

## “The Connection”

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### Invocation:

Dear Father, we delight to meet in Christian fellowship this morning, knowing that you hear our prayers and accept our worship. Thank you for giving us entry to your presence, lead us in our worship by your Spirit, and teach us more of your ways in this time together. For we come in the name of your Son our Lord Jesus the Christ. Amen.

### 1<sup>st</sup> hymn: AHB145 *by Charles Wesley (T Millenium)*

- 1) Let earth and heaven agree, angels and men be joined,  
to celebrate with me the Saviour of mankind;  
to adore the all-atoning lamb, and bless the sound of Jesus' name.
- 2) His name the sinner hears, and is from sin set free;  
'tis music in his ears, 'tis life and victory;  
New songs do now his lips employ, and dances his glad heart for joy.
- 3) O unexampled love! O all-redeeming grace!  
how swiftly didst Thou move to save a fallen race:  
what shall I do to make it known what Thou for all mankind hast done?
- 4) A for a trumpet's voice, on all the world to call!  
To bid their hearts rejoice in Him who died for all;  
For all my Lord was crucified, for all , for all my Saviour died.

### Prayers, including intercessions:

Dear Father,

We thank you this morning for the rains you have sent us this Autumn, a season which is usually rather dry. It is wonderful to see the land being restored, and the reservoirs being filled.

We are aware we do not enter your presence at this time, for you are always with us, never absent. But we concentrate and focus our prayers upon you, for you only know the prayers we wish to pray and in a real sense have already heard our prayers. “You hear us always”, just as Jesus could pray, making his prayers audible for those present at that time, while knowing he could pray silently and still be heard. But we pray as a Christian group, and ask firstly for our land – the “lucky country” yet there are so many who take so much for granted, mostly unaware that you constantly hear us. And so many do not know that you watch over us, and so many that fear any number of things, often because they do not know of your Fatherly care for us. We thank you for that care.

Lead our leaders in their choices in governing us, and give them wisdom and discernment in their decision-making.

The world behaves as if you are not there, and we see their prejudices and hatreds break out unto war at times. We pray for a cessation of hostilities in Ukraine, asking that the Aggressor, Mr Putin, will pull back and cease destroying his neighbour's cities and threatening and killing their citizens. We pray peace again return to that ravaged land.

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We bring our families to you, especially those who may have heard, but never responded to your gift in Christ. May they be quickened by your Spirit, and hear you, and respond.

For we ask these our prayers in the all-prevailing name of Jesus, the Christ. Amen

2<sup>nd</sup> hymn: AHB158 by John Newton (T St Peter, Alexander Remagle 1799-1877)

- 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 manna 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 filled 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!

### Readings:

- Psalm 8
- Mark 6:1-6

### Message:

#### The Connection

Some years ago I spent some time with an acquaintance (I’ll call him “Robert”) at a meeting of Gastroenterologists. He had worked in the same hospital as I had and was studying philosophy, of science and religion, history. He once talked to me about the Universe, and its size – 200 billion billion stars and how our solar system was only one galaxy out of billions; our nearest star was 4.3 light years away. He said to me how *arrogant* we are to think we are the only intelligent life in the Universe; that the Judaeo-Christian belief in a monotheistic omnipotent God was a convenient “cop-out” of explanations of the Universe; that it all starts and stops with Him, but of course we *cannot explain Him*; that He allegedly sent His Son to this tiny planet to be “crucified for us”; that He would have had to go to all the other places where there is intelligent life in the Universe and be crucified all over again for them. And this crazy idea of morality, of sin and guilt and shame – it was all St. Paul’s fault! It was all a plot to entrap us in guilt, and sway us to believe all this. He then asked me – he probably should have done this earlier – if I went to church, and when I said “yes” he looked at me with profound pity, left off and went away.

Robert had all that “knowledge”, but not the faintest understanding of the riches we know, and what comes to us via the scriptures. I prayed for him with some tears. He so needed to re-examine his little version of Christianity? His “straw man” was so easy to knock down. I pondered how truth is stranger than fiction – it is also much larger than science – it is beyond it! Science is only a limited tool for measuring and demonstrating little points within the system, it measures the “how” of many things, and is

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unable to get outside of the system and ask the bigger question of “Why” and then “from whom”? God is more breath-taking, more astonishing, more huge than anything the mere philosophy of man could ever have dreamed up or worked out. So how do we find truth?

King David seemed quite certain of the truth, or part of it, 3000 years ago – “When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have ordained, what is man that you are mindful of him.” (Ps 8:3-4) What made David so sure of God’s heart towards him, or mankind in general. Or St Paul (since Robert mentioned him) who was a scholastic genius in his day; did he work out the truth about God?

No! No-one has ever worked it out!

No-one would even guess the truth!

It would have to be told to us! – revealed to us!

For Paul it was by an encounter with Jesus himself – a dramatic one.

He was “struck down” before he understood, as by a symbolic act – he had to be made blind before he could perceive the truth –

- about Jesus whom he was persecuting
- about Jesus’ Father, the God he worshipped, and about the amazing provision He had made through Jesus’ sacrifice
- about the Spirit of God, who was also the Spirit of the Father and the Son, and who finally brought the Truth home to him when Ananias prayed for him and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. But David had also been anointed by the Spirit of God when Samuel prayed for him.

And so it is now. No one will ever know the truth about God without the Spirit making it clear to him or her. And if I am speaking the truth about God the Father and Son and Spirit today, the Spirit will quicken your heart, teaching you in a way that convinces your heart, and you will *know* that it is true. I don’t have the skill, and you don’t have the innate ability to understand these things automatically – the Spirit brings both.

And Paul, having seen who God really was and what he was doing, was “bowled over”! And he was changed for ever – he was astonished at the hugeness of God, and his plan for human beings, and he never stopped talking about it. Here is how he wrote about it to the Christians in Ephesus in Greece. (read Eph 1:3-14 J. B. Phillips)

Baxter Kruger, a Presbyterian Minister, tells a good story about his relationship with his son James. James was about 5, going to primary School. He appeared one day at the door of Baxter’s office, clad in flack jacket with his wooden sword, gave a whoop of joy, and he and Baxter were soon rolling on the floor with delight. Suddenly another little boy, James’ mate and similarly dressed up, had joined them and was equally enjoying the frolic! God spoke to Baxter, saying “Don’t miss this! This little boy doesn’t know you, James does. But James invited his friend home, and into the relationship you have with your son.

This is an expression of the gospel! We are the little boy! We didn’t really know God – Jesus did! In like manner Jesus connected with us, brought us to his Father, and introduced us

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into the relationship he had with his Father, and which he had always had from the beginning. *We* were the “little boy”.

This is “adoption” – and it is what God had always planned.

How did he connect us? First Jesus came as a man – the God-head was earthed. God stooped.... to meet us! No pagan god ever stoops.

So completely did Jesus identify with us, that his colleagues never picked him. (Mark 6:1-6)

He was a carpenter – a tradesman, and as Mark tells us, they could not accept him as a teacher and miracle-worker. The Artists of history have often painted him with a halo – but he didn’t have one! He was an ordinary man in their midst, doing an ordinary job, as far as they were concerned. Oh there were clues that he wasn’t average – remember when he was 12 years old, taken to the Passover Feast at Jerusalem, and he was found in the temple being quizzed by the teachers, listening to them and answering questions – and they were “amazed at his understanding”. (Lk 2:41-49)

Of course once he began his ministry 18 years later he gave many signs of his Messiahship. Some still didn’t pick who he was, but they failed to see the signs. Signs point to something – they are *sign*-ificant, and John makes capital of these in his gospel, and summarises the significance of them. (Jn 20:30-31)

We have just celebrated Easter, remembering those strange and amazing events by which Jesus secured our return to the fellowship of God’s family, by dealing with our estrangement, our dislocation from God due to our sin. It is a long story and sin is a great mystery, but the conscience of every man tells us that it is real, and a big problem. It obscures the heart of God from us, usually painting God as distant....stern (even angry)....judgmental....and severe!

It took Jesus to tell us otherwise. The details of how Jesus accomplished this is the Easter message. But sufficient to remind us by quoting Cecil Alexander in his hymn :

*There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin,  
He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in!*

And he showed us the Father – his Father who was reaching out for us and down to us, because He would not allow us to be alienated and lost.

During Jesus’ first 30 years (“the hidden years” as they were called in a fictional book) he never stopped being the Son of God, loving his Father as he had from “before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20) Though he walked in Adam’s flesh, he refused to participate in man’s hostility to God. In so doing he gave a new significance for all time to –

- Normal activities
- Eating and drinking with his friends
- Discussing all the normal things of life
- Relating to his family and normal friends.

He said once “the Son of man came eating and drinking, and you say ‘behold a gluttonous man and winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners’”. But he had just said “John came

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neither eating nor drinking, and they say ‘he has a devil’”. So he couldn’t win, could he?

He was “normal”, and “the common people heard him gladly”. John was “abnormal” – an ascetic, and people were scared of him.

Jesus did all these things while in constant communion with his Father. So for that bit of time in history, eating, drinking and discussing things with his friends was a *divine activity*.

Between 12 and 30 years, how many chairs, tables, beds, doors, and yokes would he have made? We attach religious value to the miracles, but NOT to the carpentry don’t we? For this bit of history, carpentry was in his hands a “divine activity”. It is *us* who put special labels on what we regard as special activities. Christ dignified eating, drinking, meeting with friends, and plying a trade as things worthy of the Son of God...of God himself.

So what is “normal” any more? Jesus broke the differential between secular and sacred. All our work and other activities, crafts, enjoyment of the creation, our families, our whole lives flow from and are dependent upon the eternal relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit and flow as that great river of life from them into us – whom Christ has connected for ever to God.

Why did Jesus stoop so low to reconnect us, to carry us back to his Father, to share with us the good things he knows and enjoys with his Father?

Because that is what love is! And that is what love does! And it is done! Amen.

3<sup>rd</sup> hymn: by *Edmund Budry* (T Maccabaeus via George Frederick Handel 1685-1759)

1. Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
endless is the victory Thou o’er death hast won,  
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
kept the folded graveclothes where the body lay,  
*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
endless is the victory Thou o’er death has won.*
2. Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb,  
lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;  
let the church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,  
for her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting.
3. No more we doubt Thee, glorious Prince of life;  
life is nought without Thee, aid us in our strife;  
Make us more than conquerors through Thy deathless love,  
bring us safe through Jordan to Thy home above.

### Benediction:

The Lord bless you and keep you ;

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you:

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen.

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