

OPENING PRAYER

Lord God - as we gather today we ask that you would develop in us an immeasurable urge towards you, an affection that is unbounded, a longing that is unrestrained, and a fervour that throws discretion to the winds.

Grant to us the same Spirit that was upon Jesus, the Spirit of mercy and of compassion, the Spirit of truth and of justice, the Spirit of power and of love. Lead us at this time by your most Holy Word and put it in our hearts and upon our lips. Let it give light to our minds and shine through all that we do, to your everlasting praise and glory; both now and forevermore.

Amen

A READING FROM ISAIAH 49:1-7

Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. {2} He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. {3} And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." {4} But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the LORD, and my reward with my God." {5} And now the LORD says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and my God has become my strength-- {6} he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." {7} Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

A READING FROM JOHN 1:29-42

The next day John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! {30} This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' {31} I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." {32} And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. {33} I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' {34} And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." {35} The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, {36} and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" {37} The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. {38} When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" {39} He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. {40} One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. {41} He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). {42} He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

SERMON: "God Believes In You"

O Lord your faithfulness to us and to the world you made causes our hearts to tremble. Come now O God, speak your word to us and help us to hear it. Grace my lips and anoint our ears with your Spirit and touch our hearts and our minds with your redeeming power. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen

How God spoke through the prophet Isaiah is truly awesome especially when we consider Isaiah to be one of the major prophets.

God used Isaiah to deliver some of the most encouraging and challenging messages and none of those messages are more incredible than his messages to his Servant Israel, his suffering servant; the one whom by his stripes

we are healed.

Listen to the message that God delivers about him through Isaiah in today's reading:

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations."

What a call that is! What a promise that the servant of God should not only reach out to God's own people, but to the whole world that the servant of God should not only bring light to the children of Israel: the light of hope and vindication and wholeness; but that the servant of God should bring it all nations.

A call to the whole people of Israel, and a promise about one person, one child of Jacob.

And this one person, this servant, this one we call Jesus Emmanuel this one whose name means God Saves, God is With Us, this light to the nations, tells us in the same way he is, so we are, and so we should be: salt of the earth to give savour to life and to preserve life and light of the world to show all people the presence of God's all present kingdom.

We have a task to do. One that many of us feel uneasy about, thinking as most people do that we are not up to it.

We feel that somehow we are not well shaped or well designed enough to give off the right kind of light; that for one reason or another we are not the ones for this particular calling; that it is really meant for someone else, for specialists like the pastor or the priest or that woman who reads her bible all the time or that fellow who sings in the choir; that we have a tough enough time praying and doing those good things we ought to do without having to be someone like John, who calls out to all ***"behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"***. We look at someone like Andrew who bothers his brother Peter with the words: "I have found the Messiah" ***or*** without having to be like that person who knocks on our doors on Saturday mornings or like that fellow at work who always says a quiet grace before eating his lunch.

You know something, I think most people, and that probably includes some of you here today, feel inadequate most of the time; inadequate and afraid. So many try to prove to themselves that they are OK by trying to be the one who can ski or curl or play golf the best, or by being the one who provides for their families the best or by being the one who can drink the best.

So many people are trying to prove to themselves that they are OK. And so many are afraid they are not despite all that trying, all that striving.

It's truly sad. So much energy for such little return.
And yet, to our inadequacies and to our fears, no matter how well hidden, or how up front they may be, Jesus says but one thing, and He says it over and over again **"I believe in you."**

I believe in you.

You need to believe in you too.

Believe in you too by believing in me and in my love for you.

God says that to us. He says it in the prophet's declaration

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations."

And he says it cross of the one who died for us. He says:

My child, I believe in you, I give you everything, for you I sacrifice myself, and for you I am raised. My son, my daughter, for you I am the Lamb of God, for you I am the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, giving you gift upon gift so that you may be all that I have made you to be.

God believes in you. This is the gospel that we are to announce to others.

God believes in you. This is the faith provides the light for the oil, the flame that lights the lamp.

God believes in you. This is the oil of blessing that provides the power for our living, the oil to keep the lamp burning.

God believes in you.

God believes in me.

God believes in us.

That is incredible. Perhaps too incredible for you to accept all at once: this idea that God believes in you and that your belief in His belief in you makes all the difference.

But consider this. Consider the ones whom Jesus chose to be his disciples; the ones who were to teach his ways when he was gone; the ones into whose hands were entrusted the life saving message that he came to deliver.

There was nothing extraordinary about them.

In fact, they were not even ordinary as some might understand ordinary.

Some were outcasts, of questionable character to many of the religious folks of the day, like Matthew the tax collector. Others were poor, uneducated, roughing living and few were fishermen. There was even a

zealot who wanted to overthrow Rome, mighty Rome, who could squeeze the life out of Israel as quick as it could put up a cross to kill those who threatened the public peace.

And the women who followed him all His days. Some were innocents like Mary, others anxious like Martha, and some were prostitutes, and some had been caught in adultery, and some had had many husbands; others had been considered not fit for decent company for many years.

And yet Jesus entrusted to them as He entrusts to us His gospel concerning salvation.

And He was not disappointed.

Consider these disciples, these followers, the ones no different than us.

