brought Christ to his cross,
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss. |
| 2) The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
The prisoners are freed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share,
And hope is awakened in place of despair. | 4) God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
And all things cry glory to God all in all! |

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Reading: Romans 8:18-25

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

StF 319 – Christ triumphant

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| 1) Christ triumphant, ever reigning,
Saviour, Master, King!
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,
Hear us as we sing: | 3) Suffering servant, scorned, ill-treated,
Victim crucified!
Death is through the cross defeated,
Sinners justified: |
| Ch) <i>Yours the glory and the crown,
The high renown,
The eternal name!</i> | 4) Priestly king, enthroned for ever
High in heaven above!
Sin and death and hell shall never
Stifle hymns of love: |
| 2) Word incarnate, truth revealing,
Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing
By Your humble birth: | 5) So, our hearts and voices raising
Through the ages long,
Ceaselessly upon You gazing,
This shall be our song: |

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Reading: Matthew 13: 24-30; 36-43

Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared. 'The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?" "An enemy did this," he replied. 'The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?" "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.' He answered, 'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.'

Sermon - "For it was by hope that we were saved." Romans 8: 24

What do you hope for?

There are many possibilities, aren't there? Material hopes are the easiest to identify – an increase in income, a new washing machine, a better house, being a celebrity. Emotional hopes can take more of an effort – a healed relationship, better family ties, a desire to be loved and valued. Then there are the huge hopes for the world, hopes that can seem entirely beyond the ordinary person to fulfil – food for the hungry, an end to conflict and violence (especially in Ukraine), an environment that is being nurtured rather than exploited.

So, what do you hope for?

The scripture readings today have much to say about hope, in a variety of directions. St Paul, in his letter to the Romans, gives an interesting slant: If we see what we hope for, then it is not really hope. But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. At first sight these words feel full of contradiction. Surely the first things we hope for, the material hopes, are what we can see. Isn't hope all about a visible, expected outcome that we can hold on to? And if we can't see what we are hoping for isn't the natural reaction to become more impatient rather than less so?

So what is Paul writing about? Paul is putting hope in the larger context of God's eternal purposes for the world. Hope isn't just about what I can want for today or tomorrow; it isn't just what I can long for in this year or next year. Hope arises out of the faith we place in God, that God holds all things in his hands and that God will, at the end of time, draw all things to himself. It's an extravagant claim. It's a horizon beyond our seeing. This hope brings two consequences: one inspiring the church, and the other embracing the world. Firstly, hope sets the scene for the Christian life, and secondly, it provides a challenge for the world in which we are set.

Firstly, then, hope sets the scene for the Christian life. It does so, not by pointing to 'pie in the sky when we die' but by rooting hope in history and in present experience. Hope is rooted in history. It isn't just the general history of one nation or the broad history of all nations, but the particular history of the Christian faith. Hope has its roots in the history of one man, in Jesus Christ – his death and resurrection and ascension, and in the coming of the Holy Spirit. This hope is carried in the history of the faithful people of God in the church, surviving across the centuries, despite all the ups and downs through which the church has come. It is because we have known Jesus and seen him offering salvation for the world, that we have hope. In his life we see death overcome, sins forgiven, wounds healed, the world transformed.

Hope's rootedness in history is borne out in present experience. This isn't general experience of everything, but the particular experience of the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul spells this out when he says that it is through the work of the Spirit within us that we know that we are children of God. If we are children of God, then we are heirs, with Christ, of God's promises.

It is not always straightforward for us as adults to remember what it was like to be a child. Responsibilities for work and family overtake us. We feel like we're in charge and are then subject to all the pressures that this brings. Being the children of God is a reminder that we are dependent on God, as children put their trust in their parents. It is as we experience trust in God and in God's love and care for us, that our hope grows. Coming to know God as the one who holds, not only creation but each one of us, in his hands, leads us to the understanding that it's not only the present, but also the future, which is in God's care. The first extravagant claim of hope sets the scene for the Christian life and inspires the church to travel confidently into a future that can't be seen clearly.

The second extravagant claim of hope provides a challenge for the world in which we live. The Christian hope says that there is a bigger purpose and a larger trust that is possible for the future of the world. This isn't just a private matter for Christians, or a pious optimism that all will be well. Christian hope is hope for all creation, and arises out of suffering and judgement.

Paul uses the phrase that has echoed down the centuries 'the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains.' This rich image immediately draws out the link between hope and suffering. For a child to be born, the mother goes through the agony of childbirth. Babies don't just pop neatly out of test-tubes. And who knows what kind of person the child will be? At the moment of birth there's both great pain and also everything to be hoped for.

Christian hope combines suffering and promise. This hope challenges two aspects of contemporary life:

- The promise of material fulfilment being sufficient in itself.
- The doom and gloom merchants who say that there is only disaster ahead.

This hope challenges the promise of material fulfilment being sufficient in itself. The prophet Isaiah, who I quoted at the very beginning of our service, points to the one God, the only God – as opposed to those who search after many gods. The ‘many gods’ are still evident in our contemporary society, as people restlessly search for fulfilment in a variety of directions. The “celebrity culture” in which we live is a case in point. Only so many people can become celebrities, the others are left feeling cast aside and unvalued. The Christian hope reminds us that each person is valued and gifted by God – each one is a celebrity in God’s eyes.

The Christian hope reminds us that each one has a purpose that offers fulfilment, a calling to be discovered, and gifts to be used to God’s glory. This hope challenges the doom and gloom merchants who say that there is only disaster ahead. We’ve all heard the cries: “It’s going from bad to worse”! “The problems are too great, there can’t be solutions”. “All we can do is to supply sticking plaster”. Yes! We’ve all heard them! And we know that there are crises which feel overwhelming – food costs spiralling out of control; environmental damage escalating faster than solutions can be found; war and violence still tearing nations apart. It is not that hope doesn’t contain an element of judgement. The gospel reading of the wheat and the weeds spells this out. The good seed will bear fruit. But alongside this, there will be weeds. On judgement day the weeds will be uprooted and burnt.

But the point is that it’s not for us, who are the work of the creator’s hand, to exercise that judgement. Judgement is in the hands of the creator, too. Our role is to wait with patience for what is yet to be. Extravagant hope – this is God’s inspiration for the church, and the world.

StF 409 – Let us build a house

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| <p>1) Let us build a house where love can dwell
And all can safely live,
A place where saints and children tell
How hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
Rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:</p> <p>Ch) <i>All are welcome,
All are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.</i></p> <p>2) Let us build a house where prophets speak,
And words are strong and true,
Where all God's children dare to seek
To dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
And as symbol of God's grace;
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:</p> | <p>3) Let us build a house where love is found
In water, wine and wheat:
A banquet hall on holy ground
Where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
Is revealed in time and space;
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us:</p> <p>4) Let us build a house where hands will reach
Beyond the wood and stone
To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
And live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
Bear the image of God's face;
Let us bring an end to fear and danger:</p> <p>5) Let us a build a house where all are named,
Their songs and visions heard
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed
As words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
Prayers of faith and songs of grace,
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter</p> |
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Prayers of Intercession

O Lord our God, with all your church we pray for all who are longing and yearning for freedom. Lord, look in mercy all who are struggling in life. Strengthen all who are being persecuted for their faith. Guide us as we seek to grow in our faith, that we may be led by the Spirit to become children of God.

We pray for all who are caught up in corruption and decay. Forgive us where we destroy and mar your world through greed. We pray for areas where forests are being destroyed, the soil eroded, the water polluted. Guide by your Spirit all who groan for a better world, all who seek to restore and renew the earth.

We come with our own inner longings and hopes, that your glory may be revealed in our homes and in our lives, that we may know that we are all children of God and treat each other with respect. We pray for all who live in poor or slum housing, and for those who have no home.

Lord, look in mercy on all who find life futile, all who are bored, all whose work is unfulfilling or dull, all who feel that they have wasted their lives, all who are surrounded by decay and decadence. We pray for all who are struggling through sickness or disability; all who are wearied by caring for others. May they know that the sufferings of this present time are nothing to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

We rejoice in your salvation, that you call us to be sons and daughters of God, that you call us out of death into life which is eternal. We pray for our loved ones departed, and for a vision of your glorious kingdom. Good and gracious God, grant us a glimpse of your glory. Father God, we ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us when we pray, to say:

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 who 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.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 67 – This, this is the God we adore

1) This, this is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable friend,
Whose love is as great as his power,
And neither knows measure nor end:

2) 'Tis Jesus, the first and the last,
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
We'll praise him for all that is past,
And trust him for all that's to come.

Joseph Hart

The Blessing

The glory of God the Creator be yours, the glory of Christ the Redeemer be yours, the glory of the Spirit, the Sanctifier be yours; and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you all, this day and for evermore. **Amen.**