

Wait! Repentance?



Tundergarth 7th January 2024

Order of Service

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Call to Worship Step Into The Waters

Come, step into the waters
The waters of Jordan
Come stand where the Lord stood
Come step into the waters
And drown your fears and your anxiety
For the Lord is beside you
Come, step into the waters
Restored and forgiven
Come let us gather before God
And raise up a song of praise

Hymn

CH4 642 Ye That Know The Lord Is Gracious

Ye that know the Lord is gracious,
ye for whom a Corner stone
stands, of God elect and precious,
laid that ye may build thereon;
see that on that sure foundation
ye a living temple raise,
towers that may tell forth salvation,
walls that may re-echo praise.

Living stones, by God appointed
each to an allotted place,
kings and priests, by God anointed,
shall ye not declare his grace?
Ye, a royal generation,
tell the tidings of your birth,
tidings of a new creation
to an old and weary earth.

Tell the praise of him who called you
out of darkness into light,
broke the fetters that enthralled you,
gave you freedom, peace and sight:
tell the tale of sins forgiven,
strength renewed and hope restored,
till the earth, in tune with heaven,
praise and magnify the Lord!

Approach Clean Us

Lord God, Our Father in Heaven

You have called to us, down the centuries

Called us to come home to you

To live the the kind of lives you want us to lead

Your love is so persistent, so enduring

Refusing to break or crumble against the walls of indifference we throw up

In the life of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ you came to us

Came to call us home to you

To show us our true natures as children of God

And we nailed him to a cross

Lord, your grace and forgiveness are so persistent; so enduring

Refusing to be exhausted by our falling away

By our repeated refusal to follow the ways you have shown us

So much so, that that very cross became a way for us to be washed clean

But like any parent who sees his child go out to play in clean clothes

You have seen us come back to you stained and soiled by the rough and tumble
of the world

We have been spiteful and hurtful

We have been selfish and insensitive

We have said that it's a dog-eat-dog world and acted so

We have said that charity begins at home, and let it end there too

Forgive us Lord

Wash our faults away;

Wash us us in Love:

We have seen poverty, and hoarded our wealth

We have seen injustice, and said nothing

We have seen bigotry, and have stood with our own
We have seen the broken by the side of the road and have walked on by
Forgive us Lord
Wash our faults away;
Wash us us in Justice:
We have come into this place to praise your name on Sunday
but have stayed shtum about our faith outside in case we're laughed at
We have heard your word; but have not lived by it
We have called you Lord, but have often acted as if your weren't there at all
Forgive us Lord
Wash our faults away;
Wash us us in faith:
In the Jordan the Son of Man stood for us all in the waters that cleanse us
Let us, too be cleansed
Cleanse our hearts with love
So that the world may see your love reflected in the world
Cleanse our minds with justice so that we may speak your justice in the world
Cleanse our souls with faith so that we may follow your son
Who taught us to seek your forgiveness every day
In these words of prayer which we share now, saying

Address**From Galilee**

Water flows from Galilee
By Jordan's banks, then out to sea
To who knows where?
Evaporating into air
To fall as rain on all the world
To quench the thirsty, cleanse the soiled
On fevered brow it brings relief
In church's font proclaims belief
That Son of God stood by side by side
By faltering folk in chilling tide
Where water flowed from Galilee
By Jordan's banks, then out to sea.

Hymn

CH4 334 On Jordan's Bank The Baptist's Cry

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings from the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every breast from sin;
Make straight the way for God within;
Prepare we in our hearts a home,
Where such a mighty Guest may come.

For you art our salvation, Lord,
Our Refuge, and our great Reward.
Without your grace we waste away
Like flowers that wither and decay

Stretch out your hand, to heal our sore,
And make us rise and fall no more;
Once more upon your people shine,
And fill the world with love divine.

All praise to you eternal Son
Whose advent has our freedom won
Whom with the Father we adore
And Holy Spirit ever more

Readings

Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Acts 19:1-7

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." Then he said, "Into what then were you baptised?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." Paul said, "John baptised with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied-- altogether there were about twelve of them.

