

Welcome all to another gathering of shared time around The Word.

Prayers

Lord please join us as we gather. May your word continue to reveal the depths of your love and care for us. As we grow older in this life Father, may your word and your presence be forever new, and reveal for us continuing fresh understandings of what it means to be one of your people.

Lord God, forgive us the times of doubt, and confusion, and walk with us in our search for meaning and wholeness.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen

HYMN by Newton Mann 1836—1926

1. Praise to the living God all praise be to his name
Who was, and is, and is to be, For aye the same:
The One eternal God Ere aught that now appears,
The First, the Last; beyond all thought, His timeless years!
2. Formless, all lovely forms declare his loveliness
Holy, no holiness of earth can his express
Lo, he is Lord of all: Creation speaks his praise,
And everywhere, above, below, His will obey.
3. His spirit floweth free, high surging where it will:
In prophet's word he spake of old, He speaketh still,
Established is his law and changeless it shall stand
Deep writ upon the human heart, on sea, on land.
4. Eternal life hath he implanted in the soul:
His love shall be our strength and stay while ages roll.
Praise to the living God, all praise be to his name,
Who was, and is, and is to be, for aye the same!

BIBLE READING:

- Malachi 2: 1—9

And now, you priests, this warning is for you. If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honour My name, says the Lord Almighty, I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honour me.

Because of you I will rebuke your descendants; I will smear on your faces the dung from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it. And you will know that I have sent you this warning, so that my covenant with Levi may continue, says the Lord God Almighty. My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. True instruction was

in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned away from sin.

I like Malachi's no nonsense call-it-out style. Most of this tiny book has that style. Why? Well, because of years, decades of failure of the religious and other leaders to LEAD, to honour God and the Torah, with few exceptions (e.g. Josiah).

But hope is reflected in Chapter 3 with its messianic prophecy and the powerful metaphor of the "refining" nature of the Messiah. And he will be our peace – Micah 5. The law was not sufficient, and that became clear over many years of Israel's failure to live in accordance with it. That left God with another way, the only way, to **fulfill** the law through his son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Matt 5:17 How can this come about?

I was working in court 12 for the courts Administration Authority. My rostered duties were to manage the court for that day. On unlocking I found a group of older folk (about 10 couples) waiting, anxiously (hopefully??) for the court to open. They were there to get their money back I was told. Yep a financial advisor had helped himself to their life savings -- how very sad. So I had to explain that they should not expect too much from the first hearing, maybe even a few hearings down the track—faces fell, tears were shed. Justice (if ever!) was not likely to be experienced that day. What's it all about then? -- law and procedure mostly. I don't know the outcome of that case, but I feared for those folk.

That is just one example from today's world, but one that epitomises the never ending struggle of the law and justice balance of the world's legal system. I will say no more on that here, except to admit to holding some views which may not be popular within the legal fraternity.

So we struggle to find justice in this life. Paul writes to the Roman Church about the groaning of life. And he goes on to tell them that in God's son we are justified, and through that, glorified (8:28-30). We can achieve that outcome for no cost to us, only the gift of our life into the hands of Jesus. Again there is the contrast. Getting the best result in court often requires the best legal representative maybe costing around \$4000/day in court! What a difference!!

The atonement is free to us by grace, as Paul said, "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us".

- Romans 5:8

Paul also speaks to the Galatian Church on this subject (Galatians 2:19—21): *For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ, and no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me --- I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law Christ died for nothing."*

Mighty words from a man who was raised in the law, taught it, and lived it. Now ascribing every opportunity to the justice and righteousness through Christ. With The cost paid by our Lord.

A final quote from Paul, Galatians again: *Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because the righteous will live by faith. The law is not*

based on faith. On the contrary, the Scripture says: The person who does these things will live by them. Love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10).

So what purpose the law? That question, I think, was best answered by Martin Luther. He describes the law as being like our schoolmaster creating in us a thirst and hunger for Jesus Christ. In that sense it is not negative – the law is no longer our jailer (Isaiah 64:6) Under the law even our best was tainted. But the refining presence of the Spirit (Malachi) under the new covenant “brings us home”.

Hymn 138 Charles Wesley 1707---1788

1. And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused his pain, for me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me!
2. 'Tis mystery all The Immortal dies. Who can explore this strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries to sound the depths of love divine
Is mercy all! Let earth adore, let angel minds inquire no more.
3. He left his Father's throne above, (so free, so infinite his grace)
Emptied himself of all but love and bled for Adam's helpless race,
“Tis mercy all, immense and free for, O my God, it found out me.
4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin and nature's night:
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray I woke the dungeon flamed with light
My chains fell off, my heart was free. I rose, went forth and followed thee.
5. No condemnation now I dread: Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne, and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Prayers for others

Lord, our thoughts turn to Jennifer, a brick kiln child in Pakistan, living in poverty and fear. Lord bless her family in their struggle to break free of debt, and its accompanying bondage. Thank you for Jennifer, her courage, her faith, and Lord bless the Barnabas Aid workers as they continue to assist families living in servitude. We admire their courage, and boundless faith.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Blessing:

Father, thank you that in Jesus we find justice, love, and peace. Help us to display that blessing in our daily life. In Jesus' name bless us and empower us.

Amen

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