**Morning Praise @ Home 25th February 2024**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading Ephesians 2:1 – 10

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**Reflection from Philip**

I don’t know if you are at all like me, but when I hear Bible readings that are familiar, then no matter how well they are read, my brain sometimes just clicks into a mode where it says to itself – ‘Ah yes, I’ve heard that before, nothing to learn here, move on…!’

That’s initially what I felt, when I learned what the reading was that I would be talking about today. Lots of very scriptural words – transgressions, sins, cravings of the flesh, Grace… All really powerful words, part of a powerful reading, but the danger is we can almost sleepwalk through it as our brain tells us – ‘Yes, you’ve heard that one, move on…’.

So I’m going to try and re-tell some of the elements of the passage in a very different way. I read of an example of how this passage can perhaps be told by a different narrative. Yes, it’s an example that enables me to be a bit dramatic, a bit theatrical – which of course I have been known to be, on occasion! But here goes:

Imagine a scene from the movies. A burning building, possibly about to collapse. Someone is in grave danger. On an upper floor, surrounded by flames and smoke, someone is lying on the floor, barely able to breathe.

Suddenly, a hero appears. He fights through the flames and the smoke to rescue the otherwise doomed person.

Cut to a hospital, a few days later. That apparently doomed person lies in bed, recovering, but as yet unaware of what just happened.

Then a friend visits them at their bedside, a friend who somehow saw all that had happened. The friend describes in detail what this mysterious hero did, and how through their self-sacrificing actions, they saved this person’s life.

The person in the hospital bed listens, amazed, and says to their friend ‘That’s incredible! They saved my life! I’m eternally grateful – I owe him everything!’

That’s what’s going on in this passage from Ephesians!

Paul tells the people how hopeless their condition was, that we are only spiritually alive because God took the initiative to rescue us through his son and the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul was opening the eyes of Christians to the grace of God.

Paul’s main message in Ephesians is to both Jews and Gentiles – to all Christians, that we need to have our eyes open to the greatness of God’s love, so we will live lives full of purpose. That we are not saved due to our own works, or efforts, but thanks to God’s love for us and the death of Christ on the cross.

So, let’s go back to that hospital again, remembering just how, before their friend told them of the amazing rescue by the hero, that person was largely unaware of the danger they were in, or the heroic deeds of another… perhaps they thought they’d had a lucky escape, somehow, through their own efforts, escaping the flames..

Many of us can spend so much of our lives like this person in that hospital bed before they were told the actual details of what had happened.

We can be alive in Christ, but we have yet to comprehend how gracious and merciful God has been to them.

This is how I was for much of my own life. I knew I had been in a bad place, but that I was now forgiven of my sins, but I hadn’t fully understood or appreciated the greatness of the grace shown to me. It can be easy to think we played a key part in our own salvation.

Paul is the witness who visits our hospital bed. He says, Brother (or sister!), you need to be aware – you were dead! You were lying lifeless on the ground as the flames moved closer.

Then this man put his life on the line to save you. In fact, he was touched by the flames as he came to save you. Once with you, he breathed life into your lungs until you came round.

It wasn’t luck, or chance that saved you.

You didn’t crawl out of that situation.

You didn’t even call out for help.

That man took the initiative. Thanks to him, by his ‘grace’, you were saved. You owe him everything.

So that is what we really mean by ‘Grace’. But just understanding what it means isn’t the point. What matters is to experience it. Actually accepting it and letting it transform how we think and act.

Accepting God’s grace means we don’t have to keep dwelling on all those things we got wrong. Accepting grace means we can let go of our anxiety and leave things in God’s hands.

Grace can help heal the most broken lives. As we begin this season of Lent, don’t just focus on avoiding chocolate, or alcohol, or whatever it is you crave, let’s all ask ourselves if we have fully accepted God’s grace. **Amen**

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by Tony**

Thank you, Lord God, for the opportunity of worship and for the freedom to be part of your family in the warmth of your embrace.
Thank you that in worship we can put aside the uncertainties of this world and rest upon the certainties of the Kingdom for your promises are not changeable as those of a politician might be but immovable and eternal.
Thank you that we can bring to your feet all the hurts and fears that trouble us and leave them there, knowing that your strength and assurance are all that we require.
Thank you that as we draw near in worship we are transported from a world of concerns and fears to a place where we can be at peace in your presence and find healing, wholeness and refreshment.

Lord, we put our trust in you amid the storms of life. Grant that your church may seek out the perishing, the troubled and the lost. We pray for all in our congregations, that God will give us pure hearts ready to receive him into our lives, and that we may respond by bringing his light to those whom we meet.

We pray for the nations of the World, especially where there is war or rumour of war, where there is famine or other hardship, that rulers may govern with humility and wisdom, seeking peace and justice for all.

We pray for all who are or feel that they are sinking amid the storms of life, all who are in dangerous or violent surroundings, all suffering from floods, storm or any other natural disaster due to global warming and the rising of sea levels. We pray for areas where crops have failed and homes have been destroyed.

We remember friends and loved ones who are going through a time of illness or distress. In a moment of silence, we bring before you all those we know who are suffering at this time, whether nursed in hospital or at home. Give them courage and hope, that they may trust God and know the comfort of his presence.

We thank God for the lives of those who have departed and found their final rest. In a moment of silence we bring them to mind. And we pray for all those who have been bereaved, that they may know the comfort and love of God.

In times of darkness, in times of stress, Lord, you are there. Always there.

In times of tempest, in times of shock Lord, you are there. Always there.

In times of anxiety, in times of doubt, Lord, you are there. Always there.

In times of loneliness, in times of despair, Lord, you are there. Always there.

In times of celebration, in times of joy, Lord, you are there. Always there.

In times of emptiness, in times of plenty, Lord, you are there. Always there.

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

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**