

1st Hymn: by *John Newton* (T. St Peter Alexander Reinagle 1799-1887)

- 1) How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, and drives away his fear.
- 2) It makes the wounded spirit whole and calms the troubled breast.
'Tis manner to the hungry soul and to the weary rest.
- 3) Dear Name, the rock on which I build, my shield and hiding place,
my never-failing treasury fills with boundless stores of grace.
- 4) Jesus, my shepherd, brother, friend, my prophet, priest and king,
My lord, my life, my way, my all, accept the praise I bring.
- 5) Weak is the effort of my heart, and cold my warmest thought,
But when I see Thee as Thou art, I'll praise thee as I ought.

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Prayer:

Dear Father, we are glad to meet in worship this morning, and delight in the knowledge that you receive our worship, and hear our prayers, because we come in the name of the One who gave us this access, as well as the desire to meet with you, even your Son our Lord and Saviour, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

2nd Hymn by *John Greenleaf Whittear* (T Rest)

- 1) Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways,
Reclothe us in our rightful mind, in purer lives Thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.
- 2) In simple trust, like theirs who heard beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word rise up and follow Thee.
- 3) O sabbath rest by Galilee, O calm of hills above
where Jesus knelt to share with Thee the silence of eternity, interpreted by love.
- 4) Drop Thy still dews of quietness till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of Thy peace.
- 5) Breathe through the heats of our desire Thy coolness and thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire, speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm.

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Readings:

- Hebrews 11:12-16
- 1 Peter 1:13 - 25

Intercessions:

Our Dear Father, we pray for your world, the one You so loved that you sent your Son that we might hear the truth of your Kingdom, though so many seem so far from it. We pray into the war in the Middle East fired by unmitigated hatred that prompted such in-humanitarian behaviour. We find it hard to pray, not knowing for certain what is truly happening. But within the horror of it all, we pray for a measure of restraint, and for mercy.

We pray for Ukraine, knowing many in that land believe in you and are crying out to you. Show your sovereign power and restrain the aggressor by whatever means it requires.

We pray for our people in this good land, aware that so many in our land take for granted the benefits of Australia, and take for granted your sovereign goodwill towards us. In that respect we pray for our leaders, national and state, that they will be enabled to make wise and discerning decisions on our behalf. Grant that we will be grateful for your goodness and generosity. We pray for our young people, so many of them so purposeless that they see suicide as reasonable. May many of them come within the sound of the gospel of Christ, and find the purpose that He brings, that they might serve you and our land well!

We bring these our prayers to you Father, in the name of your Son our Saviour, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

3rd Hymn by Augusts Toplady 1740-78(T Redhead by R. Redhead)

- 1) Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood from Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.
- 2) Not the labours of my hands can fulfil Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save and Thou alone.
- 3) Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked come to Thee for dress; helpless look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to Thy fountain fly; wash me, Saviour, or I die.
- 4) While I draw this fleeting breath, when my eyelids close in death,
when I soar to worlds unknown, see Thee on Thy judgement throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee.

Message:

Exiles here

Peter was writing this letter to Christians in outlying provinces, spread by the "dispersion" after Emperor Nero had begun persecution of Christians, having blamed them for the "fire of Rome." Let's look at some of his encouraging words in the face of their troubles.

1) "*Gird up your minds, set your hope fully on the grace which is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*"

The Macquarie dictionary defines "hope" as an expectation of something desired. Of course Christian hope is distinctly different from that - it is a large

part of our belief system. The world at large uses the word in the sense of "wishful thinking". Christian hope is a *certainty*, given to us by Christ himself, which includes what he did for us, but also refers to what is yet to be fulfilled at his future coming again. We hold such hope almost like a "secret society", maybe a shrinking society in the world today in terms of relative numbers believing it, but who one day will be revealed as will Christ himself, when all the world will see his Kingship and acknowledge his Lordship.

It is called "hope" because so much of this is in the future. It is so connected with Christ, that St. Paul begins his 1st letter to Timothy "*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope*".

We see the power of this hope by looking at the astounding transformation that occurred to the disciples following the resurrection. After the crucifixion they were a disappointed, dispirited, dejected group, their hopes dashed, hiding away behind locked doors lest they too were targeted. They feared for their lives. But after the resurrection Peter preached fearlessly to thousands in Jerusalem, three thousand of whom believed and were joined to the believers, all exulting together. All fear of death had now been banished!

Jesus had told them what was going to happen to him four times, but they never believed it. But after the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on them at Pentecost, it all "clicked" and they understood what Jesus had been telling them. The Holy Spirit, the infallible Teacher, taught them as no other teacher could! They were *urgent* to obey Him. The "Spirit of Jesus" was leading and directing them. He had returned to them as promised: "I will go away and I will come to you" (Jn 14:28) and this was the way he was doing so, until the day he would return, and "every eye would see him"! He said "Surely I am coming soon", and that would be "the day" he referred to. (Rev 22:20)

Ezekiel's great prophecy had been fulfilled in the disciples - "*A new heart I will give you and a new Spirit I will put within you, and I will cause you to walk in my statutes*". (Ezek 36:26) This was no makeover; this was a "heart transplant"! Christian Barnard was not the first to perform this procedure, God was. And He has done it millions of times.

