

Call to Worship

John, in the opening to Revelation, said, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy....." So, try it, read aloud the words of Revelation 1:5-8

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen! "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

Prayer

What more can I say Lord but to praise you for who you are, how much you love me, for your gift of Jesus who saves me, for the Holy Spirit who empowers me, and for the new life you have given me, even eternal life to be with you forever. Amen

Song: AHB 153 "This, this is the God we Adore" (by Joseph Hart)

1. This, this is the God we adore; our faithful unchangeable friend;
Whose love is as great as his power, and neither knows measure nor end.
2. 'Tis Jesus the first and the last whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
We'll praise him for all that is past, and trust him for all that's to come.

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Prayer of Intercession

Lord, I come to you today, praising you for your faithfulness, for your goodness that is running after me all the days of my life, for your mercy that never fails me.

Thank you that you care for me, you know my deepest needs, you understand when I suffer, when things go wrong, because you have been there in your Son, Jesus.

I pray for those in my family and my church family who endure suffering and yet declare the goodness of God. I pray for Lord, pour out your comfort, your peace, your assurance that your goodness is running after them. Draw them into your arms, Lord.

I pray for those suffering hunger, displacement and death because of political unrest in their country. I pray for peace. I pray for the conflict in Iran and for wise heads that will negotiate for peace and protection.

I pray for Christians who suffer because of regimes that hate the God they worship, for the growing church in Iran and for organisations like Barnabas Aid and Open Doors that support, feed and advocate for our brothers and sisters in Jesus.

I pray for those in my neighbourhood, who have difficult lives for many reasons. Lord, give compassion to those in need. I pray for generosity, for hospitality, for a listening ear which carries your love, the gospel of Jesus, into their lives.

Lord, hear my prayers. In the name of Jesus. Amen

Song: Goodness of God (by Ingram, Johnson, Cash, Fielding, Johnson)

1. I love You Lord, for Your mercy never fails me
All my days , I've been held in Your hands
From the moment that I wake up until I lay my head,
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God.
*And all my life You have been faithful, and all my life You have been so, so good.
With every breath that I am able, Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God.*
2. I love Your voice, You have led me through the fire,
In the darkest night You are close like no other.
I've known You as a Father, I've known You as a Friend,
and I have lived in the goodness of God.
3. 'Cause your goodness is running after, it's running after me,
Your goodness is running after, it's running after me,
With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now, I give You everything
'Cause Your goodness is running after, it's running after me.

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Bible Reading:

- John 12:20-36 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to the worship at the festival. They came to Philip who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to see Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.
Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.
"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name."
Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.
Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.
The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, "The Son of Man must be lifted up."? Who is this Son of Man?"
Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while

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you have the light, so that you may become children of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Message: "It's a Life-or-Death Situation"

Preaching at my church and preparing for this HNSA service occurred at roughly the same time, so this message was preached last Sunday. We have a large international presence in our congregation, so I was intent on being clear about the basics of the gospel as we follow a Lenten theme. This is the script which was translated into Mandarin as I spoke.

Neil McIntosh, a fellow writer of HNSA services, was a surgeon for many years and he often says, "I have done thousands of surgeries in my career in an attempt to save lives, and I would have to say I have failed! Every one of them has died or is going to!" I was one of those surgeries and I have to say he is right! I am going to die! It's inevitable.

Everyone has died! Even Jesus died, and we keep the cross at the front of our churches to remind us of that. We die because of sin. God created us to have fellowship with him forever, but right at the very beginning man and woman chose to disobey God, and that broke that relationship - that's sin. And sin has a devastating effect on our life, and on our bodies. It also had a devastating effect on our planet earth.

Romans 8:19-21 **All creation is waiting patiently and hopefully for that day when God will resurrect his children. For on that day, thorns and thistles, sin, death, and decay - the things that overcame the world against its will at God's command - will disappear, and the world around us will share in the glorious freedom from sin which God's children enjoy.**

All the horrible things in the world - cancer, hatred, relationship breakdowns, wars, Bondi Beach, October 7th in Israel, knife crime in Hindley St - we can't escape. You might say, "Well, I haven't done anything that bad." But who has escaped selfishness, prejudice, anger, unkindness, improper sexual thoughts, jealousy? No-one has. That's the bad news.

Now for the good news. God looks down on this world, on each one of us, and it breaks his heart that we live in our sin. We will die because of that - our bodies, our souls, our spirits, all that is "me", will be separated from him. So God did what only he could do. He came himself in Jesus, who had no sin, to die instead of me and you, to pay the penalty for the sin that would separate us from him, keeping us from being in his family. Remember John 3:16 **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** That is such good news.

As Jesus grew up from a babe in arms, he had a growing understanding of why his Father had sent him, a growing understanding of his purpose. During his 3 years of ministry, he didn't say much about what was going to happen to him, although there were many hints with the healings and miracles and his teachings, but later in his ministry he began to say to the crowds and his disciples that he was going to die and how he was feeling about it.

