

TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

Half Acre, Horton Heath, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7JS
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Sunday Scriptures: 25th July 2021

Scriptures: NRSV

Psalm 14:1-7 *All have gone astray*

¹Fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abdominal deeds; there is no one who does good. ²“The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God. ³They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no, not one. ⁴Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up My people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the Lord?” ⁵There they shall be in great terror, for God is with the company of the righteous. ⁶You would confound the plans of the poor, but the Lord is their refuge. ⁷O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion! When the Lord restores the fortunes of His people, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.”

Ephesians 3:5-6 *The Mystery of God’s grace revealed*

⁵In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; ⁶that is, the Gentiles have become co-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Ephesians 3:14-21 *One God, One Spirit, One body of Christ Jesus*

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father; ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶I pray that, according to the riches of His glory, He may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through His Spirit, ¹⁷and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen!

Reflection:

All have gone astray

The role of God’s people, the Body of Christ, God’s Church is timeless. Those who hear the call of God and respond in faith to the commission of His Son Jesus are charged to bring about unity and harmony within His family. The Word of God is their law and the example of Jesus is their guide to achieving what He desires. The Psalmist laments over the lack of restraint and resultant corruption of those representing God’s name. The Lord cannot find one good person among them and asks why they have no regard for His Word and no inclination to turn to Him. However, deliverance is looked for and restoration expected. Going astray is not something we think about, it usually happens by deception or subtle persuasion or by not paying attention to what is going on around us. *Are we on the right path or have we gone astray? Do we see restraint in the people of God or a free for all? Is the name of the Lord correctly represented according to His Word?*

The Mystery of God’s grace revealed

God is mystery! This is a fact that we must accept: we are not going to understand everything this side of eternity so we may as well live with it! Before Jesus, God’s people needed an intermediary to plead their case before God. Being stuck in a sacrificial system of reparation of sins was never ending and exhausting. Jesus came to be the One and only sacrifice for all

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those who would come to believe in Him as God's Son. A great family that includes *all* who have believed in God in the past, *all* who believe in Jesus in the present, and *all* who will believe in the Father and the Son in the future. This is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit, released to *all* believers by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The family of God is born of the same Father, Who is the source of all Creation and rightful owner of everything. God promises His family love and power to live in relationship with other believers, and when this happens His Church receives God's blessings. God desires that we worship One God, in the power of One Spirit, and become One body in Christ Jesus. God's people cannot do 'Church' in isolation; God's people cannot do 'family' in isolation; God's family cannot witness in isolation. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are a team; three strands of One united rope that cannot be broken. God's people are meant to be strands of the same united family that nothing can destroy. *Do we accept that God is mystery or limit His Spirit to worldly understanding? Is our experience of 'Church' like a united family or nightmare neighbours? Are we extending the grace of God to others or reserving it for ourselves?*

One God, One Spirit, One body of Christ Jesus

God's love is *total!* It permeates every aspect of our existence and continues through the whole length of our lives. God's love is *deep!* It reaches into the depths of our discouragement, despair, and even death. God's love is *wide!* It covers the breadth of our own experience and reaches out into every corner and shadow of the world. God's love is *high!* It rises to the heights of our elation in joy, delight, and exultation. The world was corrupted by Satan in the Garden of Eden and evil continues its deceptive seduction to destroy what God has created. Our weakest most tender spots are its target where resistance is fragile and doubt can be planted in the mind. The perception of isolation, false insight, and error lead to confusion and the slippery slope of negativism that Satan whispers to our mind. But remember, God's love is everlasting, eternal and strong to save; we can never be taken from His hand or lost to His love. God gives in abundance, beyond our wildest dreams or imaginings and those who remain faithful can expect to receive Trinitarian blessings. God has promised it; Jesus came to demonstrate it; the Holy Spirit is ready and waiting to pour them out in power. *Are we being strengthened in our 'inner being' by the power of The Holy Spirit? Do we 'know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge'? Do we comprehend the fullness of God?*

