

Sunday 19 May 2024 HC 2.1

Hymn - O breath of God, breathe on us now

**O breath of God, breathe on us now and move within us while we pray;
you are the spring of our new life, the very light of our new day.**

**How strangely you are with us, Lord, neither in height nor depth to seek:
in nearness shall your voice be heard; spirit to spirit you will speak.**

**Christ is our advocate on high; you are our advocate within:
O plead the truth, and make reply to every argument of sin.**

**But what a faithless heart of mine: the way I know, I know my guide:
forgive me, O my friend divine, that I so often turn aside.**

**Be with me when no other friend the mystery of my heart can share;
be always known, when fears descend, by your best name of Comforter.**

The Grace

of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you.
And also with you.

'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.'

Lord have mercy on us, and write your law in our hearts by your Holy Spirit.

Sentence of the Day

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again
Mark 18:31

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.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God

At the feast of Pentecost you sent your Holy Spirit to your disciples, filling them with your joy and boldness to preach your gospel; empower us with that same Spirit to witness to your redeeming love and draw all people to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Leviticus 16:1-10

¹⁶ The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the LORD. ² The LORD said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover. ³ “This is how Aaron is to enter the Most Holy Place: He must first bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁴ He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. ⁵ From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁶ “Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. ⁷ Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁸ He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat. ⁹ Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. ¹⁰ But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat.

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

Psalm 22:23-31

²² I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.

²³ **You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!**

²⁴ For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

²⁵ **From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.**

²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the LORD will praise him— may your hearts live forever!

²⁷ **All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,**

²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.

²⁹ **All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him— those who cannot keep themselves alive.**

³⁰ Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.

³¹ **They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!**

Hebrews 9:23-28

²³ It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. ²⁵ Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶ Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has

appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgement,²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

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

Mark 8:31–38

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to St Mark, Chapter 8 beginning at the thirty-first verse

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” ³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

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

Sermon - Jesus and the Gospel

Question Time

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Prayers of the People

Let us pray for the world and the church

Response: Christ Jesus, intercede for us, and in your mercy. **Hear our 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.

Scripture Sentence

Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one, so that your Father who is in heaven may forgive your trespasses. Mark 11:25

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

The Spirit of truth comes to convict us of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement. Let us open our hearts and 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 - Holy Spirit, come confirm us

**Holy Spirit, come confirm us in the Spirit Christ makes known
we have faith and understanding through your helping gifts alone.**

**Holy Spirit, come console us come as advocate to plead,
loving Spirit from the father grant in Christ the help we need**

**Holy Spirit come renew us, come yourself to make us live:
holy, through your living presence holy, through the gifts you give.**

**Holy Spirit, come possess us, you the love of Three in One
Holy Spirit of the Father Holy Spirit of the Son.**

Thanksgiving for Offering

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

Blessed be God for ever.

The Great 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.**

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere, mighty Creator, everliving God.

We give you thanks and praise for your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who by the power of your Spirit was born of Mary and lived as one of us. By his death on the cross, he offered the one true sacrifice for sin, and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Merciful God, we thank you for these gifts of your creation, this bread and wine, and we pray that by your Word and Holy Spirit, we who eat and drink them may be partakers of Christ's body and blood.

On the night he was betrayed Jesus took bread; and when he had given you thanks he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks he gave it to his disciples, saying, Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Therefore we do as our Saviour has commanded: proclaiming his offering of himself made once for all upon the cross, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension, and looking for his coming again, we celebrate, with this bread and this cup, his one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Renew us by your Holy Spirit, unite us in the body of your Son and bring us with all your people into the joy of your eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, and in whom, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we worship you, Father, in songs of never-ending praise:

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

The Holy Communion

As this broken bread was once many grains, which have been gathered together and made one bread: so may your Church be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.

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

Grape juice is available.

Please come to the Communion Rail if you are able, observing appropriate social distancing.

After Communion

Gracious God, we thank you that in this sacrament you assure us of your goodness and love.

Accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and help us to grow in love and obedience that we may serve you in the world and finally be brought to that table where all your saints feast with you for ever.

