



AT HOME SERVICE

Sunday 5th May 2024

compiled by Vicki Penfound - Lay Assistant

Opening words:

O Divine Voice, You sing and the universe comes into being;
O Divine Breath, You breathe and all things spring to life;
O Divine Flesh, You are born among us, and the Creator is clothed in creation.
O Divine Life, You are the pulse of all that is.
In You all things live and move and have being,
In wonder we worship,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen *(John van de Laar altd.)*

Hymn: 5 Singing the Faith

1] Father, In Whom We Live,
In Whom We Are, And Move,
The Glory, Power, And Praise Receive
Of Thy Creating Love.
Let All The Angel-Throng
Give Thanks To God On High;
While Earth Repeats The Joyful Song,
And Echoes To The Sky.

2] Incarnate Deity,
Let All The Ransomed Race
Render In Thanks Their Lives To Thee,
For Thy Redeeming Grace.
The Grace To Sinners Showed
Ye Heavenly Choirs Proclaim,
And Cry, "Salvation To Our God,
Salvation To The Lamb!"

3] Spirit Of Holiness,
Let All Thy Saints Adore
Thy Sacred Energy, And Bless
Thine Heart-Renewing Power.
Not Angel-Tongues Can Tell
Thy Love's Ecstatic Height,
The Glorious Joy Unspeakable,
The Beatific Sight.

4] Eternal, Triune Lord!
Let All The Hosts Above,
Let All The Sons Of Men, Record
And Dwell Upon Thy Love.
When Heaven And Earth Are Fled
Before Thy Glorious Face,
Sing All The Saints Thy Love Hath Made
Thine Everlasting Praise!

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Let us pray:

Lord of Life,
Present before the dawn of time,
Incarnate in Jesus, who lived and died among us, for us.
Life reborn from the tomb, bringing humanity into liberation with you,
Our minds cannot fully comprehend, but as the disciples met with you
During this Easter Season, so may we be aware of your presence with us now.
In the ordinariness of our lives, you are here and we worship.
In the disappointments and heartaches, the joy and the wonder,
You are here.
May we accept the peace of your presence and trust in your unfailing love. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Reading: Psalm 98 v 1-3

O sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvellous things.

His right hand and his holy arm
have gained him victory.

The LORD has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.

He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the victory of our God.

Hymn: 66 Singing the Faith

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,

His mercies never come to an end;

They are new every morning,

New every morning,

Great is thy faithfulness, O Lord,

Great is thy faithfulness. *Edith McNeil (1920-2014)*

Reading: Acts 10 v 1-8, 34-35, 44-48

In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius.' He stared at him in terror and said, 'What is it, Lord?' He answered, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.' When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Reflection:

There isn't the space to print the whole of Acts 10, but I urge you to read it all, and into the first half of Chapter 11. It's a thrilling account of God doing a new thing - the fact that Luke spends so much time meticulously recording all aspects for us shows that it is a profound and pivotal event.

Our Psalm set for today gives an indication of God's desire to be known among all the nations, there are many references throughout the Old Testament to the Grace of God reaching the Gentiles. However, Peter was astounded to see this actually happen in front of him.

Luke wants us to get to know Cornelius. He is Italian, a Roman Citizen volunteer soldier. The biggest army presence across the Holy Land was Legio X Fretensis, which recruited from what is now Turkey, they were known for the brutal put down of any uprising. Cornelius has a relatively peaceful job in Ceasarea Maritima where the Roman Governor had his palace, it was the seat of Roman government in the area and Cornelius could well have had an administrative role, coordinating the personal security of Roman officials. Cornelius was a thoughtful, spiritual man, he rejected the gods he was brought up with and believed in the One True God, demonstrating his faith through good works. He embraced the Jewish people and their culture and did what he could to help them, accepting that he would always be seen as an outsider. In an age defined by conquest and submission, Cornelius stood out as a Godly, compassionate man. As a soldier at that time, he was forbidden to marry so the household mentioned was more likely servants and friends than wife and children.

God is drawing Peter and Cornelius together, preparing them both with visions and when they eventually meet something extraordinary happens. The gap between Jew and Gentile was filled by the Holy Spirit, joining them as one people in Christ. Peter witnessed first-hand what God thought of division and hierarchy, be it religious or secular, it was all swept away by the joy of being one family.

Today we also live in a divided society, Peter's vision showed him that God did not have the same prejudices that he grew up with, Cornelius's vision affirmed that God saw his heart and his actions rather than his background. We rejoice that in Christ we are one with those who are different to ourselves. It is natural that as we are immersed in the Spirit of God, we are connected with all that he is connected with. The vine and the branches metaphor is not just about ourselves and the vine, but also the connection between the branches through the vine.

There is an ancient African word which describes this oneness and how it should be expressed. "Ubuntu" is sometimes translated as "I am because we are". It means a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity. Archbishop Desmond Tutu described it thus: "A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed."

As we come towards the end of the Easter Season and move towards Christ's Ascension and on to Pentecost, may we live out resurrection life in the way we see and pray for others. May we, like Peter, be open to seeing God in those we might otherwise distance ourselves from. May we be stirred into action by the Holy Spirit into good works for the benefit of our neighbours, near and far. And may we reflect the joy and purpose of the "Ubuntu" God intends for all.

Prayers of Intercession:

God of love, you are love

And your love breaks down barriers.

Break down the barriers of hostility between people,

Governments, nations, ethnicities, families...

Humans find it easy to hate, we need your power to love.

God of holiness, you are holy

And the brightness of your holiness exposes wickedness,

Corruption, injustice, violence and cruelty.
Bring light to those in the grip of darkness,
Help them to pull back the curtains of their hearts
and let your transforming light in.

God of peace. You are peace
The awareness of your presence brings calm to troubled souls.
Breathe peace to those who live in fear,
Be the lullaby to those who cannot sleep
And be the courage to all who hear your call to live life your way. Amen

Hymn: 691 Singing the Faith

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!

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!

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!

Fred Pratt-Green (1903-2000)

Blessing:

The peace of God be in your heart
The grace of God be in your words
The love of God be in your hands
The joy of God be in your soul
And in the song your life sings. Amen

Songs published under CCLI No 558764