



Good morning and welcome.

I hope you have been making the most of this glorious sunny weather we have been enjoying recently. Living in a beautiful country and having great sunny weather, makes me feel very blest; I hope you feel the same way. So, I have chosen Psalm 16 this morning to bring us together in worship:

The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Mission Praise 673

There is a Redeemer,
Jesus, God's own Son,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.

*Thank you , O my Father,
for giving us your Son,
and leaving us your Spirit
till your work on earth is done.*

Jesus, my Redeemer,
name above all names,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.

*Thank you, O my Father,
for giving us your Son,
and leaving us your Spirit
till your work on earth is done.*

When I stand in glory
I will see his face,
and there I'll serve my King for ever
in that holy place.

*Thank you, O my Father,
for giving us your Son,
and leaving us your Spirit
till your work on earth is done.*



After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the Spirit given at Pentecost, the new faith spread rapidly; again and again (and in our reading today) we read of the rapid growth of the Church. And so, as the story goes, Satan, being filled with jealousy at losing so many of his own, called a meeting of his senior demons, to come up with a plan to thwart the new movement. Satan asked his demons what lie they could propagate to prevent people from turning from darkness to the light.

One demon suggested that we could tell them there is no God. But Satan dismissed this, saying that only a fool says there is no God (quoting Psalms 14 and 53), people only have to look around about them to see the work of God. Another demon suggested that they tell people God doesn't love them, but Satan said, "no, that won't work, if they know that God's Son died for them how can they not know that God loves them.

Then one shrewd demon said, 'Tell them they have time: today they can eat drink and be merry, pursue their own ends, and tomorrow they can repent, or next week or next year . And satan said, That's it; that's what we'll tell them.

Time has a habit of running out. Time ran out in Afghanistan for everyone; everyone thought they had more time, and the consequences have been deadly. Didn't Jesus tell his followers, when you see the warning signs, flee, don't even turn back to collect your belongings. We might plan for tomorrow but in God's plan there might not be a tomorrow.

Lets Pray

Dear Lord, we thank you for this green and pleasant land we live in and for all the ways you provide for us. We thank you that we have enjoyed peace and prosperity for many years, when other parts of the world have been ravaged by wars and famines and natural disasters. We pray for the troubled land of Afghanistan: we have followed with horror the unfolding disaster at Kabul over the past weeks; we think of those who have been left behind, left to the mercy of the merciless. We think of those families who have been separated from one another, not knowing what will happen to loved ones, and those who have lost loved ones. We also remember those from our own armed forces who lost their lives in Afghanistan. We pray for peace, and so we pray the prayer Jesus taught us: Our Father...

Son of God

After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul finds himself between a rock and a hard place: he is hated by the Jews as a turncoat, and distrusted by Christians as one who previously persecuted the church. Yet he didn't waste any time in preaching his message, that, 'Jesus was the Son of God.' To the Jews of course this was blasphemy; historically they understood the term to refer to either the people of God as a whole (Hosea 11:1), or their anointed king (2 Samuel 7:14), and, by extension the promised messiah, a son of David. But for someone to identify themselves as God's son, in the way Jesus did, they were making themselves equal with God.

For us it is a fundamental truth of our faith, in fact 'the' fundamental truth. Paul was able, with his learning, to convince people of this truth from the scriptures, but a more convincing proof was in his willingness to endure hardness and suffering because of his faith. Suffering was the hallmark of his apostleship.

Jesus ultimately proved his sonship through his perfect obedience and death on the cross; only after his death is he declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection. Like Paul, if we want to make Christ known then we can do no better than deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.

Reading Acts 9: 20-31

Saul stayed for a few days with the believers in Damascus. He went straight to the synagogues and began to preach that Jesus was the Son of God.

All who heard him were amazed and asked, "Isn't he the one who in Jerusalem was killing those who worship that man Jesus? And didn't he come here for the very purpose of arresting those people and taking them back to the chief priests?"

But Saul's preaching became even more powerful, and his proofs that Jesus was the Messiah were so convincing that the Jews who lived in Damascus could not answer him.

After many days had gone by, the Jews met together and made plans to kill Saul, but he was told of their plan. Day and night they watched the city gates in order to kill him. But one night Saul's followers took him and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

Saul went to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples. But they would not believe that he was a disciple, and they were all afraid of him. Then Barnabas came to his help and took him to the apostles. He explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and that the Lord had spoken to him. He also told them how boldly Saul had preached in the name of Jesus in Damascus. And so Saul stayed with them and went all over Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. He also talked and disputed with the Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the believers found out about this, they took Saul to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

And so it was that the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had a time of peace. Through the help of the Holy Spirit it was strengthened and grew in numbers, as it lived in reverence for the Lord.

Amen.

Son of Encouragement

When Paul came to Jerusalem he was shunned by the disciples there, because they knew he had previously persecuted the church. But Barnabas was prepared to act as an advocate for him and used his good standing in the church in Jerusalem to persuade them to accept Paul as genuine.

We first meet Barnabas at the end of Acts chapter 4, when he sells a field and gives the proceeds to the church. We are told that his name is a term of endearment meaning “son of encouragement” (or “son of exhortation”). Elsewhere he is referred to as ‘a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.’

Paul is a hard act to follow, none of us have the calling he had, nor indeed his intellect and oratory skills; his ability to endure hardship and withstand abuse (verbal and physical) is phenomenal. But we can all aspire to be a Barnabas; we can all be encouragers, go out of our way to help those who are isolated and vulnerable. I’m sure we can think of people who have encouraged us over the years, just as I’m sure we can think of people who need some encouragement.

Mission Praise 52

God sent His son, they called him Jesus;
He came to love, heal, and forgive;
He lived and died to buy my pardon,
an empty grave is there to prove my saviour lives

*Because He lives. I can face tomorrow;
because He lives all fear is gone;
because I know, I know, He holds the future,
and life is worth the living just because He lives*

How sweet to hold a new-born baby,
and feel the pride and joy he gives;
but greater still the calm assurance,
this child can face uncertain days because He lives.

Because He lives...

And then one day I'll cross the river;
I'll fight life's final war with pain;
and then as death gives way to victory,
I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He lives.

Because He lives...

May the peace of the Lord be with you

Amen