



Service for personal or private use 21st June 2020

Come! Let us raise a joyful song to the Lord,
a shout of triumph to the rock of our salvation.
Enter in! Let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord, who made us,
for he is our God, we are the people he shepherds,
the flock in his care.

Hymn - *Christ is alive* - (H&P) 190; (STF) 297

Romans Chapter 6 verses 1b to 11

Prayer of Adoration

God of strength and wisdom,
high and exalted above all, yet closer to us than breathing,
you are worthy of all praise.
You created the galaxies, the planets and this earth.
You made us for yourself and have given us wills with which to obey you
and voices to sing your praise.
May we find life's true purpose in doing your will and joining the whole creation in adoring
your holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

God all-seeing, you read our hearts and minds
and we have no secrets from you.
We confess that we hide the truth from others
and try to hide it from ourselves.
But you know what we are -
sinners who have strayed from your paths and followed our own devices.
In your abundant, steadfast love, listen to our prayer.
Forgive what we have been and done;
help us to change our ways;
and bring us, with your saints, to everlasting glory;
through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

God, who laid the foundations of the earth and divided sea from land,
we rejoice in your creative might and your wonderful works to humankind.
Despite our wilful disobedience, you came to us in Jesus.
He proclaimed your kingdom in powerful words and acts of compassion and love.
Lifted on the shameful Cross, he transformed its shame to glory.
You raised him to live for ever, for death has no more dominion over him.
Buried with him in baptism, we have been raised up to walk in newness of life
and adopted as your children within that family which knows no distinctions of status or
race, for all are one in Christ Jesus.

We thank you for all faithful Christians
who, by their lives and their deaths, have witnessed to Christ's gospel;
and we pray that our thankfulness may be expressed, not only in prayer,
but by the way we live our lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn - *Alleluia, Alleluia* - (H&P) 250; (STF) 295

The Gospel Reading – Matthew Chapter 10 verses 24 to 39

What do you fear?

Spiders? - Don't like how they scuttle along the floorboards in your living room and build webs in the corners of your garage, right where the light switch is?

Do you fear thunder and lightning? - When you were young did a sudden flash followed by an ear-splitting crash sends you scurrying into your parents' bed in the middle of the night? Do you fear heights and won't even climb ladders?

We all fear rejection. That's why walking into a room full of strangers is a bit unsettling.

Is there a way to overcome our fears no matter what they are? There is says Jesus. Fear God and you will be fearless – fearless of bullies, and fearless of the future. Jesus spoke those words to prepare his disciples for missionary work – the work of telling others about their sin and their Saviour.

They would be well prepared for this effort because Jesus had given his disciples the power to heal the sick and drive out demons (Matthew 10:1).

Still, their task would not be easy. Jesus explained: *"A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!"* (Matthew 10:24, 25)

Jesus warned his disciples that since he had been harassed, the disciples could expect to be hassled too and this should not surprise them.

That's a good reminder for us isn't it? Although we would love it if news about Jesus was always as welcomed as a coupon for free ice cream would be, telling others about Jesus doesn't always elicit a joyful response – not even from those who should know better - like people who grew up in the church.

But we should not become discouraged. Jesus was often rejected and so will we if we are truly his followers. And that's a good question to ponder this morning isn't it? Am I really a follower of Jesus? Do I walk in the path he has laid out for me in his Word, or do I press on in directions I want to go? Jesus has called on us all to deny our sinful flesh, but do we use our intellect to rationalize our pet sins instead of figuring out how to avoid them? The problem could be that we don't see Jesus as our leader, but see him as our maid – someone who is to follow behind us and clean up after the messes we make. And when Jesus doesn't clean up after us, when he lets us suffer the consequences of our sin, we complain that he isn't there for us. But Jesus is not our maid; he is our leader - and he gives us good reasons to let him do the leading. He went on to say to his disciples: *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matthew 10:28). There was no reason for the disciples to be bluffed into silence by the bullies they would encounter. Those bullies could kill them, but they couldn't touch their souls.

Today Jesus is telling us that no matter how hard they hit us, they cannot break what's on the inside – our soul. God, however, has the power to break the soul as well, that is, he has the power to end our joy forever by banishing us from his love. *"So save your fear for God,"* urges Jesus. Now when Jesus says that we should fear God - he's speaking about a respectful reverence, not an attitude of terror, as if God is a mean school teacher or a difficult boss whom we better keep happy if we know what's good for us. Jesus' point is

this: stand in awe of God, not man. Don't be awed by the intellect of the scientist who tells you that this universe must be billions of years old. Don't be awed by the slick computer generated animations you see at museums to illustrate the theory of evolution. Stand in awe instead that the God of truth has told you in plain simple terms how this universe came into existence: by the power of his Word. Don't be awed by the power and prestige celebrities possess. Don't crave their lifestyles. Instead stand in awe of what God has already given to you: his love and promises of daily bread and eternal life. This is what Jesus was getting at when he said: "*There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs*" (Matthew 10:26b, 27). When someone tells you a secret, it means that they trust you. Well the Son of God has whispered into our ears the secret of eternal life. What a privileged position we hold! Jesus has also whispered the reason the world is the way it is and how it's going to end. He has whispered to us how to be happy and content no matter what our station in life. He has whispered all this to us through his Word. Now shout what you know from the rooftops because these secrets aren't just for you, they're for everyone.