So, we come to John 12. Very late in his ministry - he had just arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover - triggered by some Greeks wanting to talk to him, he decides to tell everybody exactly what was going to happen.

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Imagine you are there listening to Jesus, this miracle worker who recently raised from death a local man, the well-known Lazarus. Listen to what he is telling you.

- Some of us may remember back to the 70's when the Labor government under Gough Whitlam was elected using the slogan, "It's time!". Well, Jesus used it first. "It's time", he said, "for the Son of Man to be glorified." Even though he was God, he was a human being, a Son of Man. His Mum had to change his nappy, just like yours and mine. He ate and drank, got hungry and went to the toilet just like you and me. And *glorified* means to fulfil his purpose, to do what he was sent to do.
- He talks about dying. He uses the picture of a seed, which in order to achieve its purpose, to produce more seed, must die. Every farmer knows that when he harvests tonnes of seed, not one original seed that he planted is alive. If it's still alive, it hasn't fulfilled its purpose.
- He talks about us. If we love our life so much, not wanting to give it away to anybody, not wanting anyone to change or control it, we die anyway. If we hate our old life as Jesus said, and follow Jesus, we have eternal life.
- So, how was he feeling about what was going to happen in the next few days? He was not looking forward to dying. It troubled him right up to the night before he died when he sweated drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane. But he recognised that dying was the reason for his being here. That was his Father's will. It's the only way that anyone who has believed in Jesus can be in God's Kingdom.
- He told them how he was going to die. Being lifted up from the earth indicates crucifixion. That's how they did it; nailed to a cross and then standing it up.
- And God confirmed all this. When he spoke, it sounded like thunder and everybody in the crowd heard it.
- Then, he did an unexpected thing. He left them and hid from them. Probably this was so he could spend some time praying to his Father.

All that he said happened a few days later. But what does that mean for us? It means that if we repent of our sin, if we say sorry, and if we accept that Jesus has already died for all our sin, we are forgiven and our sin is gone. In God's eyes we are clean from sin because Jesus washed us clean. Death doesn't harm us anymore. It is defeated. We have eternal life. We will be resurrected like Jesus and have a renewed life in him forever. Now, a word of warning. Just going to church is not going to get rid of your sin. Trying to live a good life is not going to get rid of it. Telling yourself you are really a good person is not going to deal with sin. Only Jesus' death and resurrection will do it.

Just as Jesus was saying, the seed must die before new seeds are produced, and it's the same for us. We must die to ourselves, give up our old lives, so that a new person, saved, made free, enjoying the blessings of the Holy Spirit, is produced. That is, eternal life which we receive now. It is the assurance and hope we have now before our body dies. 2 Corinthians 5:17 – 21 **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.**

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At my church soon we're going to have a baptism which is a symbol of what happens to us. One of our new Christians will go down into the water, a symbol of dying and being buried, and then lifted up out of the water, which is like being resurrected and having new life.

There is another sense in which we see dying in order to be fruitful. Even though we are the fruit of Jesus dying, even though we have received forgiveness and eternal life through what Jesus did on the cross, we fight a daily battle with temptation which is trying to drag us down. In the Lord's prayer we say, "Save us from a time of trial." So daily we need to die to ourselves. There are all sorts of addictions, substance abuse, pornography, eating disorders, gambling, and even mobile phones. There are things like worry, stress, depression that Christians struggle with every day. The more we die to ourselves and serve our Master, Jesus, our lives become fruitful, when our witness to the saving grace of Jesus brings other people into the Kingdom of God, when they see the new life which is in you.

In my last year of teaching, I was at a school in one of the most difficult schools in South Australia. One of my staff spoke to me one day and asked if she could meet with me. We arranged a time and after school she came to my office and asked, "Why are you so calm, so patient, so peaceful." This surprised me a bit because although I have experienced the peace of God, I hadn't realised that it was visible to others. What an opportunity God had just given me. I was able to tell her that God lives in me as the Holy Spirit, and that produces love and joy and peace and patience and other things. It's not so much me, it's what God has made me. She could see the new life which was in me because of Jesus.

Jesus said, "I have come that they [that's you and me] may have life, and have it to the full." So many of us today can say, "Thank you Lord for the new life you have given me. Praise your name! Hallelujah!"

Song: "Blessed Assurance" (Frances Jane van Alstyne)

1. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine: O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God; born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.
This is my story, this is my song, praising my Saviour all the day long.
2. Perfect submission, perfect delight, visions of rapture burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above echoes of mercy, whispers of love.
3. Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Saviour am happy and blest;
Watching and waiting, looking above, filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

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Benediction

May the hope that is born in us and the assurance of eternal life remain with us.
And may the death of our old selves bring new life to others.

Amen

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA