

The True Home

Prayer:

Dear Father, we are grateful today for the privilege you have given us to bring our worship and prayers to you, because your Son has given us access. Lead us this day and in this worship together, and let our praise and thanksgiving come before you as an acceptable offering. For we come in the name of your son our Lord, Jesus the Christ, Amen.

1st hymn: (T Petra Richard Redhead 1820-1901) *by Augustus Toplady*

- 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 the 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.

Readings:

- Psalm 56
- John 14:18-30.

Intercessions:

Dear Father,

We come to pray for your world as you instructed us through your Apostle Paul. In particular we pray for those in authority over us, that you will give them wisdom and discernment in all their decision-making on our behalf. Whether they look to you or not, we pray that you will put into their minds the principles and laws that enhance our land and its peoples, and enable them to carry out their responsibilities well.

The world never looked untroubled or secure because of the self-interest of so many of its leaders, and today there seem many places with battles of will or of military forces, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Middle East war of Israel and Gaza. We can only pray that in the midst of their fights that your will will be done, and that your quality of justice will prevail. Bring peace as only you, Father, know to be true peace as we look with hope and expectation to the coming again of the Prince of peace, who we know will establish your standard of true and lasting peace for the end of the age. And give us patience as we await that great day. We ask these things in the name of Jesus the Christ, Amen.

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2nd hymn: (T Green Hill A.L.Peace 1844-1912) *by John G Whittier*

- 1) Who fathoms the eternal thought? who talks of scheme and plan?
The Lord is God, He needeth not the poor device of man.
- 2) Here in the maddening maze of things, when tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed ground my spirit clings, I know that God is good!
- 3) I know not what the future hath of marvel or surprise,
Assured that life and death His mercy underlies.
- 4) And if my heart and flesh are weak to bear and untried pain,
The bruised reed He will not break, but strengthen and sustain.
- 5) And so beside the silent sea I wait the muffled oar;
No harm from Him can come to me on ocean or on shore.

Message: The True Home.

This reading includes the tenderest passages in the N.T. You would have heard it at many funerals (therefore the more often as we get older!) It is especially comforting to believers and their relatives before they die. The occasion of the address was to the disciples just before Jesus went the final time to Jerusalem, and we all know what happened then.

He was speaking to a *frightened* group of disciples - he had declared he was going there (they pleaded with him not to!) They knew that in going to Jerusalem they were likely to be walking into a trap which his enemies had laid for him. The intent of these enemies was no secret - their intentions quite clear. Many knew about it. And the disciples thought it was very likely that they too would die. But it was just at this juncture that he made some of the most intimate and precious promises that he ever made.

He had not long before made some other great statements about his Father, because Phillip had asked him to show them the Father. He expressed surprise, asking "Have I been with you so long, and yet you don't know me, Phillip? He who has seen me *has seen the Father*; how can you say 'show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am *in* the Father, and the Father *in* me? The words that I say to you I do not say on my own authority - the Father who dwells in me does His works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves".

"He who has seen me has seen the Father" echoes "I and the Father are one". This was a statement which had caused the authorities to take up stones to stone him. (It sounded like blasphemy.) But Heb 1:3 says he was the "express image of the person of God". And later he was to say - "...the word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me". Jesus gave us a perfect representation of how his Father really was - not the detached, far-away god of a deist (who set the world in motion then absented himself), which was one of the views of the "creation story" that some philosophers have put up. This was a Father who loved His children better than any earthly father, and was involved in everything that happened to His people in His world. He was the *true Father* - nothing happened that He did not know about; every hair of our heads was numbered. He saw every sparrow that

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fell, and Jesus said "Fear not, you are of more value than many sparrows."

Once he said "I always do what is pleasing to Him". (John 8:29) And on another occasion he said "My meat is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). I hear him saying in this that doing His will was more important than eating.

He had spoken earlier of himself as the Good Shepherd, the True Shepherd who would lay down his life for his sheep - that he would lay it down of his own accord, but would take it again (he was not passive in that act). But then he added "This charge (command) have I received from my Father" (Jn 10:18)

So it was all his Father's will. We cannot miss the clear intention of this action - he and his Father were in total accord. How comforting these words have been to so many throughout history.

But a great part of his words to encourage the disciples at this time would have come from his promise of 3 great gifts:

1) the Holy Spirit, whom he called the "*Counsellor* - whom the Father will send in my name. He will teach you *all things* and bring to your remembrance_what I have said to you." The fact is they had *never really* understood his words or what he had come to do, until they received the Spirit at Pentecost (50 days after Easter). Then they *did* understand the whole of it - their history, the law of God (the Torah), the words of the prophets foretelling the Messiah...but only *after* Pentecost did they really know who Jesus was, and what he had done for them and for the world. The will of God is not really understandable to unaided humanity.

