

SUNDAY 26th JULY 2020

Welcome & Announcements (Caroleen)

Call to worship video 'Give thanks' from Psalm 118

Praise Song *'Here is love'*

Prayer

Scripture Reading Acts 4:32-37

Video 'Generous people'

Hymn mp 181 God forgave my sin in Jesus name (Sun 23/2/20)

Scripture Reading Acts 5:1-11

Sermon

Prayers for Others (including 'world watch' Connor)

Hymn HP 753 All praise to our redeeming Lord (26/1/20)

Blessing

Welcome & Announcements

Good morning & welcome to our service. Just a few announcements before we begin our worship. Firstly just a reminder that there is a short video available on our website which shows what you can expect when we begin our services again once more on Sunday 23rd August. Do have a look at it.

Our Minister Colin is off for a few weeks from this Tuesday 28th & the Rev Michael Spence will be covering. If you need a Minister

do contact our society steward Caroleen Cunningham & she can advise you.

Also just to say a word of congratulations to Duncan & Anne Alderdice on becoming great-grandparents with the birth of baby Judah.

Also congratulations to Olivia Elder who is 21 this week.

Finally it is with sadness that we have to inform you that Mr Howard Lynch died in the past week, we hold his family in our prayers. We will now join Colin for our call to worship.

Call to worship

Psalm 118 ¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;

his love endures forever. Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today & be glad. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you. The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine on us. ²⁸ You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. ²⁹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; His love endures forever.

Praise Song 'here is love'

*Here is love, vast as the ocean
Loving kindness as the flood
When the Prince of Life, our Ransom
She'd for us His precious blood.
Who His love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing His praise?*

*He can never be forgotten
Throughout Heaven's eternal days*

*On the mount of crucifixion
Fountains opened deep and wide
Through the floodgates of God's mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers
Poured incessant from above
And Heaven's peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love*

Opening Prayer

God whose love is vast beyond the size of any ocean, God whose loving kindness is more powerful than any flood... We come to worship You this morning humbled once more by all that You have done for us... Generous God You who did not withhold Your Only Son You gave us Your very best the Prince of Life our Ransom.. God Your grace & love flow like mighty rivers... & we pray that they would pour upon us afresh today.... Lord we worship You the author of true sacrificial love.. But as we do we pause & quietly confess again this morning that while Your love for us is perfect... that ours for You & for others is often not what it should be.... Lord forgive us a sinful people & make us new afresh through the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ...

God is slow to anger and full of compassion.
He forgives all who humbly repent and trust in his Son as Saviour and Lord. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who

are in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

So now we are going to hear the first of our bible readings.

Acts 4:32-37

³² All the believers were one in heart & mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there was no needy person among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ & put it at the apostles' feet, & it was distributed to anyone who had need. ³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Video 'Generous people'

Hymn Mp 181 God forgave my sin in Jesus name

God forgave my sin in Jesus' name
I've been born again in Jesus' name
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His love as He told me to

*Chorus- He said: 'Freely, freely, you have received
Freely, freely give; Go in My name & because you believe
Others will know that I live.'*

All power is given in Jesus' name
In earth and heaven in Jesus' name

And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His power as He told me to

Chorus - He said: 'Freely, freely, you have received....'

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Acts 5:1-11 But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. ² He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife's consent, he kept the rest.

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, & you kept some of the money for yourself. ⁴ The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God!" ⁵ As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor & died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. ⁶ Then some young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, & took him out & buried him.

⁷ About 3 hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Was this the price you & your husband received for your land?" "Yes," she replied, "that was the price." ⁹ And Peter said, "How could the 2 of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, & they will carry you out, too." ¹⁰ Instantly, she fell to the floor & died. When the young men came in & saw that she was dead, they carried her out & buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear gripped the entire church & everyone else who heard what had happened.

SERMON They were the first communistsso said my RE teacher said to us many years ago as he sought to describe the early Christian community in Acts chapter 4. To be honest looking back I guess he was just trying to get a bunch of rather bored school boys sit up & pay attention... but his words stuck with me & now years later... I realise that actually the truth is much more challenging than that... for these were not just a group of political revolutionaries... or even religious zealots... NO this was a group of people who had been so impacted by the love of Jesus...so drawn together into a new community that the life of God just flowed from them...these weren't communists... these were Christians, people who had freely received & so freely gave.

