

Traditional Home service Sunday 3rd April

OPENING PRAYER

Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; 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

Christ our passover lamb has been sacrificed for us. Let us therefore rejoice by putting away all malice and evil and confessing our sins with a sincere and true heart:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen.

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done 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 (*O God, our help in ages past*)

READINGS - Isaiah 43.16-21
Philippians 3.4b-14
John 12.1-8

TALK

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

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

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 (*Take my life and let it be*)

CONCLUSION

The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, establish, strengthen and settle you in the faith; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

1 O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home:

2 Under the shadow of your throne
your saints have dwelt secure;
sufficient is your arm alone,
and our defense is sure.

3 Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received its frame,
from everlasting you are God,
to endless years the same.

4 A thousand ages in your sight
are like an evening gone,
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

5 Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
soon bears us all away;
we fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the op'ning day.

6 O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
still be our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home!

1 Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in endless praise,
let them flow in endless praise.

2 Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee,
swift and beautiful for thee.

3 Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee,
filled with messages from thee.

4 Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
every power as thou shalt choose,
every power as thou shalt choose.

5 Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne,
it shall be thy royal throne.

6 Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee,
ever, only, all for thee.

Sermon - Peter Smethurst
Learning to forget

There are 2 types of forgetting:
intentional and unintentional.

Unfortunately, we all suffer from time to time from unintentional forgetting. I've been known to go shopping without my wallet and to go into the kitchen to get something only to be unable to remember what it is that I went for.

I'm not my own. In fact, it seems to be a fairly common occurrence even amongst younger people.

This kind of forgetting seems to come naturally but the intentional kind of forgetting can prove more difficult.

This can be one of the biggest problems that Christians have particularly when it comes to our own guilt or to those people and circumstances which have impacted our lives and our memories in a negative way. Even born-again Christians can have difficulty in accepting God's forgiveness because we aren't always able to forget. This is a difficulty that Satan encourages and delights in. He loves reminding us of every sin, mistake or cruel act that we've ever committed. He whispers in our minds: "How can God forgive you for what you've done?" God, of course, has always understood this issue and addresses it several times throughout the Bible and including our 2 readings today: Isaiah 43 verses 18 and 19 and Philippians 3: 12 – 14. Through Isaiah 43:18 God told the children of Israel: **"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?"**

The immediate context of this message was that the Israelites were about to be delivered from their Babylonian captivity. God was about to do something new and give them a new opportunity. **He was giving them a chance to start over.** He was going to bring them back to Jerusalem and help them to rebuild the walls of the city and the temple. It was another chance for them to walk with God and not to follow other gods or idols.

Through Isaiah God seems to be saying "forget what's happened in the past and pay attention to what I'm doing now." On the face of it this appears to be a contradictory message because the Bible is full of directions for us to remember the past and especially what God has done for his people.

Even in the New Testament Paul wrote to the Corinthians to say that all the things that had happened under the Old Covenant had been written down for us to learn from – so that we didn't make the same mistakes that the Israelites had.

Clearly God didn't want the Israelites in Isaiah's day to forget all past events. There are several passages throughout the Old Testament, even in the book of Isaiah, encouraging God's people to remember past events.

So what did God mean by this and how does this passage of Scripture from Isaiah apply to those of us living under the new covenant? Those of us who have been redeemed and become part of the Church of Jesus Christ? In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul put it this way: **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.** (2 Corinthians 5:17) When we are joined to Jesus and have the Holy Spirit living within us we are a new creation – or as some translations have said – a new species.

We no longer have the excuse of saying that we are only human. We are more than we once were and are indeed children of God when the Spirit of our Father lives within us. But what does it mean to be a new creation or a new species?

When I was born again as a Christian my body didn't become new and my soul or mind and emotions were not instantly transformed. I don't know anyone who got a new body or a new psyche when they asked Jesus to save them.

It was my spirit that became new, that was born again. Jesus taught that God the Father is a spirit and we can only worship Him in spirit and in

truth. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3: **Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**

When we accepted Jesus, and His finished work upon the cross, we became so identified with Him spiritually that when God looks at us He sees us through Jesus, through the perfection of Christ. It's as though the most important part of ourselves, our eternal spirits, are surrounded by God the Spirit and God the Son in such a way that when the Father sees His adopted children what he sees is how we will be one day when we are living in perfection with Jesus with our glorified new bodies.