2) his peace.

He said "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." They had really needed that. They had been a terrified, dispirited group after the Crucifixion, hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. After Pentecost they were quite fearless, understanding and bold like they had never been, afraid of nothing, and in particular now not afraid of death. That peace had come of course into their minds as they were illumined by the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of truth. Israel had always looked for the *shalom*, the full peace of God, implying ultimate well-being, the freedom from every enemy including the fear of death. It was even more than all that! Jesus had said "whoever keeps my word will never see death"; others might see it i.e. see them die, but they would never "experience it"! As the Rev Geoffrey Bingham said, they would "cross the railway line and not even feel the bump". They would be conscious only of new, abundant life. All this had come to them through Jesus the Messiah, whose promises had always held good.

Now for his main promise.

3) This was about their ultimate identification with him (and so ours too).

"In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you". This is a hard statement to really fathom. To help us, earlier he had said "In my Father's house are many rooms (monai: dwellings, apartments)...and I go to prepare a place for you. And when I go...I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am

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you may be also." The emphasis here is not primarily on the place (we were given no detail on that), but on the relationship, and the together-ness of it. He increased the picture of it even further: "if a person loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come and make our home (*monai*) with him." (Jn 14:23) Surely this is the "true home". From one point of view who cares where it is? It will be the richness of the fellowship that Jesus has always shared with the father - that is what we will also share in! (Surely that is what constitutes "more than we can ask or imagine" of which St. Paul spoke to the Corinthian Christians, (quoting from Isaiah 64, speaking of what God has prepared for those who "wait for Him".)

J.B.Phillips translates Eph 1:5-6 in this way *"He (God) planned, in His purpose of love, that we should be adopted as his own children through Jesus Christ - that we might learn to praise that glorious generosity of His which has made us welcome in the everlasting love He bears towards the Son."* Jesus prays later in his "High Priestly" prayer *"I pray for these and also for those who will believe in me through their word - that they all may be one, even as Thou Father art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us,I in them and Thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them even as Thou hast loved me"* (John 17:20-23)

So now we see the true home, that is, heaven! More detail than that we have never been given, presumably because we do not need to know.

How did this remarkable circumstance arise - how did we ever come to be in the position of being able to share so wonderful a gift? We are told the answer in a Jewish idiom. Jesus, Messiah incognito, presented himself as a "full, perfect, all-sufficient" sacrifice for the whole of human sin. He carried our sins in his body, as the sin-bearer to the place of judgment - our judgment actually, and so he died. (The wages of sin has always been death!) But he went to it as our representative and substitute (a very Jewish principle).

And just as our sin would be destroyed like straw in a fire, so it was destroyed in the white hot crucible of his holy conscience. So our penalty was paid and our consciences cleansed in that holy act. His judgment on our behalf dealt with our guilt, and released us to live in the benefit of his atoning sacrifice. We can stand now in God's presence. The Accuser's main weapon, guilt, has been defused and removed. Like the "scapegoat" in the wilderness Jesus suffered "outside the camp" in carrying our sins away and dying for those sins, which were not his own.

Now his original righteousness has been "imputed" to us, and God sees us as "in him". This was his Father's plan from the beginning - Jesus was the only begotten son that God so loved the world that He gave. That purpose was fulfilled in Christ. Peter speaks of him as the "lamb without blemish or spot who was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for us". (1 Pet 1:19-20) It is the genius of the Word of God that such statements are timeless: they are all fulfilled in God's time throughout history. And we are the beneficiaries of all that. How blessed we are!

We have been given all this as a foretaste of heaven; it has the "taste", the quality of heaven, but the fulness of our "hope" is yet to be experienced.

Amen.

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3rd hymn (T Penlan David Jenkins 1849-19150) *by Anna L Warring 1823-1910*

- 1) In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear,
and safe is such confiding, for nothing changes here,
The storm may roar around me, my heart may low be laid,
but God is round about me, and can I be dismayed?
- 2) Wherever He may guide me no want shall turn me back,
my Shepherd is beside me and nothing can I lack,
His wisdom ever waketh, His sight is never dim,
He knows the way He taketh and I will walk with Him.
- 3) Green pastures are before me which yet I have not seen,
Bright skies will soon be o'er me where the dark clouds have been,
My hope I cannot measure, my path to life is free;
My Saviour has my treasure, and he will walk with me.

Benediction:

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
Amen.

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