Over these past Sundays we have been reflecting on the practices of the early believers in the book of Acts... And we have focussed on what they were devoted too... the apostles teaching, prayer, and worship & this morning we continue as we note how in being devoted to God....they were also devoted to each other. Our first passage Acts 4:32-25 provides us with a nice summary of how these followers of Jesus were generously committed to each other.... We are told in vs 32 that they '*were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had*' Yes these weren't communists who had been forced to share with each other because of ideology, these weren't even just religious people who thought that sharing was the right thing to do... No these were people who through the grace of God had become '*one in heart & mind.*' These were people who cared deeply about each other & that's important to say because we could slip into the trap of focussing almost entirely on the money in these passages & so miss something much deeper....hearts that had

been touched by God's generous grace to a point where it overflowed out from their lives in practical ways...including the sharing of possessions.

I remember someone quoting this passage once when a few of us were travelling around India during a break from working there. We had not been spending lavishly nevertheless we began to realise that some of us had perhaps underestimated the amount of rupees we would need & so money was tight. I remember people putting their money on one of the beds in one of our lodging rooms & we shared out the excess so that everyone had enough until we got back to the city we were based in. Sounds good but the truth is that it was really only a few rupees & probably most of us thought we would get it back some time!

But that's not the example that we are given here at the end of chapter 4 in Acts... No here we are told about those who were ready to sell their own land or houses (vs34) so that they could provide for those in their community who were in need. Luke, the writer of Acts, then goes on to give us a wonderful example of this lavish generosity by introducing us to Barnabas..a man whose real name was Joseph but who had been given the name Barnabas because it meant something like son of exhortation or encouragement ...Yes here was man who had been so touched by God's grace, one who was so ready to help others, that the early Christians felt they had to actually rename him ... Son of encouragement. . Yes as Jesus said of his followers in Matthew 7:16 ' *You will know them by their fruits.*' And the early Christians were able to clearly recognise those fruits in the life of Barnabas...a man who was not only generous with his money but as we see in the rest of the book of Acts, a man who was also generous with his friendship & forgiveness.

The American Christian leader Ken Harrison calls generosity ' *the ultimate act of worship*' for he says that ' *Worship is not just singing and praising. Worship is generously and adoringly giving back to God what He has given us. A key part of doing that is seeking out ways to sacrificially meet the needs of others.*'

The early believers were devoted to God & so devoted to each other & this led to sacrificial giving...Giving of their time, their talents & their treasure... Giving... the fruit of hearts & lives that had been touched & changed by Jesus... Giving generously because we have been given *love vast as the ocean.*

I can't remember the first time I read our 2nd passage this morning but I do know it certainly made me sit up in my chair & take notice! No there is no denying the shocking nature of the verses that follow on from the wonderful example of Barnabas. Yes the story of Ananias & Sapphira shocks us & it also tells us that while we might be able to deceive human beings with any outward charity & good works...that God always looks deeper & that He won't be mocked or taken in.

This disturbing passage reminds us that the issue in finance isn't about how much we give, but rather how we give it, what are our motivations, what is going on in our hearts? It also points out how seriously God desires honesty, purity & unity among his people.

So what do we learn from these early Christians about the area of generosity? Well firstly we are reminded that being generous with our time, talent & treasure... is something that happens when we have tasted & are trusting in God's continued generous grace. Again the author Ken Harrison likens generosity to teaching a child to swim when they jump into your arms in the water from the side of the pool ... ' *Generosity is the same*' Harrison says ' *When you practice generosity, you're jumping into*

God's arms, knowing He will care for you. And those around you receive a blessing as well.

So the first question to each of us is a simple one...what is our experience of God's grace in our lives? Are we continuing to experience God's love & mercy through these difficult days...In what ways has God been providing & caring for us through lockdown & now into this time of unlocking...? It's important to take time to not these because being assured of God's care for us releases us to care for others...

Secondly these passages remind me of the powerful witness that lies in sincere generosity. It can be money or it can be our time & energy but people do take notice when something is offered lovingly with 'no strings attached'. One such example comes from Poppy Williams who works for the 24/7 prayer movement & who used to serve on their team on the party island of Ibiza. Each night the team would go out to offer people who were worse for wear help in getting back to their apartments. The team would clean up vomit & be out all night helping others...and Poppy tells of one night when a passerby saw her helping a rather drunk couple home... The passerby just had to ask the question... 'Why are you doing this?'

As we enter what we keep being told will be a new normal...as we continue to face the challenge of this pandemic...many, many people are also facing increasing economic pressures... And we have the opportunity, as people cared for by God, to share that care with others. Sometimes that will mean money... sometimes it will mean us giving of our energy & time... But whatever we find ourselves giving let us do so generously with thankful hearts.

Heavenly Father, God who gives so generously help us to receive all that You have for us so that we share it abundantly with others. **amen**

Prayers for Others

And we begin our Prayers for Others this Sunday with our monthly 'world watch' slot as Connor Cunningham helps us consider & pray for Christians who face persecution in parts of our world.... This time we look at the situation for Christians in India.

