

Prayer: Invocation and Confession;

Our Father in heaven, we come confidently and boldly into your presence as you have warmly asked us to do whenever we wish, as loved children. As your children, we want to speak with you and hear more of this wonderful family-kingdom you have adopted us into.

Holy Scripture states that your beloved Son has united us with Himself and called us His brothers and sisters. And that he has made us holy by His sacrifice, for all time. Thank you for helping us continually with the counsel and strengthening comfort of your Holy Spirit, who teaches us the ways of heaven for our lives on earth. It is wonderful.

Help us this day to appreciate more and more the privilege of belonging to the Church of your Son so that we can fully participate at every level in the work we can do within it.

Thank you. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Scripture:

- Psalm 1
- John 18.1-11

Scriptures that tell us why and how to use the Scriptures; single verses suitable for memorisation; John 21.31, Romans 15.4, 1Corinthians 10.6, 2Timothy 2.7, 2Timothy 3.15-16, Hebrews 1.2, 2Peter1.20-21

Prayer with the persecuted Church:

Father, it is a privilege that we stand as one alongside the parts of the Body of Christ this day. Remembering the report of many people in Niger and other parts of central Africa, we thank you for the news that hundreds of Fulani Africans from the North have become Christians. Those who once violently persecuted believers are now part of the Body of Christ, learning the ways of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Hymn: Out of the silence, the roaring lion *by B Johnson / P Wickham*

How great the chasm that lay between us
How high the mountain I could not climb
In desperation, I turned to heaven
And spoke your name into the night
Then through the darkness
Your loving kindness tore through the shadows of my soul
The work is finished, the end is written
Jesus Christ, my living hope
Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?



The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven
The king of kings calls me His own
Beautiful Saviour, I'm yours forever
O Jesus Christ, my living hope

*Hallelujah, praise the one who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope*

Then came the morning that sealed the promise
Your buried body began to breathe
Out of the silence, the roaring lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me (repeat)
Jesus, yours is the victory!

Chorus

© 2017 Phil Wickham Music (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors P/L.), Used by permission CCLI509237

Exhortation: Peter's Sword, our Lord's Word.

The Sword is the power of the State to rule and the Word is the power of God to create true community. God's Word is the true Sword that conquers all and against which nothing, not even hell can prevail.

The past several weeks since Charlie Kirk's assassination have stimulated interest and questioning on the relationship between Church and State, the Gospel and politics and basically what is the driving power that changes individuals and societies, even nations, for the good.

Alexei Navalny, the famous Russian political reformer who many believe was murdered in prison in February 2024 on instructions from President Putin grappled with these matters. In his autobiography, he states that the leading political idea for him was the Sermon on the Mount, the mandate of the Kingdom of God. In fact, he memorised that part of Scripture and claimed it nourished him in his isolated prison days and nights. He believed these Scriptures had the power, if believed and followed, to liberate Russian society from lies and fear.

Serious Christians are concerned with the beliefs that produce community-changing values. The Gospel that directs good politics.

In fact, this is an ancient question. The great Reformers dealt with it by saying the State wields the Sword and the faithful church proclaims the Word of God. These two are linked together because the Word must penetrate and inform the State, and the State must guard the proclaimed Word. This is how the great Western democracies began. Human wisdom cannot produce free and just societies. Only the Gospel can do that.

At the beginning of the Church founded by our Lord Jesus Christ, this question was confronted in the Garden, in the week before the crucifixion.

It was here that the power of the Word spoken by Christ and the limitations of the sword wielded by humans were on display.

In the Gospel of John, the description is vivid and dramatic. The soldiers, alerted by Judas, identify Jesus in the Garden, praying with His disciples.

Jesus stands and confronts them with that voice and words that had astonished the masses with its unheard-of sheer authority. "Here I am", He states, simply and easily. Something stunning happens immediately! At the sound of His voice, the armed soldiers fall back, stumbling and confused. Unimaginably, Jesus has to help them up to arrest him.

The power of this Man's word!

At the same time Peter draws his sword and slashes the ear of the arresting servant of the commanding High Priest.

But Jesus calmly turns and heals the man, quietly faces Peter, and directs him to "put your sword away".

Here in the Garden, the battle of the ages intensifies. Jesus brings His weapons, Peter brings his weapon. But really, what about Peter? What was he doing bringing a sword? He would soon learn that the sword which conquers is, in fact, the Word of God, wielded under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Let's trace Peter's thinking. What was he doing with a sword? Peter had seen the power of Jesus: raising the dead, calming the storm, feeding the multitudes. The power of his Word silenced the lawyers, astonished the multitudes and stunned the authorities speechless. Did he not sense that there was a power on display here that far eclipsed human strength and effort?

If Jesus was to be opposed, how was a sword going to help? "I'll follow you and lay down my life for you," said Peter the day before. Really? You will disown me three times, says Jesus. He had heard Jesus say he was to be mocked, spat on, flogged, and crucified. Did he have no idea what His Lord was going into battle against? Jesus was obeying his Father into death and beyond. *For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through the blood of His crossⁱ.* Powers from the great spiritual authorities ruling the world would press against Him.

