



I rejoice in Your Word
like one who discovers a great treasure.

Psalm 119:162



16 May, 2021

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Enter God's presence in the place where you are now and join in the voices that declare:

HYMN Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God Almighty

PRAYER

O God, You are always doing a new thing! We confess that sometimes we close windows of our hearts and minds against the fresh air of new ideas, against the sound of other people's worries, against the winds of change.

Lord! You are everywhere, all the time! We confess turning away from people who are different, against community concerns and the needs of many.

Forgive us for insulating ourselves in our locked homes, our shuttered churches, and allowing the security systems of our hearts rule over us.

Open our lives and let your Holy Spirit blow through, bringing new life, health and strength this morning, we pray in the Name Jesus. **AMEN.**

HYMN In Christ Alone

READING Habakkuk 3 (selected verses)

These lines are from the prayer sung by the prophet Habakkuk:

I have heard all about You, Lord. I am filled with awe by Your amazing works. In this time of our deep need, help us again as You did in years gone by. And in Your anger, remember Your mercy.

Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my

salvation! The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights.

HYMN I know Whom I have Believed

PRAYER for UNITY

Creator God, Master of all creation, who called every being into life, who is mindful of humankind in all its diversity, who embodies us with dignity, granting different gifts and talents to shape life in this world, we ask for your Spirit to unite us as we face lack of understanding and disunity in our churches, in our communities, and in our countries. In silence now, we lay before you the burdens of our hearts. *(Silence)*

We ask for your Spirit to unite us in the face of the conflicts, hatred and violation of life experienced in so many regions of the earth, and in silence we bring to you the pain of the victims. *(Silence)*

We ask for your Spirit to unite us wherever fear prevents us from caring for our neighbour, from meeting people of different ethnicities, cultures and faith communities with respect and in silence we bring to you the brokenness of human relationships. *(Silence)*

God of all creation, in Christ we are reconciled to You, and so we ask for your uniting Spirit to help us to overcome all our divisions that we may live in peace, for Your great Glory! **AMEN.**

HYMN Breathe on me Breath of God

READING John 7:1-24

After this, Jesus moved about in Galilee but decided not to do so in Judea since the Jews were planning to take his life. A Jewish festival, "The feast of the tabernacles", was approaching and his brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples can see what you are doing, for nobody works in secret if he wants to be known publicly. If you are going to do things like this, let the world see what you are doing." For not even his brothers

had any faith in him. Jesus replied by saying, "It is not yet the right time for me, but any time is right for you. You see, it is impossible for you to arouse the world's hatred, but I provoke hatred because I show the world how evil its deeds really are. No, you go up to the festival; I shall not go up now, for it is not yet time for me to go." And after these remarks he remained where he was in Galilee.

Later, after his brothers had gone up to the festival, he went up himself, not openly but as though he did not want to be seen. Consequently, the Jews kept looking for him at the festival and asking "Where is that man?" And there was an undercurrent of discussion about him among the crowds. Some would say, "He is a good man", others maintained that he was not, but that he was "misleading the people". Nobody, however, spoke openly about him for fear of the Jews.

Jesus openly declares his authority

But at the very height of the festival, Jesus went up to the Temple and began teaching. The Jews were amazed and remarked, "How does this man know all this—he has never been taught?"

Jesus replied to them, "My teaching is not really mine but comes from the one who sent me. If anyone wants to do God's will, he will know whether my teaching is from God or whether I merely speak on my own authority. A man who speaks on his own authority has an eye for his own reputation. But the man who is considering the glory of God who sent him is a true man. There can be no dishonesty about him.

"Did not Moses give you the Law? Yet not a single one of you obeys the Law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

The crowd answered, "You must be mad! Who is trying to kill you?"

Jesus answered them, "I have done one thing and you are all amazed at it. Moses gave you circumcision (not that it came from Moses originally but from your forefathers), and you will circumcise a man even on the Sabbath. If a man

receives the cutting of circumcision on the Sabbath to avoid breaking the Law of Moses, why should you be angry with me because I have made a man's body perfectly whole on the Sabbath? You must not judge by the appearance of things but by the reality!"

PRAYER Thank you Eternal God, for Your Word, and thank you Father for sending us Your Son our Christ who was obedient all the way to the Cross. Open our minds to understand Your Word, Lord! And open our hearts to drop all pretences and follow Jesus into Your presence.
AMEN.

MESSAGE

Galilee seems to be Jesus' stomping ground where He moved around freely. Bible maps show the region north of the Lake, to its west and east, criss-crossed by a maze of trade routes from countries further out in those directions.

It is interesting to note the polar opposites of place and activity. Jesus spent a lot of time around Galilee where He was accepted, admired and loved, where people listened intently and their lives transformed. Galilee is where the purpose of God through Jesus was achieved. Jesus spent less time further south in Jerusalem, where the Jewish leadership "were plotting His death" (7:1).

At the end of Chapter 6, we come across the first (*I think*) distinction made between Jesus' "disciples" and the "Twelve" (v.66-67). Many followed Jesus as His disciple, and many walked away because they felt His teaching was too difficult to live by. But Jesus invested His time with the Twelve, drawing them together as a group, revealing to them His relationship with His Father, and bonding them to Him and His Father. We are left with the impression, when Jesus addressed a crowd, or spoke with people, the Twelve were listening intently, because His primary goal was to prepare them as the first evangelists of God's Good News in the person of Jesus the Christ! The language in Jesus' High Priestly prayer (ch.17), of being **entrusted** with people whom we mentor to serve in God's Kingdom work, is conveyed throughout His gospel.

