

Glenkens Worship Resources for Sunday 12th September 2021

Summer suns are glowing
over land and sea;
happy light is flowing
bountiful and free.
Everything rejoices
in the mellow rays;
all earth's thousand voices
swell the psalm of praise.

We will never doubt thee,
though thou veil thy light;
life is naught without thee,
death with thee is bright.
Light of light, shine o'er us
on our pilgrim way;
go thou still before us
to the endless day.

God's free mercy streameth
over all the world,
and his banner gleameth
everywhere unfurled.
Broad and deep and glorious
as the heaven above,
shines in might victorious
his eternal love.

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for this opportunity to meet with you – that you dwell in the midst of the praises of your people. When we consider the vastness of your creation and the wonders of your works we might be inclined to ask, ‘What is humanity that you are mindful of us?’ Yet you have created us in your image and crowned us with blessings, calling us into relationship with yourself. You set your Spirit within our hearts to lead us into all truth. You have made us for yourself and in your presence is fullness of joy. We thank you for your mercies, which are new every morning.

Forgive us the small-mindedness we display at times, and our lack of concern for others. Forgive us for the way we too often fail to recognise you and give you space within the fabric of our daily lives. Strengthen us against temptation and may the knowledge of your love fill us and overwhelm us. May we recognise that all good things come from you and that your light can guide us on the path that leads to life.

God of grace and truth, Eternal Father, strong to save, you are the light of the minds that know you, the life of the souls that love you, and the strength of the hearts that serve you. Help us to know you, that we may truly love you; and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom. We bring you our thanks and praise and dedicate ourselves afresh to your service and the service of others. And so we would pray and say,

Our Father who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever. Amen.

¹I urge you, then—I who am a prisoner because I serve the Lord: live a life that measures up to the standard God set when he called you. ²Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another. ³Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. ⁵There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶there is one God and Father of all people, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all.

⁷Each one of us has received a special gift in proportion to what Christ has given. ⁸As the scripture says,

“When he went up to the very heights,
he took many captives with him;
he gave gifts to people.”

⁹Now, what does “he went up” mean? It means that first he came down to the lowest depths of the earth. ¹⁰So the one who came down is the same one who went up, above and beyond the heavens, to fill the whole universe with his presence. ¹¹It was he who “gave gifts to people”; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. ¹²He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ. ¹³And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature. ¹⁴Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful people, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent. ¹⁵Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head. ¹⁶Under his control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love.

Song

We are one in the Spirit,
We are one in the Lord,
We are one in the Spirit,
We are one in the Lord,
And we pray that all unity
May one day be restored.
*And they'll know we are Christians
By our love, by our love,
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

We will walk with each other,
We will walk hand in hand,
We will walk with each other,
We will walk hand in hand,
And together we'll spread the news
That God is in our land.

All praise to the Father
From whom all things come,
And all praise to Christ Jesus
His only Son,
And all praise to the Spirit
Who makes us one.

Reflection

When we look around in our society there are many people living very isolated lives. It's no secret that our societies are becoming more individualistic, as nuclear families become nuclear individuals. Many people now live on their own; and they exist in isolated little units, with their own little circle of friends if they're lucky. The irony is that as the world has got smaller, people have got more isolated from one another.

And it's very easy for us as Christians to act the same as society around us. To simply turn up at church once a week on a Sunday to a gathering of individuals, sing a few hymns, hear some words spoken and then go back to our homes until we meet a week later. The danger is that we become a church in name but not in actual practice. And that is not the way God meant it to be. Rather God is building a new society, a people built together on the foundation of his Son, a people who are united under one Lord and who share together and work together for the spreading of the gospel.

Earlier in Ephesians Paul has spoken of the church being a body, the body of Christ; and in Ephesians 4 he shares how as Christians we are called to be a fully working body caring for one another and supporting one another. We are called to be counter-cultural, showing the world a better way, letting God's Word shape our minds and actions, living as the people of God are meant to live, not becoming more isolated, but growing more together.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians we have learned how we are now citizens of a new kingdom and members of a new family. We have seen what Christ has done for us and our privileged position in him. Now we are called to live according to who we are. We are called to unity. We are called to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds us together. And we have been given the grace to enable us to do so. Paul says we should be humble, gentle and patient, and to show our love by being tolerant with one another. Being humble means seeing oneself aright. It means being honest with yourself. Gentle could also be translated 'meek'. Meekness is not weakness and gentleness doesn't mean being wishy-washy and indulgent. The idea behind gentleness is 'power under control'. In the Greek language the word was used of wild horses that were broken and trained. Patience is sometimes translated by 'long-suffering'. Humility and gentleness combine to produce patience. The idea is to hold one another up, to support one another and operate in love towards one another. All these are characteristics of Christ and combine to produce the nature of Christ within us.