Faith reveals spiritual knowledge

Faith is a mind-set not an emotion, a choice to believe not a mandate for compliance. When life gets messy, ask God for His clean-up team. When life gets painful, ask Jesus for His healing balm. When we are facing the brick wall of a dead end, ask the Holy Spirit for wings. Whatever we face, whatever surrounds us, whatever anyone else is thinking, saying or doing, God knows. We are encouraged through Scripture to ask, trusting for an answer and expecting God to act. We may not receive the answer we want, look for, or expect, but we are promised an answer. The Spirit of God may move to inspire, encourage, direct, or discipline, but God's people are promised the power of the Holy Spirit to endure and overcome. In all things it is faith that undergirds the family of God; faith that provides discernment of who and what is of God or not; faith that lifts the faithful remnant from the abyss of worldly corruption. Faith cannot be bottled, contained or passed on for it resides within the soul for each person to discover, so help us God. We may not understand how faith works but by faith we believe and are saved to discover the Lord is always at our side. The Church of God is not contained in a building or an institution; buildings crumble and institutions fail. The house

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of God is built with bricks of the heart, united in minds with the mortar of the Word of God, and living in the souls of the faithful. *If we believe, why do we turn round and round looking for a human answer? By faith we are redeemed, we are forgiven, and we are set free, so what are we waiting for? What is the spiritual witness of our heart, mind and soul saying to us today?* Let the Church of God open its eyes to see the hand of God moving; let the family of God open its ears to hear the voice of the Lord speaking. To those who ask, God will reveal the answer, through Jesus Christ our Redeemer, by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen!**

Hymn/Song: THERE IS A REDEEMER by Melody & Keith Green:

CD: Keith Green-*The ministry years Volume 1* **Disc 1: Track 13:** There is a Redeemer

There is a Redeemer
Jesus, God's own Son,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.

Chorus:...

*Thank You, O my Father,
For giving us Your Son,
And leaving Your Spirit—
Till the work on earth is done.*

Jesus my Redeemer,
Name above all names,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
O for sinners slain.

Chorus:...

When I stand in glory
I will see His face,
And there I'll serve my King forever
In that holy place.

Chorus:...

*Thank You, O my Father,
For giving us Your Son,
And leaving Your Spirit—
Till the work on earth is done.*

Poem: DEAF AND BLIND ©Janice Morgan 1998

There are none so deaf as do not want to hear!
God's gentle whisper is not heard by this ear
If God should shout it would be to no avail
These stopped up ears pursue a different trail

The Master speaks in tones full of compassion
But different tunes flinted foreheads fashion
The Word is twisted into unknown patterns

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The light of Truth becomes as flickering lanterns

There are none so blind as do not want to see!
Darkness hides these eyes where shadows once would flee
They turn away from God's all exposing light
Refusing to face Truth and do what is right

The will of God revealed for the good of all
Is masked behind human views on which the blind fall
Love's pure stumbling block has shown their true nature
Though busy now they won't complete their venture

The deaf speak to deaf and the blind lead the blind
And the path of God's blessing none of them find
The enemy's trap has been expertly sprung
The keys to God's Kingdom have now been far flung

When the shepherd stays deaf the sheep make no sound
When the guide remains blind the lost won't be found
Instruction is gained through open ears listening
The right way is found through open eyes searching.

Are we so deaf that we have stopped hearing?
Are we so blind that we have stopped seeing?
The deaf and the blind should pay attention
If what they seek is their own redemption.

Prayer:

Father God, forgive us when we go astray; bring us to repentance and safely return us to the fold. Heavenly Father, we thank You for Jesus, Who revealed to us the mystery of Your grace that we might believe and be saved. Lord Jesus, Christ, help us to become Your body on earth, under One God, by the power of the One Spirit, Your true Church. Holy Spirit, inspire us within to discover the gift of faith and gain spiritual knowledge. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless Your people to come together as one, as You are One. **Amen!**