Paul repeatedly tells us that we are "in Christ Jesus" because that is how God sees us. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul explained it by saying that **we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.**

Under the New Covenant, that was sealed with the blood of Jesus, we are told that "in Jesus" we are the righteousness of God. We are told that the Holy Spirit came to live within us when we accepted Jesus' death on our behalf. At that moment we were given new life and the Holy Spirit who came to live within us is the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and that He is a spirit of power, love and self-control and that He is greater than Satan.

The "Freedom in Christ" course is possibly the best course I've been on since I became a Christian. It's so good that I did the course twice. And would heartily recommend it to everyone.

The course identifies the changes I've just described, and many others, as **the key truths** that we need to know about if we are to understand what it means to be a Christian.

Jesus said that we would know the truth and the truth would set us free - if we remain faithful to his teachings. Jesus was and is

the Word of God made flesh and He told Pontius Pilate that He was "the Truth". The written Word of God is also "the Truth" and it teaches that all Scripture is "God breathed" or if you like, inspired by God. The Holy Spirit makes no distinction between the inspired Gospels and the inspired letters that make up the New Testament. This means that what the apostles and others wrote to the church as part of the New Testament are part of the teachings that Jesus wants us to remain faithful to.

It follows that in order to remain faithful to Jesus' teachings we have to know what they are. It's only when we do what Jesus taught us to do that we are like the man who built his house upon a rock. It is only the truth that we know and act upon that sets us free.

We must choose to believe the Truth. And sometimes that means that we must choose, like St Paul, to forget the past and only look forward to what lies ahead. In Philippians 3 Paul said that he focused on forgetting the past as he pressed on to possess the perfection for which Christ Jesus had called him.

The New Living Translation puts it like this:

3:10 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death,

3:11 so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

3:12 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.

3:13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,

3:14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

It is clear from Paul's writings, however, that he had not forgotten the fact that he had approved of Stephen being stoned or that he had persecuted the church of Jesus Christ in

the past. When he was on trial before King Agrippa Paul confessed to his sinfulness and he makes mention of it in his letters. It was because of the things that he had done in the past that he wrote to his protégé Timothy saying: **This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” – and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.** (1 Timothy 1:15 & 16)

Paul had no problem in remembering his past if his example could benefit others. What he did, however, was to choose to accept the promise of God’s forgiveness of all his sins at the cross of Jesus. He chose to put all his confidence and all of his faith in what Jesus had done for him. He refused to dwell upon his negative past and in that sense he had forgotten it.

Sin is a great leveller. The Bible teaches that all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.

This means that no one has ever been able to save themselves. Everybody needs a Saviour, which is why Jesus had to die on the cross.

Like the Israelites in Isaiah’s day, we are all offered a fresh start. We must choose to see that God is doing a new thing – that there is a new offer on the table and to make a conscious effort to ignore what has gone before in order to focus on the new thing that God wants to do in our lives.

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

In one sense we all must become sin conscious in order to recognise that we do indeed need a saviour. But once we have accepted Jesus as our Saviour and Lord we have to accept that it is by grace we have been saved, through faith--and this is not from ourselves, it is the gift of God-- (Ephesians 2:8)

having believed the Good News that Jesus died in order to make us right with God we

are instantly saved. We then need to put the past behind us and become salvation conscious.

We need to say about ourselves what the Bible says about us. We were sinners but we have been born again as Saints. We were enemies of God but now we are adopted as His deeply loved, greatly blessed and highly favoured children.

When he was the captain of a slave ship John Newton became sin conscious and the weight of his sins finally brought him to his knees and he accepted the salvation that Jesus offered and became a Christian. Eventually in 1764 he became an Anglican minister, just down the road from here in Olney where he worked for the abolition of the slave trade and led weekly prayer services for which he wrote numerous hymns – one of which we still sing today. John Newton came to understand that he had been a truly evil man who could do nothing to save himself. There was no way he could undo all the harm that he had done but he also chose to believe the divine exchange which took place on the cross when Jesus took the sins of the world upon himself and graciously offered to give His sinlessness and His righteousness to all mankind.

John Newton chose to forget his sinful past, to believe the good news and accept his new identity in Jesus Christ.

By not dwelling on the past, he was able to see God do a new thing in his life and it was all down to God’s Amazing Grace.