Will everyone be happy with what we have to say? No. They especially won't like the part about sin. They may even persecute us for that message. But fear God more than you fear those bullies because God's reach stretches beyond the grave. Fear God and you will be fearless of whatever bullies oppose you. You'll also be fearless of whatever else the future may bring. Jesus assures us of that when he went on to say: "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows*" (Matthew 10:29-31). It's not surprising to hear that we are worth more to God than sparrows. What is perhaps surprising to learn is that not one of the billions of sparrows that fly around this world falls to the ground apart from God's will. The sparrow that lives among the cherry trees of Japan, and the sparrow that flits through the forests of Germany, as well as the sparrow that chirps outside your bedroom are all under God's watchful care. If God gives sparrows this much attention, won't he also give you the care and attention you need? This does not mean that you will never fall to the ground. Jesus did not say that the sparrows never fall to the ground because God watches them. They just don't fall to the ground apart from his will.

Likewise God hasn't promised to keep sickness or even death from us, but he will use these difficulties for our good. That's because he knows exactly what we need. Why, he even knows how many strands of hair we each have. What I like about that verse is that it doesn't say that God could count the hairs on your head, but he's not going to bother. No. He's already done that and already knows how many hairs you have and how many more will fall out today. Not even your mother or your spouse knows those details about you and frankly they don't care to - but God does. Is there any need to be afraid of the future then? Not when we fear God and stand in awe of his power to protect and care for us. Actually there is one thing we should be afraid of and that's turning away from our Saviour. Jesus concluded our text with these words: "*Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven*" (Matthew 10:32, 33). Just because you eagerly confess Jesus now does not mean that you will continue to do this. Satan is working hard to pull you away from your Saviour. He will fight until your death to claim you for himself.

Look at how close he came to claiming the Apostle Peter. Hours after Peter boasted he would never deny Jesus he did just that! And like Peter we often disown Jesus too, don't

we? When speaking about what we're going to do on the weekend do we tell our friends and co-workers, "I'm going to church!" or do we leave that out, embarrassed of what they might think of us? Don't be afraid of what others will think of you because of your faith. Fear God instead. Love and respect him and you will be fearless even when Judgment Day comes and the world as we know it falling to pieces.

You won't be afraid when the sun stops shining and when the earth is ripped apart by great earthquakes because you will know that this is the fanfare announcing Jesus' return. And at his return he will gather the faithful and introduce us each to his heavenly Father saying, "*Father, here's my brother - And over there is my sister - They have come to live with us forever.*" God the Father will answer, "*Welcome! Come sit with my Son who washed you clean from all of your sins.*" Look forward to that reality - the reality of an eternal life with God where nothing - not spiders, not thunder and lightning, not even our sin or the sin of others can ever frighten again. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord of all, wherever Christians are ridiculed or persecuted for their faith, we ask your courage and inner strength; wherever we are called to be your witnesses, we ask for the grace to communicate your love.

Wherever love for you has grown cold we ask to fan the flames again.

Lord of all, wherever families are struggling to stay together, and wherever there are on-going arguments and family feuds, we ask your anointing for tranquillity and harmony. Wherever children are unwanted and unloved, neglected or in danger, we ask your protection and help.

Lord of all, in these difficult times as the world battles with the Covid 19 virus We pray for all who are infected and those who are anxious for their families and friends. We pray for those who are guiding our nation at this time, and shaping national policies, that they may make wise decisions:

For doctors, nurses and medical researchers, that through their skill and insights many will be restored to health:

For the vulnerable and the fearful, for the gravely ill and the dying, that they may know your comfort and peace:

For all essential workers, for teachers and all who work in schools

For those in care homes and those who care for them

For those who deliver and supply our food, for ambulance workers, those in the fire service, and those in other essential services who go unnoticed yet keep us safe

Lord of all, we pray for our Ministers, and their families; and for the circuit team who help us to worship you in these difficult times using the technology to keep us connected

Wherever nature's beauty or the daily miracles around us alert us to see your face, we thank you for the grace to live this resurrection life.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn - *Take my life* - (H&P) 705; (STF) 566

The Blessing

May the faithful God keep us loyal, may the changeless God keep us secure, and may the God of surprises keep us ever alert to new challenges Now and always. Amen