Mark 1:4-11

John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit." In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Hymn

CH4 314 Child In The Manger

Child in the Manger, infant of Mary
Outcast and stranger, Lord of all
Child who inherits all our transgressions
All our demerits on him fall

Once the most holy child of salvation
Gentle and lowly lived below;
Now as our glorious mighty redeemer
See him victorious over each foe

Prophets foretold him; infant of wonder
Angels behold him on his throne
Worthy our saviour of all their praises
Happy forever are his own.

Intercession From The Cold Waters

Father, from the cold waters

May we gather your children

Our Father and our God

Sometimes, for some folk, the world is a sunlit upland

Warm and safe and without care

But not for everyone and not all the time

So we turn our thoughts to those in need

Father, from the cold waters

May we gather the hurting and the depressed and the sorrowful

The folk whose hearts are broken

By grief or loss; by rejection or loneliness

May we gather those in pain or frustration

Who are sick or ageing; who are injured or broken

Whose bodies or minds fail them

Lord may your hand be upon them through us

Father, from the cold waters

May we gather the oppressed and the forgotten and the outcast

The folk whose lives are fragile

Because they don't get enough to eat

Because they exploited in their poverty and need

Because they are imprisoned for their beliefs

Because no one thinks they matter

Lord, may your hand be upon them through us

Father, from the cold waters

May we gather the victims of violence

The folk whose lives are filled with fear

Because they find themselves in abusive relationships

Because their country is at war

Because the streets they walk are not safe

Because powerful people can enslave them

Lord, may your hand be upon them through us

Father, from the cold waters

May we gather together
And remember that we are your Church
That you are always with us
That your compassion is with us
That your strength is with us
That your word of peace is with us
Grant us confidence and inspiration to serve you
Lord, may your hand be upon them through us
Father, from the cold waters

Hymn

CH4 335 Out Of The Flowing River

Out of the flowing river
Jesus ascends
Baptised by John
Waiting the sign

Out of the open heavens
God's spirit comes
Down like a dove
In peace and power

Out speaks the voice from heaven
You are my son
Chosen and beloved
My own delight

Out through the life of Jesus
God's word of love
Calling in grace
Comes to our lives

Out in the world we live in
We will make known
The love revealed
Through God in Christ

Sermon

Wait! Repentance?

John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 1:4)

I was baptised when I was two. I don't remember anything about it. In the years that followed I decided there was no God and became an atheist. Then, when I was about 24, I became a Christian. In communion class I asked the Minister if I needed re-baptised and he said no because, in his words, God does not forget.

A couple of weeks ago we celebrated the birth of Jesus and here we have him coming for baptism. They grow up so fast, don't they? Because we're not talking about the baptism of a two-year old here. Christ was in his thirties when this happened. You didn't get baptised as a child in Jesus's times. For John and the people of his time, baptism was a rite of repentance. It was about washing people clean of their sins and there was a limit to the amount of bad stuff a two-year old can get up to.

That remained the case even as ideas about baptism evolved. In the early years of Christianity many believed that you could only be baptised once and if you sinned again after that you were doomed. That's why Emperor Constantine refused baptism until he was on his death bed because being emperor didn't encourage to-notch moral behaviour. In the 4th Century the Church decided that people are born sinful so started baptising wee kids.

However you slice it though, baptism has always been regarded as a cleansing from sin. Which begs the question: why was Jesus baptised? Even from the earliest days of the Church, even when Mark was writing, Jesus was regarded as sinless. So, if he had no sins to be forgiven, why did he have to be baptised?

I think it's something like this. In Jewish thought at the time you had God: the perfect God. Perfectly just. Perfectly compassionate, Perfectly true. Just perfect. Then you've got us. And we're not - none of us. We all mess up sometimes. We all do things we know we shouldn't have done' We all say things we realise we

shouldn't have said and as for our most private thought well, perhaps it's as well we can't read each other's minds sometimes.

In short, we all sin: we all fall short of what God wants us to be. In Jewish thought that placed a gulf between us and God; a gulf that meant we could not approach God without accepting our faults and being washed clean of them. That's what's going on in this passage. But still, why does Jesus come for baptism if he has nothing to repent nor sins to be cleansed from?

