

SUNDAY 12 November 2023

Introduction

Hymn 231 - At the Name of Jesus

**1 At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of Glory now:
this the Father's pleasure that we call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.**

**2 Humbled for a season to receive a name
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious, when from death he passed.**

**3 In your hearts enthrone him, there let him make new
all that is not holy, all that is not true.
He is God the Saviour, he is Christ the Lord,
ever to be worshiped, trusted and adored.**

**4 When this same Lord Jesus shall appear again,
in his Father's glory, there with him to reign,
then may we adore him, all before him bow,
as our hearts confess him King of Glory now.**

Greeting

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.
And also with you.

Sentence of the day

For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 1Thessalonians 4:14

Prayer of Preparation

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.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

Jesus said: 'This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

Prayer of the Day

Eternal God, you have taught us that the night is far spent and the day is at hand: keep us awake and alert, watching for your kingdom, so that when Christ, the bridegroom, comes, we may go out joyfully to meet him, and with him enter into the marriage feast that you have prepared for all who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Ministry of the Word

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25

¹ Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God.

² Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. ³ But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants.¹⁴ "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors

worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

¹⁶ Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! ¹⁷ It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. ¹⁸ And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God. ”

¹⁹ Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

²¹ But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the Lord.”

²² Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord.”
“Yes, we are witnesses, ” they replied.

²³ “Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.”

²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the Lord our God and obey him.” ²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Psalm 78:1-7

1 Give heed to my teaching, O my people, incline your ears to the words of my mouth

2 For I will open my mouth in a parable; I will expound the mysteries of former times.

3 What we have heard and known, what our forebears have told us.

**4 We will not hide them from their children, but declare to a generation yet to come:
the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, his power, his mighty and wonderful acts.**

5 established a law in Jacob and a decree in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children,

6 That future generations might know, and those yet unborn, that they in turn might teach it to their children.

7 So they might put their confidence in God and not forget his works but keep his commandments.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-18

⁹ Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, ¹¹ and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹² so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

¹³ Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Matthew 25:1-13

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ

¹ “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶ “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

⁷ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

⁹ “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

¹⁰ “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

¹¹ “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

¹² “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’

¹³ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

This is the gospel of the Lord: **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

Sermon 1 Thessalonians 4

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Prayers

Let us pray for the world and the church.

Response: Gracious God, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

The Lord’s Prayer

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Prayer of Approach

We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

The Confession

God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy, welcoming sinners and inviting them to the Lord’s table. Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, confident in God’s forgiveness.

Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins. Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Greeting of Peace

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn 216 - Rejoice, the Lord is King

**1 Rejoice, the Lord is King; your Lord and King adore;
let all give thanks and sing, and triumph evermore;**

Refrain:

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice.

Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

**2 Jesus the Saviour reigns, the God of truth and love;
when he had purged our stains, he took his seat above: [Refrain]**

**3 His kingdom cannot fail, he rules o'er earth and heaven;
the keys of death and hell are to our Jesus given: [Refrain]**

**4 He sits at God's right hand, till all his foes submit,
and bow to his command, and fall beneath his feet: [Refrain]**

**5 Rejoice in glorious hope; Jesus the judge shall come,
and take his servants up to their eternal home:
We soon shall hear the archangel's voice; the trump of God shall sound, Rejoice!**

Offering

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have these gifts to share. Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.

Blessed be God forever.

The Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Loving God, we thank you for this world of wonder and delight. You have given it to us to care for, so that all your creatures may enjoy its bounty. Lord our God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

We thank you that when we turned away from you, you sent Jesus to live and work as one of us, and bring us back to you. He showed us how to love you and set us free to love and serve one another. Lord our God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

We thank you that on the cross Jesus took away our sin, all that keeps us from each other and from you. He frees us from hate and fear, from all that destroys love and trust. Lord our God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

And so with everyone who believes in you, with all the saints and angels, we rejoice and praise you, saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

And now we thank you for these gifts of bread and wine; may we who receive them, as Jesus said, share his body and his blood.

On the night he was betrayed, he took bread and gave you thanks. He broke the bread and gave it to his friends, and said, 'Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper he took the cup and gave you thanks. He shared the cup with them and said, 'This is my blood poured out so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in remembrance of me.'

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

You have gathered us together to feed on Christ and to remember all he has done for us. Fill us with your Spirit that we may follow Jesus in all we do and say, working for justice and bringing your peace to this world that you have made. Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen

We who are many are one body, **for we all share in the one bread.**

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts with thanksgiving.

The Lord's Supper is open to all who love the Lord.

After Communion

Father of all we give you thanks and praise that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory. May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world. **Keep us in this hope that we have grasped: so we and all your people will be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name.**

Hymn 125 I will sing the wondrous story

**1 I will sing the wondrous story
of the Christ who died for me,
how he left the realms of glory
for the cross on Calvary.**

***Refrain: Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
of the Christ who died for me,
sing it with the saints in glory,
gathered by the crystal sea.***

**2 I was lost: but Jesus found me,
found the sheep that went astray,
raised me up and gently led me
back into the narrow way. [Refrain]**

**3 Faint was I, and fears possessed me,
bruised was I from many a fall,
hope was gone, and shame distressed me:
but his love has pardoned all. [Refrain]**

**4 Days of darkness still may meet me,
sorrow's path I oft may tread;
but his presence still is with me,
by his guiding hand I'm led. [Refrain]**

**5 He will keep me till the river
rolls its waters at my feet:
then he'll bear me safely over,
where the loved ones I shall meet. [Refrain]**

Notices

Gardens Day today Sunday 12th at 2 pm at 7 Babin Place. Help beforehand to tidy the yard would be appreciated, also someone to sell raffle tickets. Don't forget plants for garden stall. Please contact Nella if you can help. Tickets are available at the Fabric Salon.

Dismissal

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

1 Thessalonians 4 Sermon

When I was 18 I moved away from my parents in Canberra to study at university in Sydney. I lived in various flats, but my parents would come and visit every now and then. I remember that whenever Mum would come to visit there would be nearly a week of frenetic activity to get ready. I needed to do all the washing that inevitably had been piling up, disposing the empty cans, pizza boxes, and unidentifiable mouldy detritus that were leftovers in the fridge. I'm sure my Mum wouldn't really have minded if my flat wasn't completely tidy (and it never was), but let's face it, when your mum is coming, you have to at least make an effort.

1 thes talks about 4 visits, although not by anyone's mum. It talks about Paul's original visit (which we can read about in Acts 17) when the church in Thessalonica was established, the recent visit from Timothy, Paul's planned visit, and Jesus' return. Obviously at the time of writing, two of these visits were in the past, and two were in the future (and of course, we are still waiting Jesus' return).

Last week Paul prayed: 11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. 12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Just like I tried to be ready when my Mum visited, so does Paul want the Thessalonians to be ready, both for Paul's visit, but more importantly for Jesus' return. It might surprise you that Paul isn't talking about washing or pushing out the rubbish. Nevertheless, the principal is the same, I wanted my flat to be tidy because I wanted my Mum to be pleased. I know my Mum loves me, and the way I kept my flat won't make a jot of difference to that, but I nevertheless wanted her to be pleased.

In the same way, Paul wanted the Thessalonians, and us to be ready for Jesus' return, not because we want God to love us, but because he does love us, and we want to please him. We don't try to please God in order for for him to love you, but because he does love you, you already have a relationship with him. It is pretty obvious - if you didn't have a relationship with God you wouldn't worry about pleasing him.

So, assuming that I am talking to at least some people who want to live lives pleasing to God, how do we do that? I very much doubt whether God particularly cares about the details of your personal hygiene, how much your washing is piling up, or the mouldering or otherwise contents of your fridge. But what is God concerned about? If you heard my sermon a few weeks ago on the Trinity, you would have heard me saying how God - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, has always, eternally existed as Trinity. I explained that God is love, because God has always loved within the relationship of the Trinity, even from before he created the entire universe. As I understand it, God is always concerned about relationships, his relationship with people, and people's relationship with each other.

Since this is so, it is not surprising that the way we please God is through our relationships. Paul gives us some guidance about what our relationships should like in the light of Jesus's return. Looking at verses 3 Paul's first direction is that it is God's will that you should be **sanctified**. Being sanctified is probably not a word we use very often, particularly about ourselves. I know it kind of sounds like being saintly, or sanctimonious, but it is really a relationship word. It really means being set apart for. I wasn't really a table cloth kind of guy, but the 1970s Laminex dining table in my flat was kind of manky, so I had this tablecloth that only got used when my mum visited. You could say the tablecloth was set apart, or sanctified to my mum, so even if one of my friends wanted to borrow my table cloth (perhaps because their mum was coming around or they were trying to impress a girlfriend), my first thought was whether my mum was planning to visit, because she had priority over my tablecloth, it was set apart or sanctified to her. Paul says we should be set apart for God, that he should take our highest priority. Our first question should always be "what would Jesus want me to be doing if he returned right at this moment?" rather than just doing what I want, because our goal is to please him.

This sanctification applies to every aspect of our lives, but Paul applies it particularly to our relationships. I suspect the matter of sexual purity was a big issue for the Thessalonians, because Paul specifically raises it. We know there were several cults in the first century that involved a form of ritual prostitution and other forms of sexual immorality. So in verse 3 Paul tells the Thessalonians they should **avoid sexual immorality**; 4 that each of you should learn to **control your own body** in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God.

The idea here is about acting honourably, as if Jesus could return at any time. Sexual immorality brings no honour to God, and certainly brings no honour to anyone involved, or certainly no honour from your current or future wife or husband. Sexual immorality has no place in the life of a Christian.

Paul also encourages Christians to keep control of their bodies. In this passage he discourages inappropriate passionate lust, but elsewhere he warns against losing control by getting drunk with wine with the same principle. God gives us the ability, and responsibility, to remain in control of our bodies, and deliberately losing that control is never honouring to God, our ourselves. I've certainly never seen a fall-down drunk who didn't make me cringe, who wasn't completely dishonorable.

Paul says that neither should a Christian **wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister**. This is another way of saying that we should never abuse the relationships that God gives us. In the same way that relationship is central to God in Trinity, so relationship is central to the life of every Christian, and so it is critical we avoid doing anything that harms, or abuses our relationships,

These things are so serious that Paul says that the Lord will punish all those who commit such sins.

Now, We don't like to think about God judging, and even less that God judges specific sins. But the sad reality of scripture is that specific sins are specifically judged. The sinner who dies without repenting suffers eternal judgment, and even the sins of Christians are judged, although Jesus has taken that punishment for us in his death on the cross. Sometimes as

well, judgment follows as a direct consequence from the sin, for example sexual immorality may lead to another relationship breaking down. So please be in no doubt that individual sins are judged.

Finally, after Paul has told us what not to do in waiting for Jesus return, Paul returns to some 'do-s' of relationships. He says we are to have **love for one another, the love that we** have been taught by God.

This reminds of Jesus's new commandment in John chapter 13, to love one another. He his disciples tells this commandment just after he had shown his model of love to his disciples by washing their feet. When Paul says we are to have the love that has been taught by God, this is what he means, the self giving, sacrificial love that Jesus showed his disciples.

It's also not surprising that Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to live a quiet life as he had experienced precisely the opposite from other Thessalonians. Remember back when Paul first visited Thessalonica, not only were some Jews jealous and rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, they formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. They followed him all the way to Berea, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. Instead, as we wait for Jesus's return, Christians are **to lead a quiet life**, minding our own business and working with our hands to gain the respect of outsiders.

This is always important, but perhaps even more critical now in this time of COVID-19, when we are careful about socially distancing from friends, family or colleagues, or sometimes confined to closer proximity than we are used to if we work from home or can't get out and around our like we used to. In either case it is much easier to inadvertently stir up strong feelings, and we need to be extra careful about what we do and say, to lead the quiet life.

In summary, as we await Jesus's certain return, we are to look to our relationships, avoiding everything, like sexual immorality or stirring up dissent that damages relationships, and working positively to love one another, as Jesus has taught us.

This is what Paul prayed for the Thessalonians in chapter 3 as they awaited his return, and let me pray for us in a slightly paraphrased version now as we await Jesus's return:
Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus prepare us as we await Jesus's return when Jesus will come to us 12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. Amen.