Of course the *hope* they had was inextricably linked with *faith* and *love* - they all sprang up together!

2) "*As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance, but just as He who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct, since it is written "You shall be holy for I am holy"*". (Lev 11:44)

"Holy" indicates God's separateness from his creation, and his moral excellence, and freedom from all limitation. In applying this to God it means the outshining of all that God is. In this respect only God himself is perfectly holy, and is distinct from everything else in His creation. As regards humanity holiness applies to everything dedicated to His service.

Moses first became acquainted with holiness when he came across the "burning bush". There God told him to put off his shoes from his feet "for the place on which you are standing is holy ground". He then introduced himself and Moses, afraid to look at him, hid his face. This fear was the "fear of the Lord" and was totally appropriate. Wherever God or his angels appear to mankind it is accompanied by true fear. Not to truly fear would be to be totally ignorant, and in danger of death, which would be the result

of having no protection from God to cover them. This was one of the reasons for the cloud of shekinah glory which covers God - it is always for *our* protection.

Non-believers use the term holy to mean "very religious", and is often used in a rather derogatory sense. The ABC and BBC use the term in that sense, and so portray priests as sanctimonious or just plain "whacky". That picture is of course a caricature of the truly serving person, which is what "minister" means! The most holy Person we know was Jesus of Nazareth. He was so "un-whacky" and unpretentious, that when he came to his own home town early in his ministry they questioned his right to teach - "we know him: he is just the son of a carpenter, and we have known him since he was a kid"! so they "took offense at him" and would not receive his words. They even tried to kill him! His holiness worked out in doing his Father's will, and living an exemplary life!

He calls us to be like him, and it is a truly high call! He characterised himself as "one who serves"!

He calls us "*not to conform to this world, or to the passions of our former ignorance*".

Is this why David prayed "Remember not the sins of my youth..."

(Ps 25:7) and many a man has echoed these sentiments in later life.

3) "*And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile*".

We may easily forget at times that we are *exiles*, in regard to our time in this world. I was once a member of a quartet which used to sing Negro spirituals including "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue..." finishing with "...and I don't feel at home in this world any more". Those black slaves were often Christians longing for their release which they could only expect through death! As young people this was still rather an acquired attitude for us and our quartet at the time, 'though it was true enough for those slaves in America!

The Christians to whom Peter was writing this letter were in danger for their lives from Rome and its influence, but their fear of Rome was more than compensated for by their longing for their heavenly home to which they truly belonged, but from which they were temporarily "exiles".

But they looked to the standard of their true Lord, and as all the letters of the New Testament address their behaviour as "exiles from heaven", were expected to be honouring to their Lord who went before them, and with whom they related as their exemplary Elder Brother, the standard of whose life has always drawn us onwards and upwards! And here Peter reminds them of the cost of their ransom from their "futile ways". We are all "bought with a price" and the standard of our Exemplar is constantly before us, and most likely requiring a much higher standard of life than many around us regard as acceptable! He had been "*destined before the foundation of the world...*" or as the King James version says He was "*fore-ordained before the foundation of the world*"!

So Christ was no accident of history - He was God's intention from the beginning. Our Saviour is sometimes likened to a Rescuer who stands in the breach to cover an unfortunate accident and pull us out of our error. That is not the

truth, and here it is spelled out! God knew from the beginning what would happen to His "good creation". His Son was fore-ordained to be the "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world" for whom every creature in the universe would be eternally praising God!

That expectation was what the saints of history would understand, acknowledging the cost paid by many of the martyrs and the faithful through history.

But no cost has been higher than that to the Father himself. And He planned it all from the beginning! Against that, no cost paid by a believer on the way to this glorious conclusion would ever seem too high! It would only be a small fraction of what it cost God!

Our view of our salvation has sometimes been seen by us as somewhat mundane by comparison. Peter seemed to be aware of this end-point of history which makes any of our sufferings minor as against the overall glory that is coming.

I know of no other truth more likely to remove the fear of death from any believer, as we approach what many people seem to believe are the end days of history. This is what all the Apostles of our Lord knew. All of them except possibly St John died as martyrs for their Lord! It is still happening across the world. But what a wonderful climax is coming! St. Paul knew and quoted the great Isaiah to the Corinthian Christians as a truth not seen by any eye or heard by any ear, adding "not even conceived by any imagination," will be as great as what Christ has achieved, which we may know in now in part, but the remainder of which is still coming to those who love Him.

Amen

4th Hymn by Henry Burton (T Maurice Wostenholme 1887-1959)

- 1) There's light upon the mountains and the day is at the spring
when our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of the King;
weary was our heart with waiting, and the night watch seemed so long,
but His triumph day is breaking, and we hail it with a song.
- 2) There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air,
and the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer:
for the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne,
and the travail of our spirit is the travail of His own.
- 3) Hark we hear a distant music, and it comes with fuller swell -
the great triumph song of Jesus, of our King Emmanuel:
Sion, go you forth to meet Him, and my soul be swift to bring
all your finest and your dearest for the triumph of our King.

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Benediction:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

This service was prepared by Neil McIntosh (M.B.B.S. F.R.A.C.S.) for HopeNet SA