Because in Jesus everything changes. In Jesus God entered the world in the life of a human being. In Jesus God took the initiative and came to us. Instead of requiring us to undergo rituals of cleansing to bridge to bridge the gulf between him and us, he leaps that gulf and meets us where we are. He meets us in our sin, in our faults, in our weaknesses and failures. He embraces us with forgiveness and washes us clean. That's what the Christian ritual of baptism really represents. We are baptised not just with water but with God's Holy Spirit: his presence with us here and now and wherever we are and whatever we have done.

So does that mean we don't have to bother with all that repentance stuff? No. But neither should we regard it as something to be avoided. We've been pretty bad at this over the years. We've waved the finger at each other in judgement crying "Repent, ye miserable sinners" and encouraged sometimes to wallow in our sinfulness. That is a denial of the Gospel which proclaims that we are not miserable sinners but forgiven sinners.

And if we are forgiven in the embrace of God in Christ, why not anybody else? Why not the people that society sometimes gives up on? I was reading an article in The Herald this week about a Free Church Minister who regarded it as part of his duties to spend time in his local prison. The guy who interviewed him expressed surprise that a pastor of a Church, so often thought of as judgemental should do this. he replied saying no one sets out to be a criminal. No one sets out to be a criminal. It's not something that comes up in careers lessons at school. Folk start down a road that gets darker and harder to turn back on.

But the Gospel is that, through, the love of God in Christ that they can. And so can each and every one of us - whatever we've done. If we believe that for

ourselves we have to believe it for anyone and everyone. We have no right to give up on hope for anyone if God does not give up on hope for us. What that Minister does in prisons is precisely what Christ does in this passage: he immerses himself with those that need to know that they can be forgiven; they can approach a perfect God; they can come home.

The point about Christ's baptism is that in him God stands with us in our faults and failings and washes us clean. In Christ God embraces us in our flaws and encourages us toward perfection. In Christ God came into a broken world full of broken people to offer hope of wholeness. Imagine you and I are standing in the waters of the Jordan right now. Alongside us right now and all the days of our lives stands Christ. He rises from the waters and raises us with him. He rises from the waters and calls us to rise with him. He rises from the waters saying, "Forget what has gone before: it's done. It's been washed away. He rises from the waters offering his hand saying, "Rise with me, and follow me."

Father may we embrace your gift of repentance and rejoice that, recognising our failures, we are washed clean of them and given new hope. May we ever offer that hope to others in all we say and do, and so share the Gospel of your son.

Offering

Fresh Starts

Lord we thank you for the opportunity for fresh beginnings
For the times when we have realised that we've been in the wrong
And you have picked us up, washed us down
And stood us on our feet again.
We thank you for the promise of forgiveness
Revealed in the life, death and resurrection of your son Jesus Christ
And we thank you for giving your own son to meet our needs.
We thank you for the simple, everyday blessings of life
For the home and food
For love and companionship
We thank you for song and laughter
For beauty and a sense of justice
In a spirit of thankfulness we bring these offerings
And so we bring ourselves
Bless them and bless us
Rededicate them and rededicate us
To your work in the world
To the building up of your church
To the bringing in of your kingdom
Amen.

Hymn

CH4 336 Christ Is Our Light

Christ is our light! the bright and morning star
Covering with radiance all from near and far.
Christ be our light, shine on, shine on we pray
Into our hearts, into our world today.

Christ is our love! baptised that we may know t
The love of God among us, swooping low.
Christ be our love, bring us to turn our face
And see in you the light of heaven's embrace.

Christ is our joy! transforming wedding guest!
Through water turned to wine the feast was blessed.
Christ be our joy; your glory let us see,
as your disciples did in Galilee.

Benediction

Standing With Us

Standing with sinners

Standing with us

Christ came redeeming

Go now knowing all your mistakes are forgotten

All your weaknesses embraced

All your failures forgiven

Go and forgive as you are forgiven

And never forget

To love as you are loved

And to live as children of God