

Wednesday Worship 27th January 2021

Opening prayers and lighting of a candle

Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness
but will have the light of life.' (John 8.12)

All God in Christ has revealed his glory.
Come let us worship.

All From the rising of the sun to its setting
the Lord's name is greatly to be praised.

All Give him praise, you servants of the Lord.
O praise the name of the Lord!

All Almighty God,
your Son has opened for us
a new and living way into your presence.
Give us new hearts and constant wills
to worship you in spirit and in truth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Hymn: *Christ is our light! The bright and morning star*

Praise

Christ Jesus was revealed in the flesh
and vindicated in the spirit.

He was seen by angels
and proclaimed among the nations.

Believed in throughout the world,
he was taken up in glory.

This will be made manifest at the proper time
by the blessed and only Sovereign,

Who alone has immortality,
and dwells in unapproachable light.

To the King of kings and Lord of lords
be honour and eternal dominion.

All **Amen.** (1 Timothy 3.16; 6.15,16)

1st Reading: Hebrews 10.11-18

And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, 'he sat down at the right hand of God', and since then has been waiting 'until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.' For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying,

'This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, says the Lord:

I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds',

he also adds,

'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.'

Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Prayer of response

Christ, our great high priest,
we thank you for your great sacrifice, made once for all for the forgiveness of sins.
Write your covenant on our hearts and your laws in our minds,
that we may always follow in your ways
and reflect your glory in our lives.

All **Amen.**

Psalm 110

The Lord said to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.'
May the Lord stretch forth the sceptre of your power;
rule from Zion in the midst of your enemies.
'Noble are you on this day of your birth;
on the holy mountain, from the womb of the dawn
the dew of your new birth is upon you.'
The Lord has sworn and will not retract:
'You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.'
The king at your right hand, O Lord,
shall smite down kings in the day of his wrath.
In all his majesty, he shall judge among the nations,
smiting heads over all the wide earth.
He shall drink from the brook beside the way;
therefore shall he lift high his head.

Prayer of response

Lord Jesus, divine Son and eternal priest,
inspire us with the confidence of your final conquest of evil,
and grant that daily on our way
we may drink of the brook of your eternal life
and so find courage against all adversities;
for your mercy's sake.

All **Amen.**

2nd Reading: Mark 4.1-20

Again [Jesus] began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.' And he said, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!'

When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that "they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven." '

And he said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.'

Prayer of response

Lord Jesus,
wherever we are today,
if we feel we are flourishing in good soil,
or if we are struggling among rocks and weeds,
help us to see and receive the goodness you offer us,
so that we may all grow and bear fruit in your kingdom.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: The God of Abraham praise

Reflection

Melchizedek is one of my favourite biblical names, not least because it contains the name Mel!

Joking aside, though, the author of Hebrews mentions this obscure figure for a very good reason.

Melchizedek is mentioned 3 times in the Bible but only appears in person once, in Genesis 14.18-20, which goes:

“And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand! And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything.’”

Then he’s mentioned in Psalm 110, as we’ve heard today, and finally in the Letter to the Hebrews.

This isn’t a lot to go on but there are some ideas about why he’s important to the writer of Hebrews.

Firstly, Melchizedek was a priest and king outside of the Jewish priesthood.

To be a Jewish priest you had to be a male descendent of Aaron, who was a member of the tribe of Levi. This is why you often see priests and Levites mentioned closely together in the Bible, although not all Levites were priests.

However, Melchizedek was not a descendent of Aaron.

Not only did he live before Aaron, but he also wasn’t even Jewish. In fact, he seems to have been a Canaanite priest and king of the city of Salem.

The Canaanites, you may remember, were the people originally living in what was to become Israel, and Salem was later to become Jerusalem.

The idea of Abraham recognising the authority of this non-Jewish priest and king and paying him tribute is startling, and unparalleled.

So, in saying that Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek, the writer of Hebrews seems to be saying that Jesus’s role is not just tied to Judaism.

He doesn’t just give the Jewish sacrifices and pronounce the Jewish blessings but has a wider priestly role for the whole world.

Secondly, Melchizedek’s name is important, as many biblical names are.

In most Hebrew texts his name is written as two words: *Meleki* and *Sedek*.

Melek means *king* and *Sedek* in this context most probably means righteousness.

So, it seems that the name means *king of righteousness*, giving the author of Hebrews a clear parallel to Jesus himself.

Thirdly, the verses in Genesis refer to Melchizedek bringing out bread and wine, which can clearly be interpreted in Christian terms as a sign of the Eucharist.

And finally, Psalm 110 makes it clear that Melchizedek’s priesthood lasts forever, just like that of Jesus.

So, what Hebrews gives us is a righteous king and priest for the whole world, who lives for ever and comes to us in earthly things like bread and wine.

You can only push an analogy so far, though, and Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus’s priesthood has an important difference from those of both the Jewish people and Melchizedek because Jesus is the great high priest who has made the perfect, final offering and sacrifice for us all.

Because of him we no longer need to sacrifice animals or undergo rituals to make us clean, and we aren’t separated from God.

Instead, we can know that our sins are forgiven when we come God in repentance and faith.

And we can come boldly to God because, as the Letter to the Hebrews says in Chapter 4 “... we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”.

Amen.

Intercessions

From the rising of the sun to its setting, let us pray to the Lord.

That the people of God in all the world
may worship in spirit and in truth,
that the Church may discover again that unity
which is the Father's will,
and that the Church may truly reveal God to all peoples,
let us pray to the Lord:
In faith we pray

All **we pray to you our God.**

That the nations of the earth
may seek after the ways that make for peace,
that there may be good government in this and every nation,
and that the whole creation, groaning in difficulty,
may be set free to enjoy the glorious liberty
of the children of God,
let us pray to the Lord:
In faith we pray

All **we pray to you our God.**

That those who suffer, in body, mind or spirit,
may know God's power to comfort and to heal,
and that there may be new hope
for those who are struggling,
let us pray to the Lord:
In faith we pray

All **we pray to you our God.**

That all who with Christ
have entered the shadow of death
may rest in peace and rise in glory,
let us pray to the Lord:
In faith we pray

All **we pray to you our God.**

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence:
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power;
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.

All **Amen.**

Rejoicing in the presence of God here among us,
let us pray with confidence
as our Saviour has taught us:

All **Our Father, who art in heaven...**

Hymn: Christ is the King! O friends rejoice

Closing prayers

May God the Maker bless us:
God who speaks words of freedom and justice,
God who walks what he talks for ever.
May God bless us with hope.

May Jesus the Teacher bless us:
Jesus who speaks for good news for the poor,
Jesus who talks and does what he says.
May Jesus us bless us with truth.

May God the Holy Spirit bless us:
the Holy Spirit who speaks in fire and stillness,
the Holy Sprit who dances what she announces.
May the Holy Spirit bless us with joy.

All **Amen.**

May the light of Christ our Lord shine in all our hearts.

All **Amen.**