

Worship 28th June 2020

A warm welcome to worship and may the Peace of Jesus be with you and within you.

Call to Prayer – Led by the Minister

Lord our God, our Heavenly Father, we come to you in the name of the Risen Christ, our Lord and Saviour – from the wealth of your mercy and infinite love we confidently approach you this morning.

It is hard sometimes for us to believe that we are so profoundly and eternally loved – but we are with David when he said:

“When I look at the night sky and see the evidence of Your Creation – the moon, the planets and all of the stars, all perfectly formed and in place – what are human beings like us, that you should have regard for us and care for us?”

Yet, Jesus tells us a different story, encourages us to come to You, and fills us with the confidence of faith – a faith that is not just our own, but a gift from you.

Lord, when You rose from the dead, you triumphed over evil, darkness, death – You cried aloud that love cannot be defeated.

Yet here we are, two thousand years on and there is still evil, hatred and violence in the world – but there is too, faith, goodness, self-lessness, care, compassion and the Gospel resonates in buildings, through meetings like this, in homes, in forests – wherever Your people are, there is hope and light and life and love and grace and mercy and forgiveness, known and expressed!

Praise be to You, Living God who dwells in the midst of His people – a people redeemed and full of hope.

Rekindle in us that wonderful message of Easter.

Let us not forget who You are, what You have done, what You continue to do for good in our world and what You will yet do when You return to subdue and remove all that is wrong, evil and sinful from our world, nature and experience.

As Your people of the Early Church were encouraged to do, help us too to wait and live in expectation of the One who will come in glory

As Peter and Paul both wrote – You, Lord Jesus, will return in unimaginable and irresistible Glory and will by the power of Your Breath subdue and eliminate all that is evil.

Help us to wait in patience and grace for Your coming and do all we can to work for Your Kingdom and Your Will to be done.

To the Glory of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Intimations

Daily readings in Acts on Facebook.

Zoom Bible Study at 7.00pm on Wednesday

Zoom Worship next Sunday open from 10.45am.

Music – People of the Cross by Selah – can be found on YouTube [written for Open Doors]

Thought for the Day – A Story from Southern India

On the night of June 4, 2020, in Samaru's east Indian village of Kenduguda in Odisha state, men known to be Hindu extremists and a few villagers came to the seventh grader's house, armed with sticks and knives.

The next day, police recovered the young boy's slain body. Reportedly, he was stoned to death. After carrying out the gruesome crime, his attackers buried his body and fled the scene. With "missing person" reports filed by both Samaru's father and his pastor, the next day police interrogated suspects who confessed to their crime and began disclosing the horrific details.

Samaru's family and other local believers in their village believe the young boy was targeted and murdered because of his conversion and for his fervent passion to share about the Saviour. Pastor Bijay Pusuru, who serves in Malkangiri district, said the teen was a passionate Christian.

"He always shared from the Bible with youth and children from the village," the pastor said through tears

Since converting to Christianity in 2017, Unga and his son have been harassed. Local Christians report villagers have been upset for the past three years over the growth of Christian conversions. Christians in their village have faced many threats.

This is not the first time a Christian has been slain for his faith in Odisha state. On January 23, 1999, Graham Stains and his two young sons, Philip and Timothy, were burned alive by a Hindu fundamentalist group.

Reading Acts 7 verses 51 to 60 – Gordon Brown

⁵¹ "You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you! ⁵² Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah whom you betrayed

and murdered. ⁵³ You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels."

⁵⁴ The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honour at God's right hand. ⁵⁶ And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honour at God's right hand!"

⁵⁷ Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him ⁵⁸ and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died.

Thought For The Week

What martyrdom is **not**:

It is not, never, ever, someone blowing themselves up and killing people for the sake of a religious or any other cause. That is self-murder and the murder of other people, will never be condoned by God, and is a crime against humanity.

It is, when people are persecuted, to the point of death, for their conscientious conviction and belief [in the case of Christians, faith in Jesus Christ] and a refusal to deny that faith even under threat of death. This person, or group of people, refuse to engage in violence and are prepared, passively, to die for their faith.

