

29th October, 2023

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe,

light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.



Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

The church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
she is His new creation,
by water and the word.
From heav'n He came and sought her
to be His holy bride;
with His own blood He bought her,
and for her life He died.

Elect from every nation,
yet one o'er all the earth,
her charter of salvation:
one Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses,
with every grace endued.

The church shall never perish!
Her dear Lord to defend,
to guide, sustain, and cherish,
is with her to the end;

though there be those that hate her,
and false sons in her pale,
against the foe or traitor
she ever shall prevail.

'Mid toil and tribulation,
and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation
of peace forevermore;
till with the vision glorious
her longing eyes are blest,
and the great church victorious
shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union
with God the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion
with those whose rest is won;
O happy ones and holy!
Lord give us grace that we,
like them, the meek and lowly,
on high may dwell with Thee.

The Sermon by Rev. Brian Pritchard

Read Romans 10:11-15, Matthew 24:30-35: Returning Jesus

The Creed declares: 'He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead'. When He spoke of the second coming, Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives. He'd predicted the destruction of the Temple (as happened not so many years later) and his disciples came to him "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus said that there will be many who 'interpret' the signs of the end of the age, but warned against deception. We know false Christs have popped up over the centuries – and how many (wrong) predictions have there been of the end of the age, of the second coming of Christ?

Jesus speaks of wars and rumours of wars, famines, earthquakes, etc., as we see in the world today but we mustn't be diverted by these concerns. Rather, Jesus says, we must always be prepared – we don't know when the second coming will be, and Jesus uses imagery which can make us uncomfortable. Two in a field – one taken, the other left. The ten virgins – five ready when the bridegroom came, five with no oil for their lamps.

Jesus' second coming will be very different from his first coming, the lowly mystery of the Incarnation, the babe in the manger in Bethlehem. He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy – a man of sorrows, who took the form of a servant, was despised and rejected, betrayed into the hands of wicked men – but we must see the initiative of our God in salvation: Jesus came as saviour, to save. His second coming will be as King over all the earth, and he will come with royal majesty, with power and great glory. The 'great' men and women of this world will – like every one of us – stand before His throne to be judged as Isaiah wrote in 45: 23. Paul quoted that verse in Romans 14: 11, and wrote in Philippians 2: 10-11 "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Today, especially in the more affluent west, there is scoffing, denial, disbelief, and more about Jesus Christ, about Christianity, but there will be no scoffing or blasphemous jest or anything on the last day. We should be concerned, and want those who mock today to see the greatness of God, and declare Jesus is Lord, whilst there is still time to do so.

Verse 31 tells us that when Christ returns to this world: "he will send his angels ... who will gather his elect" These are the angels who, in Luke 15: 10, rejoice over one sinner who repents. Those who believe, who declare that Jesus is Lord, have nothing to fear. Romans 9: 11: 'As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."' Or Romans 9: 9: "If you

declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

There's a section within today's passage that is a bit confusing, the implication that as we read the signs of nature, so we can tell by the signs of the world when the second coming is imminent. Then there is the implication that the second coming will happen within the lifetime of those to whom Jesus was speaking. But if we go to the verses immediately following today's reading, verse 36 tells us that no-one knows when it will be, not even the angels or even the Son. Scholars disagree as to Jesus' meaning in verses 32-34.

Jesus knew there would be 'scoffers' who would contemptuously reject Jesus, life after death, eternity, let alone judgment but he assures us His words will be fulfilled in their season, and shall not pass away unaccomplished. History tells us few believed the report of Jesus' first coming – and we must not disbelieve He will come again!

A significant number of Russian Orthodox churches are highly decorated, the walls painted with scenes depicting Biblical events - the Garden of Eden, Abraham and Isaac, events in the life of Christ. But most have a painting on back wall, usually around or just above the door, depicting graphically the second coming, the final judgement. A reminder, as you leave the church building, that Christ will come again – so live your lives accordingly. Be ready.

Scripture holds the promise that the saints of every age will be assembled out of every land. This week the church celebrates All Saints. We usually think of the 'great' Biblical characters, or those whose lives we honour, like Mother Theresa, as saints, but all believers are saints including believers amongst our own family and friends. Can we dare to imagine what it will be like, amidst that amazing family of God's saints? If we can enjoy meeting a few 'saints' here around us in the here and now, what will it be like to meet that multitude that no man can number?

This raises a challenging question. How many of my loved ones – family, friends – will be in that multitude? Faith in Jesus has to be a personal faith - we can't simply rely on a parent or grandparent's faith. Hence the urgency of Romans 10: 14 and 15: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Until quite recently it was said this was a Christian country. Perhaps that 'thinking' got in the way of mission in this country. The assumption that we're

all Christians anyway, so we don't need mission. How wrong! As the very end of Matthew's gospel makes clear.

We do not know when the second coming will be. Bad things in the world raise the question 'is this the portent of the second coming'? Speculation about the second coming is academic debate, and shouldn't be our focus. What does matter is that we are always, constantly, ready for the coming of our Lord. Remember the scene on the back wall of Orthodox Churches. As believers we should not fear such things. God sent his Son to be our Saviour and he will come again to be our judge. If we are ready, then we can stand and lift up our heads, because our redemption, our ultimate salvation, is drawing near.

Collect: Twentyfirst Sunday after Trinity: *Grant, we beseech you, merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

The Notices: We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.

- Tea and Chat & Bowls: Wed. Nov. 15th at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee and Questions: Nov. 22nd at 11am, in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: TBA.
- COGS Tots: 2nd Mondays.
- COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.