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen

Notices

Hymn - Come, Holy Spirit

**Come Holy Spirit come inflame our souls with love
Transforming ev'ry heart and home With wisdom from above
O let us not despise the humble path Christ trod
But choose to shame the worldly wise the foolishness of God**

**All knowing Spirit prove the poverty of pride
By knowledge of the Father's love in Jesus crucified
And grant us faith to know the glory of that sign
And in our very lives to show the marks of love divine**

**Come with the gift to heal the wounds of guilt and fear
And to oppression's face reveal the kingdom drawing near
Where chaos longs to reign descend O holy Dove
And free us all to work again the miracles of love**

**Spirit of truth arise inspire the prophet's voice
Expose to scorn the tyrant's lies and bid the poor rejoice
O Spirit clear our sight all prejudice remove
And help us to discern the right and covet only love**

**Give us the tongues to speak in ev'ry time and place
To rich and poor to strong and weak the word of love and grace
Enable us to hear the words that others bring
Interpreting with open ear the special song they sing**

**Come Holy Spirit dance within our hearts today
Our earthbound spirits to entrance our mortal fears allay
And teach us to desire all other things above
That self-consuming holy fire the perfect gift of love**

Blessing

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**

Dismissal

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

Sermon - Jesus and the gospel

Introduction

In the first two sermons in this series, I have talked about how God created a perfect world, but it, and how the relationships between God, creation and humankind, as well as the relationships between humans, were spoiled by sin, bringing evil, sickness and death into the world.

However, God still loved his creation, and particularly humankind, whom he had made in his own image, and He has a plan for restoration.

In military tactics, plans usually have at least two phases. The initial phase only seeks to prepare for the second phase, which is the part that is designed to meet the objective: to gain control over the strategic piece of land, destroy vital infrastructure, or whatever. While the first phase doesn't directly achieve the objective, it is nevertheless important - it might distract the enemy forces so the forces in the second phase have the element of surprise, or it might involve an artillery barrage to weaken the enemy so that the main attacking force is more likely to defeat them. Whatever the case, the first phase doesn't achieve the objective, it simply prepares for the second phase.

After sin entered the world, God also had a two-phased plan to restore the world to the perfection it was supposed to be, and to destroy death, allowing eternal life in his presence.

The first phase, essentially covered in Genesis chapter 4 to the end of the Old Testament, was to prepare the way for Jesus, the second phase of the plan.

Jesus was always the main plan. He wasn't a Plan B, only to be brought online if Plan A failed. In fact, right at the beginning of phase 1, back in Genesis chapter 3, God was already forecasting that Jesus would come as the offspring of a woman who would crush Satan's head and destroy evil. Throughout the Old Testament, we find out more and more about Jesus, both through prophecies directly about Jesus, and from the pattern of Israel's relationship with God. The direct prophecies about Jesus included the prophecy of a prophet like Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15 where Moses said "The Lord your God will raise a prophet like me from among you." Jesus is that prophet like Moses.

Phase 1

So Phase 1, the preparation phase, sets the pattern: Israel's religion including temple worship, sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin, and even the national governance of King David are all part of the pattern. All of these elements were imperfect, but they all pointed towards Jesus. Jesus would perfect them, and provide the only truly effective way to repair our relationship with God and destroy sin and death.

As we said in the last sermon, sin had got in the way of our relationship with God. God is completely pure and holy, and can't be approached by sinful human beings. The Old Testament model for solving this involved a whole set of laws that would convict us of our

sin, and a system of blood sacrifices in which animals could take the punishment we deserve for our sins, by being sacrificed. Through this, priests could be temporarily cleansed of their sins and were able to approach God directly, but only on special days of the year, and only in the innermost room in the Jerusalem temple, the Holy of Holies.

So, we know these things were only ever intended to point to Jesus. At best, as we read in our New Testament reading, animal sacrifices could only temporarily remove the guilt of sins, and had to be repeated every year. Even the Holy of Holies was only a human copy of heaven, and could not provide continuous, perfect access to God. There had to be more.

Phase 2

So what do we believe about Jesus, Phase 2 of God's salvation plan?

Jesus is God the Son, second member of the trinity

John 1:1 tells us that in the beginning the word was with God, and the Word was God.

³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it.

Down in verse 14, John makes it clear that the Word is another title for Jesus - the Word who became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

By saying Jesus is God, we are saying the eternal attributes of God that we mentioned a couple of sermons ago are also true of Jesus. He is not created, because he existed before anything was created. He, in his divine nature, is all powerful, all knowing, and omni-present - he's fully divine.

