



Sunday Service

Sunday 5th July 2020

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, through your Son, Jesus Christ, you brought salvation to your broken world: draw us now, through your Holy Spirit, into your presence, so that we may praise you, hear your Word, cry out to you in prayer and seek to do your will for your glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Bible reading

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand. The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is

"the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone."

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

Acts 4 : 1 - 12

Reflection :

'Acts is one of the most exciting books of the Bible. In the first 12 verses of chapter 4 we discover what happens after Peter cures a crippled man. More people come to Faith - the number of believers rises to 5,000 - and the temple authorities take an unhealthy interest. So unhealthy, in fact, that they arrest Peter and John and throw them in jail for the night.

The reading swiftly moves onto the Courtroom the following day, but I wonder how Peter and John would have spent the night in jail. Would they have slept? I doubt it. More likely, they would have strengthened each other by reciting Scripture and by singing psalms.

One psalm in particular may have inspired Peter above all. In that psalm, he would both recognise himself as a redeemed sinner [the LORD has chastened me severely] but God would also provide encouragement for the ordeal to come [the LORD is my strength and my defence]. And one couplet in particular will have stayed with Peter, long enough for him to remind his Courtroom accusers the following day:

'The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone'

During the night that Peter and John spent in jail, they realised that the psalm, it's 118 by the way, is referring to Jesus. The builders are Peter's accusers Annas and Caiaphas, the very same accusers who condemned Jesus to death just 50 or so days earlier. And here is Peter, a fisherman by trade with a previous disposition for speaking and acting without thinking of the consequences or else cowering with fear as he denies that he knew Jesus, here is Peter standing up to his accusers and accusing them of being the ones in the wrong.

How much like Peter are we? Prone to exaggeration perhaps or, when the going gets tough, slipping away just when our friends need us most? Then why not meditate on Psalm 118, just as Peter and John did, and pray that you too might be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Just now on the BBC iPlayer it's possible to see the film 'Selma' about the US civil rights movements in 1965 led by Christian pastor Martin Luther King Jnr. There is a scene in that film which re-enacts King's time in jail, arrested for passive resistance during a peaceful demonstration against racist discrimination. And from King's own books and sermons, we know that he derived great strength from the psalms. Maybe he too drew comfort and strength from psalm 118 before facing his accusers?

I urge you to watch 'Selma' and to find out what happens. It may inspire you to seek out injustice in your own neighbourhood and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to overcome that injustice with peace and love.'

A prayer for all those affected by coronavirus

Keep us good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious, be with all those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort knowing nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Final prayer

Gracious God, protect us as we walk in your ways, and strengthen us in the face of challenges, so that we may stay faithful to your eternal truth and proclaim the saving love of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Blessing

Almighty God, who from the death of sin raised us to new life in Christ Jesus, strengthen us through your Holy Spirit to proclaim your love and truth where ever you call us to go.

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and for ever more. Amen.