Hear these quotes, all from people who paid the ultimate price:

The Blood of Martyrs is the seed of the Church – Tertullian

I will kiss the rope that hangs me, but I will never deny my faith – Tahir Iqbal, Pakistan

"Wherever it pleases God to put man in this world, the Christian must be ready for martyrdom and death. It is only in this way that man learns faith." – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"This is the end? – for me the beginning of life." – when Bonhoeffer was being escorted out to be hung in 1945 by direct order of Hitler, the man from the Gestapo accompanying him to the gallows said, "So this is the end pastor." "The end?" said Bonhoeffer, "for me this is the beginning of life."

I wanted to put into perspective that Christian Martyrdom begun with Stephen, continued throughout the early church and has to this day been a factor of the life of the Church.

Stephen was murdered. This was not a legal act – his executioners had no authority to do what they did – simply put, there was a crowd of deeply religious people who lost control, took the law into their own hands, and put Stephen to death. Sadly that is a story that can be often told down through the generations – but of course a lot of Christian Martyrdom was also state sanctioned – China, Laos, Russia, Rome – the list could go on to include the names of at least 50 countries.

What does Stephen's martyrdom teach us?

There is injustice in this world and it is impossible to eradicate it but we must also both expose and oppose it wherever it exists.

There are Christian brothers and sisters who need our support. They need our prayers. They need practical, monetary support through organisations like the Barnabas Fund and Open Doors. They need us to advocate on their behalf both nationally and internationally.

As Christians we are called to be faithful, whatever the cost. We are not called to top the popularity polls but make a stand for the Gospel – this is what Stephen did fearlessly.

Everything is ultimately put into perspective. When Christ died he was experiencing the blackness of separation from God [this he did for us] but when Stephen is dying he is seeing the glory to which he is being called. We are people ultimately fitted out for the glory of God's Kingdom.

Finally, Paul was there witnessing this. The arch-enemy of the Church was soon to become its greatest asset. We must never forget that even the hardest of hearts can be won over to Christ.

Music – Stand By Me – can be found on YouTube

Prayers of Intercession – Ross Kerr

Dear father in heaven, thank you for being with us this morning and welcome to our service. we are still locked out of our church building but does it really matter where we have our services or is it truly a fact that we share our thoughts with you wherever we may be? Thanks to Iain for setting up the technicalities to help us get together and which for some of us is indeed beyond our ken. you find us this morning lord still in the midst of this virus that has caused the death of so many

people – not just in the UK but also over the rest of the world. Please be with those that have suffered the loss of loved ones and give them the strength and faith to cope with that loss and help them to understand that their loved ones are with you in that happy, forever place that we call heaven. Be with those that are now living with the virus and fearful for their lives. Be with those brave people who are caring for them and putting themselves in harm's way to do so and give them the skills to combat this affliction.

Lord – as you are aware there is another type of suffering going on at the moment. due to the lockdown many, many people have lost their jobs through the closure of many businesses and they have indeed fallen on hard times. Many will not have experienced this before and new to the hardships this can inflict. People are at risk of losing their homes and have little idea how to cope with thinking about the future. There are those who have lived like this for most of their lives and will suffer even more due to the lack of money being available from charities and the fewer people who are able to give to charities. However Father, regardless of who they are and what their background is, please give them the patience of Job, the wisdom of Solomon the faith of Daniel when in the lions' den, to battle on and not give up. Hear their shouts for help from you lord – even those that have turned away from you over the years. Treat them please like the prodigal son who was welcomed back by his father after wasting his father's money and became homeless and cast out. Let us who have so far been kept free of the virus do all we can to help those unfortunates and do so with love in our hearts and with an attitude of “ what if it was me or mine” and that we don't walk by on the other side of the street. Please be with the leaders of our country and throughout the world to be cautious, to work with each other, not treat this as a competition as to who can be first and to forget the politics of life and think of how to defeat the effect of the virus. Please Lord give the scientists the imagination, skills and energy to come up with a vaccination that will protect all human life.

The virus has taken away from the minds of many of us that there is still other suffering that is with many people, other conditions and illnesses, starvation in many parts of the world and the constant abuse and suffering of children. These people still are going through that suffering and we must care for them with the same and better dedication that we did before the virus came along.

Forgive us lord if we ask for a lot, forgive us lord for not speaking to you as often as we should and forgive us lord if we do not say “thank you” for all that you do for us each and every day. in the name of Jesus Christ our lord – amen.