

Traditional Home service

Sunday 5th Dec

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Jesus says, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' So let us turn away from sin and turn to the Lord, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

God of mercy, we acknowledge that we are all sinners. We turn from the wrong that we have thought and said and done, and are mindful of all that we have failed to do. For the sake of Jesus, who died for us, forgive us for all that is past, and help us to live each day in the light of Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*O come, O come, Immanuel*)

READINGS - Malachi 3.1-4
Philippians 1.3-11
Luke 3.1-6

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

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 for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (*Shine, Jesus, shine*)

CONCLUSION

May God the Son give you grace to live in the light of his coming as redeemer and judge. And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

1 O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*

2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go.

Refrain

3 O come, O come, great Lord of
might,
who to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.

Refrain

4 O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem,
unto your own and rescue them!
From depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.

Refrain

5 O come, O Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road
and bar the way to death's abode.

Refrain

6 O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light.

Refrain

7 O come, O King of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease
and be yourself our King of Peace.

Refrain

Lord, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon
us
Set us free by the truth you now bring
us
Shine on me, shine on me

*Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and
mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light*

Lord, I come to your awesome
presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By the blood I may enter your
brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my
darkness
Shine on me, shine on me

As we gaze on your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell your
story
Shine on me, shine on me

Sermon - Peter Smethurst
The kingdom that grows

If I appear to have a few extra bags under my eyes this morning it's because almost a week ago my wife and I adopted a labrador puppy. Yesterday she turned nine weeks old. And the difference in her from when we first saw her at three weeks old is staggering. In the last six weeks she has doubled in size and then doubled again.

It is the nature of all living things both plants and animals to grow. God's design, following His initial act of creation as described in the first chapters of Genesis, was that all life should start small and grow. Whether it's the seed of a plant, an animal or human being once life is established it draws on whatever is available to it in order to grow into whatever it is designed by God to become.

In the early days wife's first pregnancy she was very sick and shared her concerns with our doctor that the foetus, that later became our son, might not be getting enough nutrients. The doctor laughingly assured us that babies are like parasites and that regardless of whether or not my wife ate anything at all the baby would take whatever nutrients he needed in order to grow strong and healthy.

Growth is not only an earthly principle it is also a spiritual principle. This is why Jesus compared to the kingdom of God to seeds that grow and compared faith to a small mustard seed.

In the opening chapter of Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians he prays for their growth both as a church and as individual Christians and, having heard the gospel read from the NIV, I would now like you to imagine that you are a member of that Philippian church hearing this letter from Paul read out to you for the very first time as I read this short passage from the Easy Reading Version:

Philippians 1

**3 I thank God every time I remember you.
4 And I always pray for all of you with joy.
5 I thank God for the help you gave me while I told people the Good News. You helped from the first day you believed until now.**

6 I am sure that the good work God began in you will continue until he completes it on the day when Jesus Christ comes again.

The "good work" that Paul refers to here is being born again of the Spirit of God. When you accepted Jesus Christ as your Saviour you became a new creation – and new hybrid species – with your human body, mind and emotions and your human spirit being transfused by God's Holy Spirit. We were grafted into the life of Jesus and His righteousness. His right standing with Father God became ours and this process that we call Salvation meant that in spiritual terms we are no longer subjects of the kingdom of Satan, which is where we were first born, but instead have been spiritually reborn into the kingdom of God. This happened in the twinkling of an eye when we believed in our hearts what Jesus did for us on the cross and confessed with our mouths that he had risen from the dead to become our Lord and it is this "good work" that God began in us and will continue until He completes it on the day when Jesus Christ comes again, which is the rapture that Matthew was explaining last week.

Paul continues to speak to us:

7 I know I am right to think like this about all of you because you are so close to my heart. This is because you have all played such an important part in God's grace to me - now, during this time that I am in prison, and whenever I am defending and proving the truth of the Good News.

8 God knows that I want very much to see you. I love all of you with the love of Christ Jesus.

Having explained that he was praying for us and was confident that the Father would cause the kingdom that He had planted in each of His adopted children to grow Paul becomes even more specific in his prayer:

9 This is my prayer for you: that your love will grow more and more; that you will have knowledge and understanding with your love;

It is interesting that he did not pray for our protection or our prosperity but **that our love would grow more and more**. He asks for us what is the very nature of Father God –

because God is love. This is why the love is the highest Christian grace. Paul wrote in the 13th chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians that love never fails, fades or ends and that when everything else is stripped away we will be left with faith, hope and love and **‘the greatest of these is love.’** And it is this selfless type of love that he wants to see continue to grow within us.

If we are to become like our Father in heaven then our Christian love needs to express that kind of affection which involved self-sacrifice and is to be offered to all men everywhere at all times.

Paul also prays for us to grow “In knowledge”. The word for knowledge here implies a process of adding more and more to the spiritual insight which comes from a serious and diligent development of all that we already know about the Kingdom of God within us. It is a Kingdom knowledge which will increase more and more until Jesus returns. It is true that Jesus takes us exactly as we are and it is equally true that he doesn't leave us that way.

Paul adds that we should also grow in discernment or “understanding”. Discernment is essential for us as we are all placed in circumstances which constantly call upon us to make a choices. Life is a constant stream of choices! God told the Israelites that He had placed choices before them between life and death, curses and blessings and that He wanted them to choose life and blessings. Saint Paul prays for us that we may be able to do the right thing. He is urging us to develop and to use spiritual insight – the inner growth of Kingdom light and wisdom that keeps us from making the wrong choices. Left to our own devices it is easy for us to revert to our old ways. Consequently we all need to develop a consciousness of the Holy Spirit within who will remind us of who we are. As Scripture teaches us in one John 3:1 **Dear friends, now we are children of God. We have not yet been shown what we will be in the future. But we know that when Christ comes again, we will be like Him. We will see Him just as He is.**

Saint Paul's prayer concludes by saying that as our love, knowledge and understanding grow the outcome will be:

10 that you will see the difference between what is important and what is not and choose what is important; that you will be pure and blameless for the coming of Christ;

11 that your life will be full of the many good works that are produced by Jesus Christ to bring glory and praise to God.

It is when we see what is important and choose to do it that Jesus will be able to produce many good works through us.

Paul is not only praying for us but he is setting out certain doctrines in this prayer. These are:

- (1) that Christian life is progressive – we are meant to be growing;
- (2) that God is ready to work in and for His children for their moral and spiritual growth;
- (3) that the entire purpose of Christian new life is to be filled with the Spirit of God and to bear fruit.

These doctrines are mirrored in the prayer for the church at large that Paul included in chapter 1 of his letter to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 1:15 That is why I always remember you in my prayers and thank God for you. I have done this ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people.

17 I always pray to the great and glorious Father, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that he will give you the Spirit, who will let you know truths about God and help you understand them, so that you will know him better.

(Again Paul is praying for a growth of knowledge and understanding.)

18 I pray that God will open your minds to see his truth. Then you will know the hope that he has chosen us to have. You will know that the blessings God has promised his holy people are rich and glorious.

19 And you will know that God's power is very great for us who believe. It is the same as the mighty power

20 he used to raise Christ from death and put him at his right side in the heavenly places.

Paul continues his prayer in chapter 3 of this letter to the Ephesians:

we would know what was important and that we would do it. Amen

Ephesians 3:16 I ask the Father with his great glory to give you the power to be strong in your spirits. He will give you that strength through his Spirit.

17 I pray that Christ will live in your hearts because of your faith. I pray that your life will be strong in love and be built on love.

18 And I pray that you and all God's holy people will have the power to understand the greatness of Christ's love--how wide, how long, how high, and how deep that love is.

19 Christ's love is greater than anyone can ever know, but I pray that **you will be able to know that love**. Then you can be filled with everything God has for you.

20 With God's power working in us, he can do much, much more than anything we can ask or think of.

21 To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time, forever and ever. Amen.

There is a lot of valuable teaching to be gleaned from these prayers by Paul for the church.

Today, however, I suggest that we focus on his emphasis that we grow in knowledge and grow in love and the fact that we can only do this because God the Father gives us His Holy Spirit. Otherwise how could Paul pray in verse 18 that we be given the power to understand the greatness of Christ love and then in the same breath say, "**Christ's love is greater than anything anyone can ever know, but I pray that you will be able to know that love.**"

We all need to draw upon the Holy Spirit within us who Paul described to Timothy as not being a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Paul also told us how to do this when he instructed us to "pray without ceasing". This means that in our minds we need to be having an inner dialogue with our Father, through the Holy Spirit. It is as we keep our minds stayed on Him that He keeps us in perfect peace.

Paul prayed that with the Holy Spirit's help we should grow in our understanding so that