

First hymn: *by C Wesley (T Stuttgart Christian Witt 1660-1716)*

- 1) Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free,
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee.
- 2) Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art,
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.
- 3) Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,
born to rein in us for ever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
- 4) By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
by Thine all-sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne.

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Prayer:

Dear Father, It is the day your people have met for 2000 years; we ask that you hear our prayers and receive our worship this day. We rejoice that we know you hear us. Lead us today in our time together, and let us know your blessing in our time of fellowship. We pray in our Saviour's name.

Amen.

Second hymn by Horatius Bonar 1808-89 (T Vox dilecti J. B. Dykes)

- 1) I heard the voice of Jesus say "Come unto me and rest;
lay down, thou weary one, lay down thy head upon my breast;
I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad;
I found in Him a resting place and He has made me glad.
- 2) I heard the voice of Jesus say " Behold I freely give the living water;
thirsty one, stoop down and drink, and live";
I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him.
- 3) I heard the voice of Jesus say "I am this dark world's light;
look unto me, thy morn shall rise, and all thy day be bright"
I looked to Jesus and I found in Him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk till travelling days are done.

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Readings:

- Hebrews 11:11-16
- 1 Peter 1:11-25

Prayers:

Dear Father of our Lord Jesus, who taught us to address you that way, what a privilege He gave us, teaching us how to pray, and ushering us into your presence. We are so grateful for this great gift. Our world is increasingly hostile to many of us but we are encouraged by his

words: "Let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me", and that he is preparing a place for us. As the years go by we become increasingly aware of the wonderful future he is preparing for his own who one day will all be gathered.

Father, we pray for the troubled world, unaware on the whole of the Christ of history, and what he accomplished. We pray for those who follow Christ in places hostile to Christians, even to the extent of severe persecution. Will you bless and strengthen them; give them the assurance of your Spirit, and remove their fear as they look to you for your guidance and strength. Let their testimony to Christ be clear and with power that holds and keeps them. Let their example and testimony be a light to the truth of the gospel in a "dark place", so that even their enemies will be unable to resist the truth they see and hear.

We pray for our own country, for its leaders, and those who make decisions on our behalf. Grant them to choose wisely in our parliaments, and to make strong decisions for the good of our nation.

Lift up the weak, the lonely, and those who are failing in health. Let them know your keeping power, and encourage them in understanding of your faithfulness and your constancy. Let your will be done in our land and our people.

We ask these our prayers in the name of our Lord, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Third hymn *by Godfrey Thring 1823-1903 (T St Aelred J.B.Dykes 1823-7)*

- 1) Fierce raged the tempest o'er the deep, watch did Thine anxious servants keep,
But Thou wast wrapped in guileless sleep, calm and still.
- 2) "Save, Lord, we perish!" was their cry, O save us in our agony!
Thy word above the storm rose high - "Peace, be still".
- 3) The wild winds hushed, the angry deep sank like a little child to sleep,
the sullen billows ceased to leap, at thy will.
- 4) So when our life is clouded o'er, and storm-winds drift us from the shore,
say, lest we sink to rise no more; "peace be still!"

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Sermon: [Being strangers here.](#)

Several wonderful steps are before us before our lives are ended. Peter, newly charged by the Spirit and wise now with the spirit's wisdom, gives us some good advice.

1) He says: "Set your hope fully on the grace of God that will be given to us as a new gift at the 'revelation' of Jesus" (v13) - that is to be given to us when he appears at the end of the age! Our hope is nothing like the world's - *that* is more like "wishful thinking." Our hope, the Christian hope, is a certainty about the future when Christ appears. All humanity seem to need hope in order to live (those without hope do not seem to survive. Geoff Bingham saw that in action in prisoner-of-war camp.) So we hope with joyful anticipation. A good example of our hope is seen by looking at the disciples of Jesus, including Peter himself. After the death of their Master Jesus they had become a dejected, disappointed and dispirited group, their hopes dashed (they were hopeless), meeting behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, lest they also be targeted.

But they were astonished by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, proving his Messiahship and fulfilling the prophecy of Ps.16 that the Messiah's flesh would not see corruption.) Jesus had told them at least 4 times what would happen to him, but they had never believed it - it had never "jelled! The last time he reminded them of his future was on the road to Emmaus when he was incognito as the "travelling stranger" but revealing himself when giving thanks and breaking the bread, before disappearing. Later he appeared again when the disciples were all together. They were beside themselves with wonder and excitement.

Fifty days later while they were obeying his instruction to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit came with the sound of a rushing wind and the appearance of tongues of flame. Once the Spirit had been poured out, they immediately *understood* all that he had told them. And then they were instantly fearless, full of confidence. Peter preached boldly in crowded Jerusalem, and 3000 people believed the message, the good news. And every day more believers were added.

The Apostles now knew the presence of the risen Christ, who was still directing them, and their faith in him, the ministry of the Spirit, and the certainty of his visible return was the basis of their "living hope". This was a fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy of God's gift of a "new heart and a new Spirit I will put within you and I will cause you to walk in my statutes." This was much more than a "makeover" - this was a "heart transplant"! (Christian Barnard didn't do the first one, God did, and has done it millions of times.) The hope the disciples now had was inextricably linked with faith and love - they occur together!

2) (v 14) "Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called us is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct". Peter then quotes Leviticus and the holiness required in following God's call. "Holy" means *separated for God's service*; He calls us to follow Him - the standard is exceedingly high! Moses first encountered God at the burning bush experience in the desert. He was terrified, and was told the land whereon he stood was "holy ground"! The "fear of the Lord" has always been a part of our true faith - it is awe, a *reverential fear*. The world thinks "holiness" means "very religious" and use it often as a derogatory term. Ministers of the word are often portrayed on the media as sanctimonious or even quite "whacky", and are set up to be laughed at! Jesus is the most holy person most of us have heard of, and he was unpretentious - completely "non-whacky"! So much so that when he came to his own town early in his ministry, and taught on the sabbath, they questioned his right to teach because of familiarity with him. "Where did he get all this? But we know him, we know his family!" And they took offense at him, and were quite unable to see who he was. (familiarity breeds contempt). And he taught his followers "I am among you as one who serves - you do that too".

A part of holiness is an associated "glory." The O.T. word (*kabod*) meant weight, value, or worthiness. It was often associated with light. The N.T word (*doxa*) could refer to human honour, but most often to the revelation of the character of God in the person of Jesus. In Hebrews 1 he is referred to as the "radiance of God's glory," suggesting a bright light. Jesus shone with it on the mount of transfiguration when the three disciples saw his glory. Peter never forgot it, saying they were "eyewitnesses of his majesty" where they also heard God's voice "when we were with him on the holy mountain." Paul says to the Romans "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory which will be revealed in us",

and he is looking towards the liberation of the creation itself from its bondage to decay, and being brought into (literally) the "liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:18). And in the account of the nations Jesus spoke of "coming in his glory and all the holy angels with him" to judge them. In another story, a parable, the angels will gather the evildoers and condemn them, but the righteous will "shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father", the same phrase as was used to describe Jesus' appearance when he was transfigured! (Matthew 17:2) So holiness and glory are a part of what will one day be revealed to us and in us! (do you ever think about that?)

3) Peter reveals his true understanding of the source of his redemption in verse 18. He knew the cause of his salvation, and it was not a ransom of silver or gold which he called "perishable", but the precious blood of Christ, as of a "lamb without blemish or spot" being destined "before the foundation of the world" i.e. pre-planned, and manifested "at the end of times", which we are still in! Peter knew the value of this ransom was the perfect offering, as is strongly affirmed in Hebrews - "how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God". (Heb 9:14)

This took the place of the old animal sacrifice, God's provisional blood sacrifice, efficacious until Christ's final and permanent offering of his own blood.

The picture may still seem strange, even gruesome to Western culture, and of course we have become accustomed to the language and to the old Hebrew significance of it. When I was living in London in 1970, gaining valuable experience in the NHS, we sponsored an English Youth Group in our home. Once when celebrating communion in our home, a petite English girl complained about the image conjured up. She suggested this was a rather horrible and uncivilised language. "Why don't we just eat a slice of cake and have a cup of tea, and remember Jesus?" (How *English* I thought.) We need to be reminded of the true horror of sin, and the cost of God's provision to remedy it, which was the very life of His Son. It truly *was* horrible, and the cost of it was higher than we of the West can imagine!" It upheld the ancient principle "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin" (Lev 17:11)

4) One of Peter's phrases was "conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile". (v17) This answers to Peter's opening statement that we are "born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Christ from the dead." His statement was "an inheritance which was imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you".

But it raised the issue mentioned in our first reading from Hebrews 11, where Abraham, and Sarah believed God and obeyed God's instruction to go "towards a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (v 10). It seemed God had given them an "impossible promise", of progeny when Sarah was 95 and Abraham 100 years old! They didn't even know where they were going. He took Abraham out to look at the sky and count the stars if he was able. Such would his descendants be! And we read "Abraham believed the Lord, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." (Gen 15:6) I think God loves doing the impossible, and particularly loves those who believe He can do the impossible. No wonder Abraham is called the Father of the faithful! Abraham and Sarah became exiles from their own land by God's command. It was quoted that Abraham was one of those who acknowledged that they were "strangers and exiles

on the earth". (Heb 11:13) This is also the truth about *us* if we think about it, and we should!

Malcolm Muggeridge was a brilliant English Journalist, a notable editor of Punch magazine, a good critic and hard taskmaster at times. He became a Christian late in his life. He once said that his chief blessing had been one of his greatest sorrows, a great discomfort in earlier years - his sense of alienation. Even before he was converted! He said "I had a sense, sometimes enormously vivid, that *I was a stranger in a strange land*, a visitor, not a native. He was later to say "The ultimate disaster that can befall us is to feel ourselves to be at home here on earth. As long as we are aliens, we cannot forget the homeland". So why is it such a blessing? It is because we were *not intended primarily for here*. And this feeling pulls us towards our true home.

When Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem, the disciples were terrified - that he would be killed (and so would they!) And he said "Don't let your hearts be troubled - trust in God and also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms...and I go to prepare a place for you.... And I will come back and take you to be where I am, that where I am you may be also.

My friends we are aliens in this world, *strangers, exiles!* Our true home will be in our Father's house, where Jesus will also be. And in this world where troubles rage, and many feel great insecurity, this gives us a great security. For now it is internal, and I believe that that is the only *true security* that anyone can have. And there is no other security that gets even close!

Amen.

Fourth hymn: *W Fullarton (T Londonderry Air Petrie's Ancient Music of Ireland 1856)*

- 1) I cannot tell why He whom angels worship should set His love upon the sons of men,
or why, as Shepherd, He should seek the wanderers to bring them back, they know not how or when
But this I know, that He was born of Mary, when Bethlehem's manger was His only home,
And that He lived at Nazareth and laboured, and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world is come.
- 2) I cannot tell how silently He suffered as with His peace He graced this place of tears,
or how His heart upon the Cross was broken, the crown of pain to three and thirty years.
But this I know, He heals the broke-hearted, and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
and lifts the burden from the heavy-laden, for yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.
- 3) I cannot tell how all the lands will worship, when, at His bidding, every storm is stilled,
or who can say how great the jubilation when all the hearts of men with love are filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture, and myriad, myriad human voices sing,
and earth to heaven, and heaven to earth will answer –
"at last the Saviour, Saviour of the world is King!"

Benediction:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with you all. Amen.

This service was prepared by Neil McIntosh (M.B.B.S. F.R.A.C.S.) for HopeNet SA