

Call to Worship:

As we sit, or stand, or kneel to worship God today on our own, as a family, in a group or as a congregation, we may or may not have the benefit of musical instruments or someone who can play them, but drink in these words from Psalm 92 – “It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. For you make me glad by your deeds Lord; I sing for joy at what your hands have done. How great are your works, Lord, how profound your thoughts.”

Prayer

Father, I worship you, Creator of all I see and know, the doer of all the deeds that bless me, whose Spirit brings me joy, and who feeds me through your word. Lord, in this time spent in your presence, show me more of who you are that I may praise you more and more.

Song: AHB 68 “Praise my Soul the King of Heaven” (Henry Frances Lyte)

1. Praise my soul the king of heaven; to his feet thy tribute bring;
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me his praise should sing?
Praise him, praise him, hallelujah, praise the everlasting King.
2. Praise him for his grace and favour to our fathers in distress;
Praise him still the same forever, slow to chide and swift to bless:
Praise him, praise him, hallelujah, glorious in his faithfulness.
3. Father-like he tends and spares us; well our feeble frame he knows;
In his hands he gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes:
Praise him, praise him, hallelujah, widely as his mercy flows.
4. Frail as summer’s flower we flourish, blows the wind, and it is gone;
But while mortals rise and perish, God endures unchanging on.
Praise him, praise him, hallelujah, praise the high eternal one.
5. Angels, help us to adore him, ye behold him face to face;
Sun and moon bow down before him, dwellers all in time and space:
Praise him, praise him, hallelujah, praise with us the God of grace.

Prayer of Intercession

Father, I pray for those among my friends, in my family and in my church who are suffering. For those who are devastated by cancer, for those still affected by COVID, those laid low by Chronic Fatigue, and those affected by depression and mental illness. I pray also for those who suffer the loss of capacity through Alzheimer’s and dementia. Father, touch their bodies with your healing hand, and touch their spirits with the presence of your Spirit. Thank you for those who support them – doctors, hospitals, families, and churches.

Sir, we would see Jesus.

Thank you Father for how the Suffering Church teaches us and blesses us from their faith, where they live through the daily suffering of discrimination, injustice, violence, and extreme poverty. I pray with Christians in the Middle Belt of Nigeria who are suffering ongoing attacks by Islamist militants who have looted and razed villages and displaced thousands, and in recent weeks have killed a pastor and his sons. Lord, encourage me with their faith.

I pray with Christians in Somalia displaced and devastated by civil war, in Myanmar who are bombed and displaced by the military, in Ukraine as they suffer from the Russian invasion. Lord, encourage me by their faith.

And Lord, I thank you with the Egyptian Christians as they increasingly are able to worship in newly licensed churches.

And thank you for the vast army of supporters and donors who provide food, clothing and shelter through Barnabas Aid, Open Doors, Bible Society, and other organisations.

I pray through the grace of the Lord Jesus. Amen

Bible Reading:

- Titus 2:1-11 (it will take about 5 minutes to read all of Titus)

You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

Likewise teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to too much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

Song: "There is One Gospel" City Alight (Jonny Robinson, Rich Thompson)

1. There is one Gospel on which I stand for all eternity.
It is my story, my Father's plan, the Son has rescued me.
Oh what a Gospel, Oh what a peace, my highest joy and my deepest need.
Now and forever He is my light, I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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2. There is one Gospel to which I cling, all else I count as loss,
For there, where justice and mercy meet, He saved me on the cross.
No more I boast in what I can bring, no more I carry the weight of sin,
For He has brought me from death to life, I stand in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. There is one Gospel where hope is found, the empty tomb still speaks,
For death could not keep my Saviour down, He lives and I am free.
Now on my Saviour I fix my eyes, my life is His and His hope is mine!
For He has promised I too will rise, I stand in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. And in this gospel the church is one, we do not walk alone.
We have His Spirit as we press on to lead us safely home,
And when in glory still I will sing of this old story that rescued me.
Praise to my Saviour the King of life, I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Message: “Sir, we would see Jesus.”

On the shelf in the pulpit at my church there is a little brass plaque that says simply, “Sir, we would see Jesus”. The church was opened in 1927, and although I don’t know whether it was on the pulpit at that time, I do know that it has been there for at least 60 years. The words of course are those in John 12:21 where some Greeks, who were in Jerusalem to worship at the Passover, said to the disciple Philip, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus” (NIV). Why Philip? Possibly because he was from Bethsaida in Galilee (northern Israel and on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee) where it is known that many Greeks settled, and Philip was perhaps a familiar face, or at least had the accent! Philip, interestingly, didn’t go directly to Jesus, but enlisted the help of Andrew, and they delivered the message to him.

It doesn’t seem as though the Greeks got the private audience that perhaps they were seeking, but they certainly got to see and hear who Jesus really was, along with all the crowd present at the time. In the days before this encounter, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, Mary had anointed Jesus’ feet with the expensive perfume, and he had ridden a donkey colt into Jerusalem through the crowds waving palm branches and shouting “Hosanna”. There was much talk about the Messiah and a buzz amongst the crowd wondering if this was him. Little wonder that the Greeks wanted to see him and get to the bottom of it as the Greeks were wont to do, with their cultural heritage of being rational thinkers, and like Euclid, wanted to prove the theorem!

Jesus spoke to the whole crowd, not just the Greeks, and made it very clear that he is the Son of God by using the term “Father”. He implies the title of “Messiah” by referring to himself as the “Son of Man” (OT reference), he tells them that he is going to die and be glorified, tells them that this is his purpose for being there, and reminding them of the cost of discipleship. Then as an exclamation mark to what he had just spoken, God the Father spoke to him, and the crowd heard the thunder of his voice. Jesus then adds mention of the judgement, the defeat of Satan, and the drawing of his people to himself.

Did the Greeks get to see Jesus? You bet they did! They got the full picture, the whole 9 yards or whatever idiom you care to use!

So, back to the plaque in the pulpit of my church. Why is it there? It was regarded as significantly important because in a church upgrade in the 90's the old pulpit was discarded, and the plaque removed and affixed to the new one. The reason is that it's a reminder to all preachers who stand in the pulpit of their responsibility and calling to ensure that the congregation will see Jesus in both their preaching and their demeanour.

Firstly, preaching. Any preacher, or teacher, ordained or lay person, should be basing their teaching on the word of God where the truth about Jesus lies, where the purpose of the Father sending his Son is made clear. In the Titus passage above, Titus is exhorted by Paul to teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine (2:1). Reason? To carry on Paul's calling "to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness" (1:1). He is exhorted to teach the older men and the women godly behaviour. Reason? So that no-one will malign the word of God (2:5). He is reminded to teach, and model, exemplary behaviour to the younger men. Reason? So that those who opposed them may be ashamed because they had nothing bad to say about them (2:8). Even slaves (in our day, workers) are to be taught the godly way to regard their masters. Reason? So that in every way they will make the teaching about God the Saviour attractive (2:10).

Paul's words to Titus are a reminder to him, and to all who preach and teach, (and those who receive the teaching) that not only must the words spoken be sound in doctrine, encouraging, and where required, strong, but their behaviour, demeanour, relationships and integrity must be beyond reproach, because when they stand in the pulpit, or behind the lectern (or whatever they had up the front in the 1st century), the congregation must see Jesus.

All that we do in church as we meet, and worship together should have the purpose of those in the congregation "seeing Jesus". When any of us get up to read the word of God we want the listeners to "see Jesus". When we get up to pray, we want people to meet Jesus. When we share a testimony, it is so people can get glimpse of the reality of Jesus. Paul spoke strongly to the Corinthians about their conduct at Holy Communion. The sacrament that should reveal so much about Jesus was riven by class distinction, by gluttony and drunkenness. What a great way for those watching all this to see Jesus!! And the Corinthians, again, were warned about their sexual immorality, and in one case were actually proud of it! What a way for others to see Jesus!

It is not only preachers and teachers who are called to live a life where others can see Jesus, but each and every one of us who are his followers. Not just in the church setting, but in all aspects of our lives. When we play sport, do people see Jesus – on the football field or the bowling green? When we are engaged in our jobs and professions, do people see Jesus – in the classroom, boardroom, or courtroom? Whether we farm, or fish, or fold the ironing we do so as followers of Jesus, and we hope that others will see Jesus in all that we do.

And of course, we fail at various times, but by the grace of God our lives are not like an account book with a profit and loss column, with God's final judgement depending on us finishing in the black. Rather, the loss column is wiped clean by the blood of Jesus and God's forgiveness. There are plenty of times when I had hoped that people would see

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Jesus in me, but they saw something else entirely. Praise God that both the sin and the guilt are blotted out by the work of Jesus on the cross. I love the line in the hymn “Rock of Ages” – “Be of sin the double cure, cleanse me of its guilt and power”. I know that my failures are forgiven, but the power of the guilt to hogtie me from growth, and “to try again”, can linger. Romans 8:1 **there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.**

With the power of sin broken, we can be empowered by the Holy Spirit to grow further into the likeness of Jesus, to obey his commands, to live as his servants, to follow his calling in ministry, and to be immersed in his word. The Greeks came to see Jesus. May each of us rejoice in the new life we have so that others will see Jesus in us.

Song: “Here I am , Lord” (Talbot)

1. I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin, my hand will save.
I have made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them? Whom will I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go, Lord. If You lead me, I will hold Your people in my heart.*
2. I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide, ‘til their hearts be satisfied
I will give My life to them. Whom shall I send?

Benediction

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and earthly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11-14)

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA