

Sunday 06 September 2020, a service for use at home; Haddington West Church, Garvald and Morham

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

1Tim.4,10: *We have set our hope on the living God, who is the Saviour of all.*

Collect: Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people, that richly bearing the fruit of good works, we may by you be richly rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. AMEN

BE STILL, FOR THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

1. Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here;
come bow before Him now
with reverence and fear:
in Him no sin is found –
we stand on holy ground.
Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One is here.

2. Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire,
with splendour He is crowned:
how awesome is the sight –
our radiant King of light!
Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

3. Be still,
For the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place:
He comes to cleanse and heal,
To minister His grace –
No work too hard for Him.
In faith receive from Him.
Be still,
For the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place.

David J Evans, 1986

Mt.16, 21-28:

“From that time Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’ Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’

Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.’”

Dear friends

One day when our family were a lot younger we were on a ferry passage across the English Channel. As the weather was quite good I decided to take all four children – one of them in a buggy – outside on to the deck for a wee walk-about. Opening the heavy door and manoeuvring the buggy outside took a bit of effort and by the time I had managed the other 3 children were out in front. To my absolute horror, before I could stop her, our youngest girl, barely able to walk and certainly in no controlled way, lost no time in running towards the railing, stumbling straight towards a small gap left there, I presume, for handling the crane next to it. The gap was large enough for the little girl running towards it at top speed to go right through – and behind was nothing but a 30 m drop into the sea! Never before or after have I shouted a name as loudly and sharply as I did then in utter panic. Thankfully it stopped her in her track, she stood frozen to the spot. Grabbing her by the hand I made sure she couldn’t continue where she had been going.

From the moment I realised where she was heading I had but one thought: “Don’t go there!” Now it’s a similar thing with Peter here (and it’s important we look at this because in the things we read or hear about the people who were with the Lord we learn a lot about our own hearts, about our thoughts towards God and about Him and about truth and love and about salvation). After hearing Jesus say that his way was to take him to Jerusalem where he would have to suffer and die *and on the third day be raised to life*, Peter had a “Don’t go there!” – moment. Taking Jesus to one side he urged him very earnestly: “Don’t go there! You must not even think in that way! This cannot be God’s plan. Look at what you have achieved, the support you have from the people – would you now jeopardize all of this? Our movement has gained real momentum, you have the upper hand over you adversaries in Jerusalem – if you don’t push this further not even a future resurrection, whatever

that might look like, will undo the damage that suffering and death at the hands of your adversaries will do to your cause. What is the point in going to your doom? In suffering? In death? People have seen your power and they follow you. But will they follow you when you end in such weakness? No Lord, you mustn't go there, it can't be right, nor God's good plan!"

Do you and I not understand Peter? Do we not think like him? How, we say, will people be attracted to faith, to God, to church, if the way is that of suffering and death and resurrection, that of the cross? No, people are attracted to miracles, to healings, powerful demonstrations which leave no one doubting that God is real! And people are attracted to a faith that agrees with their wisdom and with their understanding, with how they see God, their soul and whatever else, and the cross with its dying Saviour jars with that! Yes, Jesus did suffer on the cross and he may have thought that it was the main purpose of his coming, but did not his miracles and teachings do more for the attractiveness of Christianity than the forgiveness of sins and the hope of the resurrection? Would he not have achieved even more if he had not died on a cross, like a church today, let's be honest, can hope to achieve more by being impressive and captivating rather than being faithful in suffering and calling out sin and preaching Christ crucified? Would God not sell Himself, faith, the church, much better and more successfully if He gave the church the power of miracles and of awesome prophecy?

This way of thinking is natural to us, is it not? It is tempting to think so. In fact, Jesus was tempted by it – he was tempted by the idea that he could be a Messiah without the cross (suffering and death before resurrection). And that is why he rebuked Peter in such very strong terms, because he perceived in him the words and voice of the tempter himself – Satan.

"Don't go there!" Peter said to the Lord. And the Lord said to Peter: "By speaking in this way you don't have in mind the concerns of God but merely human concerns. Why must I go there? So that God, being concerned for your soul may become your soul's concern. For nothing else can or shall give life to your soul, nothing you do and nothing you can possibly gain and should it be the whole world."

Dear friends, we are tempted in our minds with human concerns when we imagine God's concern for us. Our concerns for success, for gain, for health, for security, for admiration, for our aims, must be the way for God to be our help and convince us of his love. But God's concern for us is for our soul – that there be light because there is love, that there be truth because there is grace.

And the way here is through the cross, where God out of concern for our soul in Jesus suffers and dies in place of the sinner in judgment of sin and rises from death to new life in order to become this new life in all who receive him, that is, believe.

Let Christ be your concern, and that you may follow him: though it will mean a cross for yourself it is the way in which the new life will grow. AMEN

IN CHRIST ALONE

1. In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
this cornerstone, this solid ground,
firm through the fiercest drought
and storm.

What heights of love,
what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled,
when strivings cease!

My comforter, my all in all,
here in the love of Christ I stand.

2. In Christ alone - who took on flesh,
fullness of God in helpless Babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones he came to save
till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied,
for every sin on Him was laid;
here in the death of Christ I live.

3. There in the ground his body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain,
then, bursting forth in glorious day,

up from the grave He rose again!
And as he stands in victory
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am His and He is mine-
bought with the precious blood of Christ

4. No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man
can ever pluck me from his hand;
till he returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Stuart Townend, 2001

Time of prayer / intercession –

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Live in union with Christ Jesus as Lord, be rooted in him, be built in him, grow strong in the faith; let your hearts overflow with thankfulness. (Col.2,6-7)

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you.

AMEN