Powers that imprisoned us in guilt and death because of our failure to live up to the written Law of God. But Jesus, by His obedience to death and His blood shedding *disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.ⁱⁱ* And Peter thought to contribute something with a sword into this great global and even cosmic warfare?

The ancient prophecies in Isaiah about the Lamb of God bearing under the Father's wrath, the iniquities of all the earth. And Peter thought his sword would help?

A sword or a Word. Even at the end, when all evil powers and deeds will be obliterated, there is no other weapon save the Word of God that is sufficient to do the work; *Then I saw heaven standing open, and there before me was a white horse. And its rider is called Faithful and True. With righteousness He judges and wages war. He has eyes like blazing fire, and many royal*

*crowns on His head. He has a name written on Him that only He Himself knows. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is **The Word of God**. The armies of heaven, dressed in fine linen, white and pure, follow Him on white horses. And from His mouth proceeds a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with an iron sceptreⁱⁱⁱ.*

Today, the battle rages, and it is the Word of God which conquers as it did in the Temptations, where Jesus said we should live by every word that comes from God. What shall we do?

Scripture declares that the real Sword is the Word of God. Acts describes the world-conquering mission of the Word; so *the word of God spread*. It alone reaches the core of our personalities, *For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires*. It enables victory against the schemes of Satan, who aims to make your life useless. *Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*.

May our pulpits burn with the Word of God. And that means addressing the social sins of the day with the redeeming power of the Scriptures. It means pastors not just describing doctrine but declaring it into the conscience of the State. The Word is mighty and has the power to direct the best politics. As Charlie Kirk put it; next to the Kingdom and the Word, politics is peanuts.

Personally, it means each of us prays for pastors and prophets to declare the Word. Politicians can only rise to the best that the church offers. And individually, it means falling in love with the Word of God. Are you lonely for this Word? Do you feel its goodness? Are you reading and thinking, wanting to discover more ways to obey your Father in heaven? Maybe today you want to be refreshed in knowing Scripture is yours and feeling its power and promise. Get back to the Scriptures today. Read at the rate that suits your comprehension.

And because you are part of the church that exposes darkness and grows in righteousness be ready to state the answer in the Bible to the problems you face or hear about. Don't hide it under the table, Jesus urged.

Prayer:

Dear Father in heaven, your Son loved and fulfilled Scripture. He lived by the words of your mouth. I determine today to take you at your Word, to Love Scripture, to ponder it from today and fulfill its directions in my life. It is the living Word; it outlasts everything else, it gives me health, makes my life useful to the Kingdom, and leads me in the way pleasing to you.

Benediction:

Therefore, brothers, stand firm and cling to the traditions we taught you, whether by speech or by letter.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who by grace has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good word and deed.

Children's Spring fun fact:

One of the lovely things about Spring is the scented air as flowers open up after Winter dormancy and offer their pollen to the waiting world of insects. The pollen is mainly protein, and the nectar in the flowers carbohydrate which is a feast for bees and other little creatures.

The bees eagerly gather these treasures and bring them home to their hive, which is home to thousands and thousands of bees. In fact, a strong colony may have 50,000 bees living in harmony together. How do they live like that?

Well, in a beehive there is one special bee called the Queen, the monarch of the hive and she is adorned with a beautiful (to the bees) perfume.

Every day, every one of those bees will brush past her and cover themselves with a little of her perfume. And because of this unique perfume every bee knows their home, their hive-colony. They fly out and gather nectar to make honey, they clean the hive, and do guard duty outside to sting anything that looks dangerous. But they know their hive because of its special perfume.

And they know it because every 24 hours, each one will make contact, will brush alongside the Monarch of the hive. The Monarch will thus keep the whole hive happy and working together as it should.

Hymn: Yes, God is good: in earth and sky, *by John H Gurney*

- 1 Yes, God is good: in earth and sky, from ocean's depths and spreading wood,
Ten thousand voices seem to cry, God made us all, and God is good.
- 2 The sun that keeps his trackless way, and downward pours his golden flood,
Night's sparkling hosts, all seem to say, in accents clear, that God is good.
- 3 The merry birds prolong the strain, their song with ev'ry spring renewed;
And balmy air, and falling rain, each softly whispers, God is good.
- 4 Yes, God is good, all nature says, by God's own hand with speech endued;
And man, in louder notes of praise, should sing for joy that God is good.
- 5 For all Thy gifts we bless Thee, Lord, but chiefly for our heavenly food;
Thy pard'ning grace, Thy quick'ning word, these prompt our song that God is good.

© *public domain*

Amen.

This service prepared by Rev Ian Clarkson for HopeNet SA

ⁱ Colossians 1.19

ⁱⁱ Col 2.15

ⁱⁱⁱ Revelation 19.11-16