India currently sits at number 10 in the open doors *world watch list* of the top 50 countries where Christians are facing persecution. India has a population of 1.4 billion of whom between 60-90 million are Christians. The predominant religion in India is Hinduism, to be Indian is thought to be Hindu. Hindu extremists want India to be rid of Christians and all other minority religions. Ultra nationalism is on the rise in India & the last election saw a landslide for the nationalist BJP party. Since the BJP has come to power attacks against Christians has more than doubled, what started out as religious intolerance of Christians has escalated to outright physical violence over the years. The Evangelical Fellowship of India listed 366 incidents where Christians were targeted in 2019 & there were 40 more recorded in the first 2 months of 2020. Most of the incidents are physical violence threats & disruption of services & prayer meetings by extremists or the police. Right wing Hindu groups are angered by the growing number of conversions to Christianity by the Dalit

underclass. There are up to 300 million Dalits in India today & they are sometimes referred to as 'untouchables'. Dalits are assigned the most menial tasks in society as many Hindus believe that extreme poverty is the Dalits' lot in life. Pastor Kumar Swamy says 'In my childhood I constantly remember my mother saying that we were untouchables, subhuman was the word she used.that is how I grew up...constantly being told by my own mother that I was subhuman... So I saw myself that it is only the gospel that gives dignity to human beings... there is dignity in the gospel & that is what a Dalit longs to hear...the gospel is the answer to the Dalits... Dalits are coming to Jesus Christ in huge numbers. So many Christians in India are Dalits & have been effected terribly by the current crisis...no work means No food.. Many are dependent upon the likes of open doors & other organisations for the provision of help during this time as many Christians have been denied government aid. Remember however that those who help these Dalits are themselves facing opposition.

Many states have adopted anti-conversion laws in an attempt to stop increasing numbers of Dalits converting to Christianity. These laws require clergy leading people to Christ to give 1 months notice to the police & the police investigate... Individuals wishing to change their religion must obtain the governments permission, officially this is to stop forced conversions but, these laws are widely open to abuse... The offer of Heaven can be portrayed as an inducement & charitable works are often

portrayed as bribery! Hindu radicals have issued death threats & ordered the closure of Churches... intimidation happens daily. Significantly there have been moves to try & impose anti-conversion laws across the whole of India. Many believe that the BJP have an agenda to stop all conversions & to try & turn the country from being officially a secular state to a Hindu state.

Increasing numbers of Indian Christians need our prayers for SAFETY- SECURITY - SURVIVAL & GROWTH.

We pray for our brothers & sisters in India using a prayer from Pastor Kumar Swamy - Our prayer is that in spite of persecution the Church of Jesus Christ in India will stand strong in the word & continue to witness, that we will not fear & not be intimidated but we will continue to be courageous & stand firm. This is our calling as Indian Christians. Amen

And so we continue in prayer as we bring to God those who have requested our prayers.

We begin by giving God the glory for His work in the life of Hannah Smyth who, after her terrible accident, is now speaking full sentences & having normal conversations! We thank God for His work & for the NHS staff who have been caring for her.

We Praise God too for His mercy & protection shown to Timothy Harte at this time & to the progress made towards healing among many of those we have been praying for. & we continue to pray for **Timothy- Daniel Kidson - Shirley Bristow - Nan Irwin, - Tina Donaldson - Jerry & Jean McHaffie- baby Rosie - Bernie McKee - Margaret Kennedy- Lou Kennedy & Marta Kennedy.**

We remember too those who have experienced loss this week... Firstly the family of **Ethel Campbell** following her death, praying especially for her son Rodney & family.

Also the family of **Howard Lynch**, remembering especially his sons Brian & Jackie & the grandchildren Michelle, Stephen, David & Connor & the wider family..

We also remember all others who have experienced loss in these past days.

We finish with the Lord's Prayer

Closing Hymn *All praise to our redeeming Lord*

All Praise To Our Redeeming Lord,
Who Joins Us By His Grace,
And Bids Us, Each To Each Restored,
Together Seek His Face,
Together Seek His Face.

He Bids Us Build Each Other Up;
And, Gathered Into One,
To Our High Calling's Glorious Hope,
We Hand In Hand Go On,
We Hand In Hand Go On.

The Gift Which He On One Bestows,
We All Delight To Prove;
The Grace Through Every Vessel Flows,
In Purest Streams Of Love,
In Purest Streams Of Love.

We All Partake The Joy Of One;
The Common Peace We Feel;
A Peace To Worldly Minds Unknown,
A Joy Unspeakable, A Joy Unspeakable.

And If Our Fellowship Below
In Christ Yet Be So Sweet,
What Height Of Rapture Shall We Know,
When Round His Throne We Meet,
When Round His Throne We Meet!

Closing Blessing So let us encourage & bless each other generously with the words of the grace. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God & the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us forevermore.