The Spirit of God has brought us into the bond of peace by reconciling us to God. As Christians we now enjoy peace with God - and so we come to experience the unity which the Spirit gives, binding us together in love. We all have the same hope, we have the same Lord, the same faith, the same baptism, and the same God and Father of all mankind, who stands over against all other gods and idols who are no gods at all. If we serve the same Lord and are members together of his Body we should be able to walk together in unity. But if our god is our own preferences and desires then it will show through all too clearly and we will be divided. When it says there is one God and Father this is probably another way of saying that we are all one family under God. Those who have been baptised into Christ and received his Spirit can now refer to God as their heavenly Father. In the Lord's Prayer we don't pray 'My Father', but 'Our Father'. We belong together as his people and the ground of our unity is not that we all agree, but that God has made us one by placing us together in Christ. Paul would have been shocked at the division within the church in our own day, a church which over the

centuries has splintered into so many different denominations – to such a degree that members of some groups have difficulty recognising members of others as fellow Christians. We need to recover our unity as members of one body, recognising Christ in one another even though we may still continue to worship him in different ways. That is what I find so inspiring about the National Days of Prayer in the Ukraine organised by David Hathaway in recent years. There all denominations have come together to share the same platform and pray for God's blessing on their nation. Jesus himself prayed in John 17: 21, 'I pray that they may all be one, Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one so that the world will believe that you sent me.'

Then having spoken about our unity in Christ, Paul goes on to speak about our diversity. All of us have been given different gifts by the grace of Christ, he says. Paul quotes from Psalm 68, which tells how God goes up to his city, Zion, in victory, leading a whole train of captives. And he is giving out the booty from his victory. And Paul sees that Jesus has fulfilled these verses by his resurrection, ascension and exaltation. The Jesus who came to earth, who descended from heaven and who humbled himself even to death on a cross, is the very same Jesus who now rules the heavens and equips his church. It is this risen and glorified Jesus who has given us gifts.

In verse 11 he mentions various equipping gifts. These are not gifts given to individuals; they are gifted individuals who have been given to the church to build it up. He mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. An apostle is one who is sent. In most of the places where this is used in the New Testament it refers to the original twelve disciples chosen by Jesus. But others like Paul and Barnabas, Silas and Apollos, are called apostles. They were involved in planting churches, and in that sense the ministry of an apostle lives on to this day. Prophets are those who speak out the Word of God. The ministry of a prophet is not so much a foretelling of the future as a forth-telling of the Word of the Lord. The Bible teaches that the New Testament gift of prophecy is given for edification, exhortation and comfort. And that is precisely the effect when God speaks a fresh word into our contemporary situations. Evangelists are those who are anointed to preach with power to the lost. Pastors and teachers may be thought of as two aspects of the same gift. A pastor is one who feeds and cares for the sheep, to strengthen them and build them up.

But why did Christ give these gifts to the church? 'He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ' (v.12). Contrary to popular belief the job of spiritual leaders is not to do all the ministry. It is to equip the rest of the body for ministry. So the idea is every member ministry! The church is not meant to be like a bus with the minister in the driving seat and everyone else enjoying the ride. It should be more like an orchestra with everyone playing their part and the leader keeping everyone in time. Too often over the centuries the clergy have been elevated to a position above everyone else, or have elevated themselves to such a position, depriving others of the opportunity for ministry. The clergy should be equipping others for ministry, not trying to do all the work themselves or being left by the rest of the body to do more than their reasonable share.

And as we are all strengthened and equipped as God's people we should come more and more 'to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature. Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful people, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent. Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way into Christ who is the head. Under his

control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So, when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love.'

'Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Christ who is the head.' It is right that both truth and love are mentioned. Truth without love can be harsh and judgmental. Love without truth can be condoning and produce no change. When truth and love are joined, we are enabled to grow up. Truth and love produce growth.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian and pastor who was executed in a Nazi concentration camp, in his book *Life Together* makes this statement: 'Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin.' In church we should care for one another that much. We should be accountable to one another and to those God has placed over us as leaders. We should love God enough to obey him. We should love his Word enough to read it and submit to it. We should love his church enough to be committed to it. We should love people enough to reach out to them. And we should love fellow Christians enough to walk in unity with them, to forgive them, and to be accountable together with them to the lordship of Christ. A wedding of truth and love is a mark of the mature believer.

Song

*Bind us together, Lord,
Bind us together
With cords that cannot be broken.
Bind us together, Lord,
Bind us together,
Bind us together with love.*

There is only one God,
There is only one King;
There is only one Body,
That is why we sing:

Made for the glory of God,
Purchased by His precious Son;
Born with the right to be clean,
For Jesus the victory has won.

You are the family of God,
You are the promise divine;
You are God's chosen desire,
You are the glorious new wine.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for giving us Jesus and for the way he has built a bridge to us in our lost humanity. We thank you for the way he has come to indwell our lives by the Spirit, and build us together into a new Body, the Church, of which he is the head. Bind us together in love and give us a sensitivity to you and to one another. May we grow up into

Christ and be tuned in to his Word to us, so that we are not tossed to and fro by the storms of this life. May we learn better his ways of love.

We pray for those who put their trust and faith in false gods, who know there is something missing in their lives, but deny that it is you – instead seeking refuge in money, possessions, and success or becoming addicted to things that take control of their lives.

We pray for our world that is broken and in pain. For those who are in sorrow and need. For the hungry, poor, and lonely. For the sick and bereaved. Strengthen your church to reach out in compassion to those who are struggling and to stand with them in their time of need, that they may come to know you as their rock and constant companion in difficult and dark days, and know also the companionship of others on life's journey.

Enable your church to share with all the peace of your presence, the healing of your touch and the strength of your guiding hand, so that all who are weak and weary may walk in hope and faith. May we know your blessing today and in the coming days. Amen.

Hymn

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care;
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world; when we disown and doubt you,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without you,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us,
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

And now may the peace of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - rest upon you and go with you into the coming days. In Jesus' name. Amen.