Jesus the truly human

As well as being divine, or God, Jesus was also fully human. He was born of woman, and did most of the things humans do (except sin). He ate and drank, he increased in wisdom and knowledge, he felt emotions, hunger and thirst; he suffered and died. Hebrews 2:14 says 'Since the children have flesh and blood, he (that is Jesus) too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death.' Jesus shared in our humanity!

Many heresies deny one or other of these aspects of Jesus. Some deny Jesus's divinity, saying he was just a man. Apollinarians, Christadelphians, (a very old sect), Jehovah's witnesses and Mormon's either don't believe Jesus is God, or they believe Jesus is god in a different sense to the way God the Father is divine - somehow created, or some other way subordinate to God. Atheists of course, don't believe in God at all, so they certainly don't think Jesus was God either.

Others don't believe that Jesus was truly human: Gnostics and Docetists believe that he only appeared human, but really was only a spiritual being.

Christians however, believe that Jesus possesses two natures - one fully human and one fully divine. According to the Council of Chalcedon in 451AD, Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human, unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably two natures: the differences in the natures being in no way removed because of the Union, both concurring in the one person and one substance, not as though he was divided into two persons.

While both Jesus's humanity and divinity are evident from the Bible, it is very difficult for our finite human minds to understand completely how it works, and the Chalcedonian definition is the best we can manage. Nevertheless, both natures are both true, and we should be very careful about over emphasising one aspect over the other, his divinity over his humanity or vice versa.

Jesus is the true temple

When we looked at God a couple of sermons ago, I said a very important aspect of God the Father's nature is that he is completely pure and holy: sin cannot exist in his presence. Consequently, sinful humans cannot meet God face to face without being destroyed. Even when Moses wanted to see God, God put him in the cleft of a rock so he wouldn't see his face and die in Exodus 33. The Old Testament model of meeting with God was only for priests after special sacrifices to purify them, and only in the holy of holies in the temple on one day of the year.

The Old Testament model for seeing God also points us to Jesus. Jesus is both God and human, so the people who saw Jesus saw God the Father. In John 14:9 Jesus says "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." The disciples therefore walked with Jesus the same way that Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden of Eden, and didn't need a temple, either to provide the sacrifices required prior to meeting with God, or to provide the Holy of Holies as the place to meet with God. Jesus is therefore the true temple, and we too can approach God through Jesus, both in prayer, and eventually face to face in heaven in eternal life.

Jesus is the true sacrifice

Finally, at least for today's sermon, Jesus is the true sacrifice. As I mentioned, the Old Testament model for meeting with God required special sacrifices. The death of the sacrificed animal would be substitute for the judgement that the priest deserved for his sin. Similarly, sacrifices were also made in the temple for the sins of other Israelites, not just the priests

God's perfect plan was that Jesus would be the perfect sacrifice - that he would die on the cross as a sacrifice, once and for all time, as a substitute for the punishment everyone deserves for their sins. People would thus be cleansed from their sin, and would not have to take the punishment for their sins - that is death - upon themselves. The cleanliness it brings would also allow us to spend eternal life with God in a world without sin, a world restored to the perfection it enjoyed before sin entered.

Conclusion

Today we have seen God's two part plan to restore his relationship with the world he made perfect but was spoiled by sin. In Phase 1, the Old Testament, God established models of restoration, the temple, the sacrifices and so on. Models that weren't perfect and that could never perfectly restore creation's relationship with God, but nevertheless illustrated something of how phase 2 would work, how Jesus, God the Son, truly God and truly Human, would truly restore things to the way they were intended to be.

With his two natures, the human and the divine, Jesus allowed sinful humans to see and walk with God.

Following the model of the temple, Jesus allows us to meet with God, but without sacrifices and a physical temple.

By dying on the cross, Jesus completely fulfilled the sacrificial system, with his death substituting for our judgement and bringing us our forgiveness, and allowing us eternal life with a completely holy God.

This week, we have talked about God's plan of restoration, but we haven't really talked about the outcome of God's plan - the restored world that Jesus, through God's plan, is bringing about. Jesus also has the major part to play in the restored world. His Spirit works in us, He is the new king, he is the source of God's blessing, and he gives eternal life. Like God's plan of restoration, the restored world comes in two phases - Phase one which comes about as soon as you put your faith in Jesus, but you are still in this world that is spoiled by sin, and phase 2, when Jesus returns, and those with faith in Jesus Christ enjoy eternal life in a perfect world without any sin.

However, these outcomes of God's restoration plan will have to wait until my next and last sermon in this series, when we will talk about all of these things, and more.