The ones that the scriptures portray with startling honesty as being ones who misunderstood Jesus; as being ones who twisted His words to suit themselves; as being ones who sought their own glory and honour and as being ones who betrayed and deserted Him in His last hours.

Consider the ones to whom Jesus gave the keys of heaven and earth, saying to them ***“Whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven”***.

Consider them and what they managed to do, all the while saying that it was not they that did it, but the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead doing it through them.

I believe in you.

You are the light of the world.

You are the salt of the earth.

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel.

I will give you as a light to the nations."

God believes in us right now.

It is too light a thing that we should be a people who only help our own, or a people who only take care of our own family be it of blood or of the spirit.

There is a whole world out there where we could be shining; where we could show that not only is the lamp of our life full, but it has the fire of faith shining from it.

God believes in you.

God believes in you and there isn't anything you can't do.

You can shine in your homes. You can shine in this church and you can shine where you work and where you eat.

You can shine because God believes in you, and you can shine because God makes you that way.

It is a question I think of catching the vision. Of understanding that the very gospel we are called to carry to others is the same gospel that applies to us and makes it possible for us to shine.

A story that made its way around the Net some time back:

It is about a man, a prospector who is mining for gold, and suddenly discovers the mother lode; a thick, rich vein of almost pure gold. He digs out a big chunk and cashes it in for thousands and thousands of dollars. So, he begins to live well, truly enjoying and appreciating his new-found wealth. But after a while, the money runs out. He's become hungry, destitute. He pawns his possessions to try to make ends meet. He lives on the street, hand to mouth.

But wait a minute there's something wrong with this picture, isn't there? If he owns a gold mine of unlimited wealth, why doesn't he use it? Why doesn't he go back to the source where all his needs would be met? Why does he live as a beggar?

We have it all.

God gives it us.

He is the only one who can.

And he does.

He believes in us.

He gives himself to us and for us.

He pours out the spirit upon us.

He gives us the oil for our lamp,

He equips us with the wick we need,

He fashions every part of us, and he holds us in His hands, or he puts us upon the stand so that we might shine..

The only question is are we going to light up with the fire of our faith?

Are we, by our trust and joyful acceptance of the message of God's love for us, going to allow the spark to set the flame a going?

Andrew did. Peter did.

So did James and John, and Mary and Martha, and that woman by the well and that late comer, that uptight pharisee called Paul.

God believed in them even when they didn't believe in themselves.

And despite their weaknesses, their failings, their sins, their fears, they lifted up their own people and gave light to the nations.

And you know something, someone spoke to you about God.

Someone touched you. Someone quite ordinary; perhaps less than ordinary, was a light to your feet; showing you where the bread you needed was to be found; showing you how to go back to the mine and get the gold; showing you that God believes in you.

God believed in them. And God believes in you.

You Sarah, who are old and barren you will mother a nation.

You David, the youngest and smallest of your family, you will father an everlasting dynasty.

You Simon, son of John, you who are changeable and spontaneous, you will be a rock for the faith of My people, the church!

You Saul, you who persecute Me, will be My greatest apostle.

You Mary, whose shame was known to many in one town in one time, your love for Me will be remembered throughout the world for all time.

I believe in you. I give you myself.

We can be what God calls us to be and have the joy and the peace that God wills to give to all through the gospel we proclaim.

May we believe in Him and in His belief about us and spread abroad His message to all who come near.

Amen

Let us pray.

All knowledge is yours, O God, and you know us better than we know ourselves, yet you have chosen us and called us to follow of the path of Christ. If we lose faith in ourselves as your children forgive and restores us. If we lose faith in your pervasive goodness and mercy, bring us to a right mind and give us a deep trust in your love and power. Fill us and use us; fill us and use us to be ones who bring light; a people who shine in the darkness and who are not afraid.

We thank you God for all those people who have shared the hope that is within them. We thank you for those who first told us about you and about Jesus and the healing that comes through Him. We thank you for those who

shared your love with us and who showed us the way to the fuller and richer life You offer to all people through Christ. We thank you for those who told us that He is the Lamb of God; the one who takes away the sin of the

world. We thank you for the ones who told us that He was a great teacher and those who suggested to us that He is Your Chosen One.

We ask your blessing to be upon those who witnessed to us and for you to encourage and bring peace and joy to all those who this day share their faith with others.

Father, we pray for those we lift up today before You at this time. We remember those who are sick and in need of healing; those who are grieving the loss of loved ones; for those who are alone or have no where to turn for help

We pray for the blessings of the earth and the justice of your kingdom upon those who hunger or thirst for the things of daily living: for food, water, shelter, hope, and love; and ask that your watchful eye and gentle hand will be upon those whom we love with a very special love. We remember before you ---

Thank You, O God, for believing in us and for loving us. Help us to love with your own most dear love and to do all that we do as Jesus would do it. We ask it in his most blessed name, saying together the prayer he taught us.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

BENEDICTION

Go in peace, love and care for one another in Christ's name, and may God, the God who believes in you; the Christ who laid down his life for you and the Spirit who gives you breath day by day, bless you with a gentle heart, a discerning mind, and a spirit eager to share His love both now and forevermore.

Amen