John's Gospel also informs us, Jesus balances His time between three groups of people: those excluded from society because of sickness, disease and neglect who experience His healing and know He is "from God"; those curious and mesmerised by Jesus' miracles, but are not convinced of His Divinity; and those challenged by Jesus' popularity, wanting to find ways of doing away with Him, if necessary, literally! Needless to say, Jesus spent more time with the first group, and least amount of time with the the last group.

Each of the three groups followed Jesus, driven by their own motives. Today we meet a fourth group of people, Jesus' brothers, also with their own motives.

Jesus was indeed Mary's first-born, but Mary and Joseph had other children. John first mentioned this in 2:12 and now at the start of chapter 7.¹

His brothers seem to be taunting Jesus, *"Why don't you leave this place and go up to the Feast (of Tabernacles being celebrated in Jerusalem) so your disciples (followers) can get a good look at (admire you for) the works (miracles) you do? No one who intends to be publicly known does everything behind the scenes. If you're serious about what you are doing, come out in the open and show the world."*

John then shocks us, *even Jesus' own siblings did not believe Him (v.5)*, which in hindsight, might be the reason Jesus entrusted Mary to John's care.

Is there a difference or a commonality between, the "unbelief"² of Jesus' brothers Joseph, Simon, Judas (not Iscariot) and James (who became a leader of the Church in Jerusalem³ and wrote a letter to the 12 tribes of Israel scattered abroad, which I think documents His own journey into deeper faith, as encouragement to others), and the "unbelief" of the Jewish leadership. In the first 24 verses of ch. 7, John offers us insight into what this "unbelief" looks like. It frightens me, perhaps it will you too!

¹ Matthew mentions Jesus' brothers in 12:46-4, and sisters of Jesus are mentioned in Matthew 13:55-56

² **Unbelief** is the lack of belief or refusing to believe. **Disbelief** is the state of not believing, or refusal to believe

³ Acts 15

First, the difference between the unbelief of Jesus' brothers and the Jewish leadership (who influenced the crowds). Jesus' brothers are excited about the miracles Jesus performed which attracted crowds. It was the miracles that excited them, not their brother Jesus, nor His message about the Kingdom of God. As long as Jesus continued to "perform miracles", they were happy because they could say to people in the crowds, *That's my brother! The one performing miracles is our brother!* So they goad Him *to make an appearance in Jerusalem to win more amazed followers.* Their ulterior motive was be known in Jerusalem, as brothers of the Man who could do wonders, perhaps cash in on Jesus' fame!

The "unbelief" of the Jewish leadership was the opposite. They are neither excited nor amazed; they are threatened by Jesus popularity arising from the miracles He does. Jesus confronts them, *Wasn't it Moses who gave you God's Law? But none of you are living it. So why are you trying to kill me?*" The Jews' response is exactly what you would expect from someone caught lying, *"You are mad! Who's trying to kill you?! You are the one who is demon-possessed."*

Does "unbelief" really matter? At the end of his Gospel narrative, John wrote, *"These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name"* ⁴ which is to say, believing Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is how a person receives the gift of "eternal life" which John explained earlier, *God so loved the world, He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish but have eternal life* (3:16).

John could not have said it clearer, *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see (eternal) life, but the wrath of God remains on him* (3:36). When God sees the world in which we live, a world so dominated by satan misguiding people with his lies, His anger is directed on satan; In His anger, He will destroy the world and all who bought into satan's contempt of God, redirecting our attention, affection and obedience away from

⁴ John 20:31

God, arguing against His law, and disregarding His compassionate cry to meet the needs of the suffering, through disease sickness and poverty.

God's Testimony before Christ offers us wonderful images of Christ-like hope: God's anger burned against the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah *because their sin is so flagrant*.⁵ Two Angels ushered Lot and his family to safety, as God unleashed His anger on the cities, so will Jesus the Saviour usher those who believe He is the Son of God, come to save us from the coming unleashing of God's anger against sin.⁶

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29), said John when he introduced us to Jesus at the start of his Gospel narrative.

Is the "unbelief" of Jesus' brothers and that of the Jews, the same or different.

John quotes Jesus addressing the Jewish leaders, *"I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"* (5:43–44).

Pride is rooted in the craving for human approval. If pride is at the root, faith can't be at the root. *"You cannot believe in Jesus if your root desire is to be praised by other people."*

The root of Jesus' brothers' "unbelief" is the same as the "unbelief" of the Jews: the brothers wanted human praise for being related to the Miracle-Maker, and the Jews were missing human voices of praise given them by the crowds, which was being redirected to Jesus as they witnessed His miracles.

Jesus' words sound like a clear indictment: *"How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"*⁷

⁵ Genesis 18:20

⁶ Revelation 16:1 onwards

⁷ John 5:44

“Unbelief” falls apart and collapses when we exercise Faith in the God of grace. Such faith is driven by a deep-rooted, joyous thankfulness, that God is for us when we do not deserve any praise. We have not heard, nor do we understand that God praises us in the Court of Heaven when we accept God’s Son, Jesus our Christ as the fulfilment of His plan, that we His precious creation will spend eternity with Him, as He intended for us at creation.

A genuine and lasting faith comes by feeding on the word of God, with hunger and joy. Paul reminds us, *faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ* ⁸ This is how we thwart “unbelief” by remaining in faith, through the Word of Christ. Shall we take up this challenge now? **AMEN.**

PRAYER

Loving Father! Forgive us our pride which blinds us from seeing You, knowing You and trusting You. Create in us a hunger and thirst for Your Word, that we may be nourished by it and find our way to Jesus the Christ, who takes us into Your Majestic Presence! **AMEN.**

HYMN Breathe on me Breath of God

⁸ Romans 10:17