

SUNDAY 6th Sept 2020

Welcome & Announcements

Call to worship Psalm 149

Praise Song 'Jesus all for Jesus'

Prayer

Old Testament Reading Gen 12:1-3

Offering

New Testament reading: Acts 8:1-8

Sermon

Prayers for Others

Hymn Hp 65 'God moves in a mysterious way' Sun 24/3/19

Blessing

12 noon live Communion through Facebook

Call to worship- Psalm 149

¹ Praise the LORD. ***Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.***

² Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;

Praise Song

Prayer let us pray- ***Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen***

Let us now take some moments in quiet as we each have that opportunity to confess to God once more our sins & failures.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
Amen. Thanks be to God

Old Testament Reading - Genesis 12:1-5

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people & your father's household to the land I will show you.

² "I will make you into a great nation, & I will bless you; I will make your name great, & you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, & whoever curses you I will curse; & all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Offering

New Testament Reading Acts 8:1b-8 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, & all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea & Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen & mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men & women & put them in prison.

⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

SERMON **SLIDE 1** To be honest I was hot & tired & I just wanted to read my book for a time & be left alone but this young Indian man wanted to chat & since we were in the same 6 person train cabin on a 24 hour journey between 2 Indian cities....there wasn't anywhere for me to hide...& so, we chatted... & we chatted some more.... He was the sort of person who asked lots of questions & shared a bit about himself.... Although he was a Hindu by background he was interested in why I was working in India & we got to talking about Jesus & my Christian faith....As sometimes happens after a long train journey we exchanged contact details but I really didn't think I would hear from him again... But I was wrong.... for some weeks later he came & volunteered with some of our Oasis social programs in Bangalore & he began to explore further the Christian faith.

Now I must make clear that this certainly didn't normally happen when I took a train ride... This was unusual.... nevertheless it reminded me of how God can sometimes use strange situations to be opportunities for the gospel to advance...

Our New Testament passage tells us of another unlikely, in fact very difficult painful situation that God took & used to bring a

blessing to others....Yes our Acts passage comes just after the murder of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. **SLIDE 2** Our passage tells us about how persecution broke out at that time against those early Christians, as the Jewish authorities sought to stamp out the new Jesus' movement. So Saul of Tarsus & no doubt others went searching for Christians to through them into prison and so the scriptures tells us that most early Christians fled Jerusalem But that '*Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.*' **SLIDE 3** Yes as these believers fled for their lives they took the gospel message with them....telling others...the good news about Jesus...

Yes God can use even difficult circumstances to bring a blessing to people & help establish His kingdom... Consider the Samaritans that are mentioned clearly in these verses. While it's true that Jesus seems to have made a point of going through Samaria on several occasions, famously in John 4 where He meets a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well but also on other occasions Luke 9:52-56 & Lk 17:11-19. We know that in general Samaritans & Jews didn't usually get on that well...to say the least. So perhaps we can understand why, despite Jesus clearly telling His disciples that they would be His '*witnesses in Jerusalem, & in Judea & Samaria & to the ends of the earth*' (Acts 1:8) **SLIDE 4** that they hadn't up until this point got out there to share with these potentially difficult people. Maybe I am being too harsh on them but someone might say that it took some persecution to begin to

move some of those early Christians out of their comfort zone bringing the gospel with them as they went.

Now maybe that's being too hard on them, but what seems clear is that God took something that was painful & horrendous & turned it into something that brought a blessing for so many other people..... Yes as someone said.. *God can bring shower of blessings out of storms of adversity...* **SLIDE 5** for God loves to bless.. In fact in our Old Testament reading we hear God promise Abram that *'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'* *Gen 12:3* This is a reference to that ultimate descendent of Abraham.... Jesus Christ, the One who would die for all our sins and open up that way back into a living relationship with God our Maker. Yes God loves to bless & the best blessing available is when people meet Jesus and receive God's forgiveness & new life. This is the ultimate blessing.

Of course our situation today in N Ireland is so very different from those early Christians 2000 years ago. Unlike some parts of the world... thankfully we are not being persecuted.... we can worship God freely and we won't be arrested... Probably few if any of us have had to flee violence....In many ways we are so fortunate... and yet there is no doubt that the past few months have left a deep wounds on so many people. We have faced fear.. & isolation... as for the first time in modern history had to go into 'lockdown' separating us from each other... Yes we have faced our own challenges... & You might think that during these times opportunities to share the gospel have dried up...

& some have... BUT perhaps other opportunities have opened up... With Church buildings being closed for so long many churches

including ourselves began putting together online services **SLIDE 6** & while most of these have been viewed by church members, different ministers & pastors have reported how some people who normally wouldn't have gone to Church have been watching their services online. Yes there the volume of Christian content online has grown considerably, you might say more seed is being scattered online... However God hasn't just been leading people to work through new technology... the good old fashioned telephone has come into its own again... as has sending cards... dropping off shopping... and generally looking for ways to care for each other... And of course, importantly, Christians have generally been praying more than normal... when we read the New Testament we find that the Apostle Paul was often prevented from meeting with churches and other Christians in person but this didn't stop him writing to fellow believers or praying for them regularly. ([Rom 1:8-11](#)) & we too can lift others up to God even if we sadly can't see them face to face.

Yes today's challenges are very different from that of the early Christians in Acts 8 but I believe that God has been working in and through these painful times too... that's something that I believe we will have to tell & retell ourselves as we travel into the autumn and winter days ahead... I expect there will be days when most of us will feel as if we have simply had enough of this virus & this way of life.... We might be tempted to just give up & forget about hope...

In those days remember that God is still in charge and that He has a plan.... *Ye fearful saints fresh courage take, the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head...* may God grant us hope... may He bless us & help us be a blessing. We are now going to watch a video called HOPE.

VIDEO - HOPE

Prayers for Others

God, most gracious and most holy, grant us the help of your Spirit as we pray for the Church and the world.

We pray for the Church in every land.... Lord help us all to trust You and believe that we can be a blessing in these times. We pray for this church and for other local churches.. Lord help us to serve you with reverence and joy.

Lord hear us. *Lord graciously hear us.*

We pray for the peoples of the world... Lord we pray especially for those who are most vulnerable, for those who have little access to health care or help. We pray for the leaders of the nations... God give them guidance in these most difficult of times may all work together for justice and peace.

Lord hear us. *Lord graciously hear us*

And now we pray for those who are ill and distressed, especially those who have requested our prayers... Tina Donaldson... Daniel Kidson Paul McDowell Jean Woods ... George Johnston...

Jerry McHaffee... George McKee... TrevorSuszanne.. 10 year old Leo facing surgery for a brain tumour... & for all those connected to our Church family who are still recovering from illness or surgery

Lord hear us. *Lord graciously hear us*

And we say the Lord's Prayer together

HYMN God moves in a mysterious way; his wonders to perform;
he plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines; of never-failing skill
he treasures up his bright designs, and works his sov' reign will.

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread
are big with mercy, and shall break, in blessings on your head.*

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace;
behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding ev'ry hour;
the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.

Blessing- Lets say the grace together. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God & the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us forever and ever. Amen