

Starting Point

16 January 2022

Call to Worship Psalm 19

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

**Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.**

There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;

**yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.**

Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable to you,

O LORD, our rock and our redeemer.

Be Thou my vision

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light

Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one

Riches I heed not, nor vain empty praise;
thou mine inheritance, now and always.
Thou and thou only, first in my heart,
Ruler of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of Heaven, my victory won
May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heav'n's Sun
Heart of my own heart, whate'er befall
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all

Reading 1

Nehemiah 8:5-6, 8, 10

⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

⁸ So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

¹⁰ Then Nehemiah said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Reflection 1

Quick question: Has anyone here made a New Year resolution this year that they have actually kept so far? If you're like me, you may not bother with that kind of thing. But perhaps there are some people who have made a promise to themselves that this year they are going to do something, give something up or whatever else they may have decided on. I think it is a good thing to set yourself goals. My problem was always that if I set a goal of some kind I invariably arrived at the next New Year having abjectly failed in achieving said goal.

I think it had been that way with the book of the law that Ezra had found. The Israelites had set out with great intentions, but along the way they had lost sight of the original goal. God had simply receded into the background for most people. It was hard enough simply getting through life without having the added complication of having to do temple every Sabbath. And they were always asking you for stuff. Easier to just tune it all out, get out of bed at a reasonable hour on your day off, and keep your money in your wallet. After all, when was the last time God did anything for ME? And so you forget...

So when Ezra found the book of the law and read it to people it had to be explained so that it made sense. That's great – it gives me a job 😊. But then the best bit – go your way, eat the fat, drink wine, make sure everyone gets some. Remember, the joy of the Lord is your strength. It seems like a great starting point for church – get out there, eat, drink and be merry. I think I could go with that. What do you think?

Notices

Bible Study, 10:30am, 03 February in the Church Lounge.

Does anyone know what is happening to our church? We can bury our heads in the sand and pretend nothing has changed. We can think about what is happening around us and search for what we can do.

‘Where to from here?’ is a short 4-6 week conversation aimed at asking questions about how the church might be in the future and how can we help and not hinder what God is doing. Drawing on Scripture, current events, personal experience and anything else we can find to help us think about what is next. There’s no agenda apart from listening to God and to each other. Signup sheet for the, ‘Where to from here?’ conversation.

The Peace

Prayer of adoration and confession

Share one joy and one disappointment with a person next to you. Hold them before God, together.

God, we are sorry for the times when we forget to be joyful and for the times we allow our disappointments to cloud our vision of you. Teach us to live knowing that all we have is a gift from you and our disappointments are shared with you. Amen

Reading 2 Luke 4:14-17

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

¹⁴ Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.

Reflection 2

I wonder what Jesus was teaching that meant he was praised by everyone. The cynic in me quickly leaps up and says he was giving them ear candy – telling people what they wanted to hear. As I think about it I suspect that may be close to the truth, just not in the way you might think.

For some reason the church of today has tended to head in one of two directions. On the one hand you have the so-called ‘chandelier swingers’,

heavily focussed on outward signs of God at work. On the other you have the often rather dour, more traditional believers who like to be more controlled and reserved. The fact that both extremes have something valuable to offer to the church can often be lost in the war over style. The other thing that seems to be lost is the Good News that Jesus preached. It wasn't a good news of don't do this or don't do that, of rules and regulations that must be followed. It was a Good News that offered hope and freedom.

Do you remember how Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard who hung out with tax collectors and sinners? And do you remember how Nehemiah told everyone to eat, drink and share it around? The Good News that Jesus brought was genuinely Good News. And it was supposed to be celebrated. Seems like a pretty good starting point to me.

Where the road runs out

Colin Gibson

Where the road runs out and the signposts end,
where we come to the edge of today,
be the God of Abraham for us,
send us out upon our way.

Lord, you were our beginning,
the faith that gave us birth.
We look to you, our ending,
our hope for heaven and earth.

When the coast is left and we journey on
to the rim of the sky and the sea,
be the sailor's friend, be the dolphin Christ
lead us in to eternity.

When the clouds are low and the wind is strong,
when tomorrow's storm draws near,
be the spirit bird hovering overhead
who will take away our fear.

Offering

Generous God, we are reminded through scripture of the spiritual gifts that you give. We know that these are not for us to hold onto but are gifts for us to share – gifts from you meant for giving. As we bring our gifts and offerings, prompt us to commit more than dollars, but to see the gifts you have written on our hearts and to share generously of these as well! We pray these words in the name of Jesus, in whose way we follow, for whose love we are eternally grateful. Amen.

Prayer for ourselves and others

Share one concern and one anticipation you have for the coming year. Hold them before God, together.

All these we bring through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us how to pray

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, holy be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Amen

Reading 3

Luke 4:17-21

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Reflection 3

I find myself wondering if perhaps, rather than individuals having New Year resolutions, churches should have them instead. What might it look like if we gathered around and started with this piece of Scripture? Then, rather than simply treating it as a nice story, we treated it as a call to action, a resolution to see the scripture fulfilled in our now.

Perhaps we might begin by changing our thinking from what we CAN'T do, to what we CAN do. Looking around it is plain to see that for many of us the list of can'ts is likely much longer than the list of cans. But that doesn't matter. Because it is the CAN's that we will focus on.

Then from there we ask the question, 'How CAN I ...?'

Bring good news to the poor
Proclaim release to the captives
Proclaim recovery of sight to the blind
Let the oppressed go free
Proclaim the year of the Lord's favour

Not asking, 'How CAN'T I do this?' Rather asking, 'How can I NOT do this?' Remembering that we are not in this on our own – we are a church, a community of people called to be God's people here in this place. Even at age 95 there is a place for pausing and asking, 'How CAN we do this?'

Seems like an excellent starting point for the year.

Turn to your neighbour and ask the question, 'How can we do this?' then listen for the answer. And if eating good food and drinking great wine (or whatever your preferred beverage) is a part of the answer then all the better.

We Pray

God, forgive us for the times when we lose sight of the good in Good News. Help us to learn to celebrate, even to party over what Jesus has brought to us. We long to see you moving among us, changing hearts and minds. Begin with us we pray. Then help us to get on to doing what we CAN do to share the Good News with others. Amen

How great is our God

Chris Tomlin

The splendour of a king, clothed in majesty
Let all the earth rejoice, all the earth rejoice
He wraps Himself in light and darkness tries to hide
And trembles at His voice, trembles at His voice

How great is our God
Sing with me how great is our God
And all will see
How great, how great is our God

Age to age He stands and time is in His hands
Beginning and the end, beginning and the end
The Godhead Three in One, Father, Spirit and Son
The Lion and the Lamb, the Lion and the Lamb

Name above all names, worthy of all praise
My heart will sing how great is our God

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here, may our hearts be full of what we CAN do to proclaim
the year of the Lord's favour, celebrating the Good News with all that is in us.

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.