**Morning Praise @ Home 14th August 2022**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Readings Hebrews 11: v29 to 12: v2 Luke 12: 49 – 56

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**Reflection from Philip**

Traditionally it was assumed that St Paul wrote the letter to the Hebrews, but nowadays people are not so sure. It’s written as a letter and it tries to help people of Jewish descent understand how the lives of their Old Testament heroes relate to the good news about Christ and his resurrection.

Our reading from Hebrews typifies this with a gallop through many of the greats from the Old Testament.

It starts with a review of the faith of Moses, but quickly moves on to talk of others ‘who lived by faith’ – in fact it moves on so rapidly it’s hard to keep up… slightly surprisingly, Rahab the Canaanite prostitute gets a top mention, then an eclectic list of other heroes of the faith, to include:

The judges of Israel - Gideon, Samson, Samuel; The prophets of Israel.

Verse 33 begins a run of heroic activities that are not attributed to any particular person – perhaps it was assumed that as Hebrews, it would be obvious to them who was being referred to?

Who ‘shuts the mouths of lions’ ? Daniel in the lions’ den? Or Samson, or David….?

Then a rather nasty list of torture and abuse suffered by people of faith:

Torture, mocking, flogging, chains, imprisonment… being sawn in two (!) – I couldn’t find any reference to anyone described as being sawn in two in the bible – sounds more like something from a magic show, but according to Jewish tradition, Isaiah was (sorry for the squeamish) cut in half with a wood saw. Also the more conventional - killed by the sword, and so on.We know the Romans came up with some very nasty ways to kill Christians – not least crucifixion itself, mauled by wild animals in the arena, and so on.

Perhaps the lack of details of names alongside these atrocities is intentional? The focus is on their struggles, rather than who they were. I think we are given a clear impression of a great number of people who over the years, and throughout the Old Testament, have suffered for their faith. We are also made aware of the large numbers of witnesses to their faith ‘of whom the world was not worthy’ (v.38) Hidden behind this list is a God who they were prepared to die for, who is the one equipping people with the necessary faith – a faith that can sometimes cost people their lives.

Then a strange claim – for all their faith, these people ‘did not receive what was promised’. This is where we get to the nub of what the letter to the Hebrews is about – all this awaiting the arrival of Christ – of his perfect sacrifice on a cross and his resurrection. But the fullness of this ‘Kingdom of God’ has yet to be realised or achieved. Christ’s life and death and resurrection are a key part of the realisation, but the final and full process of the Kingdom is still ahead.

This all sounds a bit grim and heavy – so the writer gives us an easier example to think about –

*‘Let us therefore run this race that is set up before us’*

I don’t know about you, but suddenly it all seems a bit clearer. I can relate to this in my everyday life. I find myself thinking of those great verses from Isaiah 40, so wonderfully spoken by the actor playing Eric Liddle, the Olympic athlete, in the film Chariots of Fire.

I’m always looking for an excuse to play extracts from that - one of my favourite films!

As at the Olympics, in our biblical analogy from Hebrews, there is a grandstand stadium finish – all the runners are cheered on – the onlookers being all the saints of old.

But this race is different. The course has already been prepared – and run, by ‘*Christ, the pioneer and perfector of our faith’*. He has already run this course to the end, and in having done so, he makes it possible for us all to follow.

In following the crucified and risen Christ we are led through all the struggles and obstacles we can come across in our lives, even death itself. He gives us the strength – a strength from God that those Old Testament bible greats had.

Nobody is promising an easy life –that list of torture and death in Hebrews makes that clear. Many came to a sticky end. However God will give us strength. As the good book says,

***‘We can do all things through Him who gives us strength’ Philippians 4. 13***

But God will reward those who seek to live by him:

*‘****He who honours me, I will honour…’ 1 Samuel 2.30***

As we run the great race, he will be there to help us, guide us, and give us that strength.

And so into the presence of Christ (this ‘*invisible presence’* – Hebrews 11 v2) we lean forward in faith, as all of us do our best to run the course before us. Amen

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ

known in the world? **We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by John**

Gracious God, your Son encouraged us to be generous givers: may we so rejoice in your love that we give without counting the cost and work tirelessly to spread the Gospel message in all that we do and say.

Holy God, as you revealed yourself to the Jewish people through the prophets in ancient days, reveal yourself to our church in this present age. Raise up new prophets and make us into a faithful people ready to believe your promises and follow you wherever you will lead us.

We pray today for the peace of our nations.

May all places that suffer violence, injustice, war and terrorism find peace and reconciliation. We pray for the peoples of the world and that the leaders of the nations may uphold what is right and good.

As we remember the older and retired people in our church, we give you thanks for all that they do in our Sunday worship, in our church fellowship and in our communities. Send your Holy Spirit to inspire them to use and share their life experiences with wisdom, humility and gladness.

We pray for all those who have lost their way or have been led astray and for all who are living below their potential or their abilities.

We raise before you all whose lives are unfulfilled and all those whose lives are restricted by illness; we remember the chronically ill, those in constant pain, the depressed and the despairing.

Almighty God, we remember before You those who have died and those who are bereaved by their passing.

We give back to you, Lord, those whom you gave to us.

Your son taught us that life is eternal and that love cannot die.

So death is only a horizon, and a horizon is only the limit of our sight. Open our eyes to see more clearly, and draw us closer to you, so that we may know we are nearer to our loved ones, who are with you.

Faithful God, as we go from today’s worship help us to see each individual we meet as uniquely made in Your image and worthy of our love and respect. Show Your love through our lives in some small way today and every day.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be,

that you may live and work to his praise and glory,

and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**