

Service for use at home

3rd Sunday after Christmas, 10 January 2021

Haddington West with Garvald and Morham

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

“God the Lord has spoken and summoned the world from the rising of the sun to its setting. God shines out of Zion, perfect in beauty.” Ps.50, 1-2

Prayer -

Eternal God, yours is the greatness, the power, the majesty, the splendour and the glory; for everything in heaven and on earth is yours. We worship and adore you; we bless and praise your holy name.

Throughout the ages you have revealed to men and women glimpses of your glory – the glory that was fully manifest in Jesus Christ our Lord. For he is your eternal Word, the source of life and light. That light shines on in the darkness and darkness has never been able to quench it. The Word became flesh and lived among us; and we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth.

Eternal God, revealed to us in Jesus, we worship and adore you, we bless and praise your holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

Epistle reading: Eph.1,3-14

‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory.’

THANKS TO GOD WHOSE WORD WAS SPOKEN

1 Thanks to God whose word was spoken
in the making of the earth.

His the voice that called a nation,
fired her vision, tried her worth.

God has spoken:
praise him for his open word.

2 Thanks to God whose word incarnate
came to save our human race.

Deeds and words and death and rising
testify to heaven’s grace.

God has spoken:
praise him for his open word.

3 Thanks to God whose word was written
in the Bible’s sacred page,
record of the revelation
showing God to every age.

God has spoken:
praise him for his open word.

4 Thanks to God whose word is published
in the tongues of every race.
See its glory undiminished
by the change of time or place.
God has spoken:
praise him for his open word.

5 Thanks to God whose word is answered
by the Spirit's voice within.
Here we drink of joy unmeasured,
life redeemed from death and sin.
God is speaking:
praise him for his open word.

Thomas Brooks (1918-19850)

Jn.1,16-18:

'From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.' (NRSV)

Dear friends

In Christ, the incarnated Word, God and man stand in a relation to one another. This relationship is key to who Jesus is, to his person. It is also key to what a person becomes through receiving him – a child of God (v.12!), that is, a person who as man relates to God as a child to the Father.

This we shall ponder a bit further, having last time spoken about Jesus being the revelation of God and also the knowledge of God and saying that this knowledge is central to being who we truly are and what we need to gain in order to become it. By way of a summary statement John here lets us see something of what he then shows at length in the rest of his Gospel, laying out carefully the evidence so *"that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life"* (Jn.20,30).

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. What is his fullness? [John here wants to evoke a sense a beggar might have on being offered full access to all things plentiful, a prisoner on being offered liberty, a thief on being offered pardon, one dying of thirst on being offered water for free...]. We must withstand the temptation to enter here our wishes and wants, our unrealised plans and unfulfilled desires, our gripes and grievances, and say: 'This is what I lack, let then his fullness cover it!' It is tempting, because certainly this is the kind of thing that we are inclined to imagine and desire: to have God in our pocket; a pocket-god who ensures that I am healthy and prosperous, who keeps all suffering, hardship and difficulties away from me, who gives success and the end I wish, who enables me to have my way and says 'yes' and 'thank you' to what I choose to offer him in return for such blessings.

But the thing here is that in this way while man may get his way God does not get his man! And this is the reason for the incarnation: that God may get his man, and man may be man truly when God does – that man may get God's love, may be won for the light, for life, that man may not perish but have everlasting life, which alone is life in all its fullness: the truly human life, the life of true humanity.

There is a poverty in us and about us – a lack, a need, a sickness – to which Christ's fullness corresponds, a poverty which he made his own, a poverty into which he came so that we might partake of his fullness and receive it and no longer be poor and sick but rich and well.

To know the fullness of Christ, then, we need to know the nature of this poverty and sickness. Because, will we receive of his fullness truly (that is, will we believe in him) if we think we are not poor but quite full, not sick but quite well? Indeed, one of the most, if not the most, troublesome aspect of humanity and its ways lies precisely here: (not in CO2 figures, not in economic inequality, not in the quality of education, not in societal unrest and war etc., but) in the mind and heart of man who is full of himself, who is, and means to be, full without God, is full of his own ways and thoughts and the conviction that this is just what the world needs to receive in order to heal and achieve fullness.

The fullness we see in Jesus, however, is diametrically opposed to this and so it must be in all that receive him: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Mt.11,29) His fullness is not one of self, it is not one he arrived at by self-determination and self-expression (as is man’s way, and is how all fullness was lost!). It is a fullness that arises out of and consists in his relationship with the Father as the Son. Through the incarnation this comes to stand in a person in whom, in an utterly unique way, man and God relate in the right way, in truth. **No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.**

You see, then, what our poverty and sickness is? That it has to do with the way we relate to God? That we are alienated from God and are as a result not rich in goodness nor well in heart? We are in person different from the person that is Jesus, from the true humanity that he is, because we do not relate to God as we ought to, in a true way.

We *“have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God”*, says Paul (Rm.3,23). John leads us to the same conclusion when he mentions that *“the law was given through Moses”*. Because the law was given as the way for man to relate to God in truth. The law was to be the enabler of true humanity. Now this is an important point because the idea is close to us that there is something by which we see when we are good and when we do good – and the standard by which we do that is law! And so to the law we look. But let us do it properly by the gold-standard, the law that was given; and when we do it this we find that the law has not enabled us to meet its demands, but that it has left us oppressed by them, guilty and condemned. For, demands you cannot meet, and do not, become oppressive, they push you into hiding, into the secrecy of the dark – that is the poverty and sickness of man in which all humanity shares.

But this is what Christ’s fullness corresponds to. *“For the law was given through Moses; **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**”* Dear friends, Christ’s fullness, available to all, is not about demand but about a gift – the gift of his coming from God to be under the law, to bear the full weight of sin the law pronounces, to cancel the oppression of the law’s unmet demands through fulfilling it on our behalf and to heal our broken relationship with God through sharing with us his own. In him we have, as God’s gracious gift and by faith, the forgiveness of sins and a true relationship with our Father.

From his fullness let us receive, grace upon grace. AMEN

FATHER OF HEAVEN

1 Father of heaven, whose love profound
a ransom for our souls has found,

before your throne we sinners bend:
to us your pardoning love extend.

2 Almighty Son, incarnate Word,
our Prophet, Priest, Redeemer, Lord,

before your throne we sinners bend:
to us your saving grace extend.

3 Eternal Spirit, by whose breath
our souls are raised from sin and death,
before your throne we sinners bend:
to us your quickening power extend.

4 Jehovah – Father, Spirit, Son -
mysterious Godhead, Three in One,
before your throne we sinners bend:
grace, pardon, life to us extend.

Edward Cooper (1770-1833)

Lord God, you have made heaven and earth, to you it all belongs and of the wisdom and might of your works it all speaks. We praise you that you have made us for knowing you and to enjoy you forever. You do not want that anyone should perish but everyone to come to repentance. We thank you that you have made a way for us to dwell with you and have fellowship with you, something that is impossible but for the grace of Jesus who died for us so that we should become a new creation, who for our sake became poor so that we in him should become rich. Great is the wisdom of our redemption through Christ, and great indeed is the blessing of the inheritance prepared in him for all whom you have given to him and all who are still to be called. Through faith in him we fully share already in his fullness as your Son; now it is no longer about law and demand, but about being a new creation. Fill us with your Spirit, we pray, so that we may grow more fully towards the fullness of Christ.

- 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. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen'

May the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ shine in your hearts, transform your lives, and brighten the world.

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

AMEN