

Traditional Home Service Sunday 16th August Trinity 10

OPENING PRAYER

Let your merciful ears, O Lord,
be open to the prayers of your humble
servants; and that they may obtain their
petitions make them to ask such things as
shall please you; through Jesus Christ
your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns
with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole
heart. We have not loved our neighbours
as ourselves. In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly, love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God.
Amen.

PRAISE

Let everything be said and one in the
name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to
God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms,
hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
And we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*see page 2*)

READINGS

Psalm 23

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

Matthew 15:21-28

TALK (*see page 3*)

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our
Lord, who was conceived by the Holy
Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered
under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died,
and was buried; he descended to the
dead. On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven, he is seated at
the right hand of the Father, and he will
come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy
catholic Church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of
the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let's pray for:

- The universal Church
- Bishops, synods and all who lead the Church
- The leaders of the nations
- The natural world and the resources of the earth
- All who are in any kind of need

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us
from evil. For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever.
Amen.

HYMN 2 (*see page 2*)

CONCLUSION

God of power, may the boldness of your
Spirit transform us, may the gentleness of
your Spirit lead us, may the gifts of your
Spirit equip us to serve and worship you
now and always. Amen.

HYMNS TO USE:

AND CAN IT BE that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: th'Immortal dies:
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore;
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above
So free, so infinite His grace—
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

Still the small inward voice I hear,
That whispers all my sins forgiven;
Still the atoning blood is near,
That quenched the wrath of hostile
Heaven.
I feel the life His wounds impart;
I feel the Savior in my heart.
I feel the life His wounds impart;
I feel the Savior in my heart.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,

And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my
own.

Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my
own.

THE LORD'S MY SHEPHERD,

I'll not want;
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

My soul He doth restore again,
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
E'en for His own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill;
For Thou art with me, and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still.

My table Thou hast furnished
In presence of my foes;
My head Thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me,
And in God's house forevermore
My dwelling-place shall be.

Sermon - Psalm 23

I'm going to focus on v4 of ps 23, 'even though I walk through the darkest valley' - the King James version puts it this way: 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff comfort me' - 'the *shadow* of death'. I've been really struck by that phrase.....shadows are powerful.

In movies, particularly older ones, when someone is in their final hours, like on death row or something, they will sometimes recite this bit of the psalm. It's not talking about a spiritual darkness, its talking about those challenging moments of life when it feels like some horrible scary shadow has come over us. And this psalm makes a bald declaration that even when we go through the most frightening things, we do not need to fear. Fear is powerful and can be debilitating. We're living in a time when fear has gripped the nations in a way that has not been experienced since my grandparents generation. How do we the church respond? Tozer, a theologian and writer, said this 'a scared world needs a fearless church'. And the second half of v4 in this psalm tells us why we don't need to fear those tough times (the shadow of death), it's precisely because of the transformational truth of who God is, of His nature and character, the one who goes with us - it says specifically His 'rod and staff will comfort us'.

'Rod and staff' probably don't make sense to our modern ears. The 'staff' has two meanings, firstly, a staff gives rest (the staff for a shepherd would be a crutch, something to lean on as they walked

around). Secondly, the staff was a guide (the shepherd used it to guide the sheep). So God's staff is that part of his nature which means that as we intentionally lean on and into Him we too can find rest and be led to a place where we can find peace and restoration from the chaos of the shadow. The 'rod' was the curly bit at the end of the shepherd's staff & was used to pull sheep out of danger, to protect them from predators. The rod was also a symbol of love, as it was used to count the sheep to make sure they were all there. For us as Christians, being under God's rod means he counts us as His own, and offers us His continual presence and protection.

Many of you will know our story of when our daughter, Millie, died. It was a real shadow of death time and I daily cried Jesus I need you. But I remember saying to someone, quite early on, that I was worried that I maybe wasn't feeling it fully, that I was almost doing too OK, it was as if I was being emotionally protected at various times from feeling the full force of what had happened, the peace I experienced and the emotions didn't seem to always match the circumstances - of course I come to realise that it was an entirely supernatural thing. The day after Millie died I had some time on my own and there was a rocking chair just at the end of my hospital bed and I suddenly saw Jesus sat rocking Millie in his arms - it was so real, and I knew then that she was safe in His arms and the intensity of sadness that swept through my body found some relief. Jesus, the person who is peace, the person who is rest, the person who is protection, comes and actually sits right with us, walks the journey with us. It

wasn't made up, it wasn't pretending, you can't pretend when life becomes desperate, but supernaturally the very person who is peace was right there with me. Of course I wouldn't have chosen this to happen but actually its often in the shadow of death experiences that we really find out who God is - a place of great pain but also a place of indescribable transformation. I've heard some say yes but the darkness from living under the shadow of death just gets too much, it takes over my thinking and emotions....I get that.....but in the middle of the night, probably our most vulnerable time, I would wake and I just got into the habit of immediately plugging my ear phones in and listening either to worship music or to a downloaded sermon so that I didn't give hideous thoughts any room - I learnt to immediately lean into Him, rest in Him, find His peace, His presence.

Undoubtedly, we are right now, collectively, living under the shadow of death in the form of COVID-19, and for some of us there may be other things as well as this virus - God's nature and character is the same now as it was for David when he wrote ps 23, it's the same now as it was when Millie died - He is alive and counts us as His own, offering us His peace and His presence as a place to rest from the swirling emotions.

But there's something else I want us to think about, when I heard that phrase 'the shadow of death' my mind immediately went to another shadow in scripture - the shadow of Peter in Acts 5. As Peter walked around people would come and lay sick people on mats so that they would be healed as Peter's shadow passed over

them. Shadows have enormous power. The shadow of death is hard because it breeds fear. But under the shadow of Peter there was life and healing, pointing people to heaven, which is supernaturally right here, right now.

The world needs a church that doesn't give in to the shadow of death which is fear and leads to a 'heads down, let's just get through it'. The world needs a fearless church that has learnt how to walk through the valley of the shadow of death so that we can walk with others through hurt, loneliness, grief. The worlds needs a church that carries a message of hope, that demonstrates it lives, not even under an alternative shadow, as wonderful and life giving as Peter's was, but looks to heaven itself, that looks to who God is, to His kingdom from which Jesus is supernaturally present with us bringing life, rest, peace, restoration, creativity, ushering in the new thing. As an aside I think its interesting that the way the charismatic part of the church previously ran seems to have been shut down - so we can either say 'this is too difficult' or, we can look to heaven and say Lord what are you doing and how do we join in with that - what does being the church look like for us now? Let's not give in to saying its too difficult so Lord show us the way....

I'm going to end with this:

If you feel like you're living under the shadow of death and fear/low mood/disappointment/anxiety/regularly feeling 'this is too hard or not worth it' please can I encourage you to do two things: firstly, ask Jesus to be present, secondly, get your bible and remind yourself who God is

- if you're not sure where to look, either read through the gospel stories asking yourself what does this tell me about who God is, or, google 'God's nature and character in scripture' and then look those passages up, ask the Holy Spirit to use these truths to transform how you see life right now.

Let's pray:

Father you count us as your own, you promise us your presence, to give us your peace, to give us a place of rest, to guide us. So Holy Spirit would you come, as we look to heaven, would you come and meet with us. Lord you say to us that you are here - flooding over the uncertainties, the questions, the feelings, I pray that we will be so aware of your presence with us - would you minister your peace and rest to those who feel worn out, who feel anxious, who struggle with low mood, would you bring your hope Lord. Amen.