

Reading and Reflection for the Sibyls Evening Service

11 June 2020

Ephesians 2

English Standard Version

By Grace Through Faith

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

One in Christ

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Reflection

In Ephesians Chapter 2 verses 13-14 we read:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near”.

In a set of "Thoughts, Poems and Reflections in a Time of Pandemic" I note that one effect of the current corona virus pandemic and the consequent lockdown is that of depriving everyone of social interaction. The loss of communication, income, and lack of interaction with family, friends and others, throws us into a world of worry, anxiety uncertainty, social and economic deprivation, loneliness, and isolation, where the possibility of our own deaths seems closer than we might

otherwise expect. A major concern is the harm that this will do to our abilities to interact with others after the lockdown ends. Medical practitioners and researchers are already predicting that there will be major long-term effects on mental health which will last for years to come.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. To this list we add our own concerns as minority groups: All of us who are transgender, and sexually and gender variant people. All of us of different races and creeds. All of us who are in lockdown with unsupportive families and other people around us. All of us who are in stealth, holding our self-identities as secrets we need to keep. All of us who being denied the integrity of our identities. All of us and who are being misrepresented by pressure groups, churches, and other bodies for their own social agendas, in both private and public life. All of us who are being made scapegoats for the inadequacies and tensions felt by others though the need to divert blame away from themselves, and because of the misrepresentation that occurs.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. The prospect of achieving that peace must seem for many to be very distant at the present time, and for those of us who lose hope the perception that any peace could be achieved is destroyed. We are right to feel angry, but anger suppressed only festers inside. Paul tells us that it is Jesus who breaks down the wall of hostility between us by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in the ordinances we set, and by our actions which create these divides. Through the Gospel message we find the courage to cross over these walls and bring the message of hope to our lives, for Paul also says (Romans 8 v 38 to 39).

"No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow - not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below - indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord"

Through the reassurance and support which Paul and the gospel message, gives, we pray that we may also find the courage to love as Christ commanded, and to preach peace to those who are far off and those who are near. These are strange and difficult times, but we must embrace the challenges they bring. In ordinary times this would have been a service which formed part of the Sibyls London Evening Meeting: Now it is countryside, indeed it is worldwide, and it can embrace every member of the Sibyls... no matter where we are. Because of geography and social distancing, we are further apart in body but now we are closer in mind. It may also be a time of great difficulty, but it is a time of opportunity. Let us pray that we can bring the love, care companionship, and support that we find in the Sibyls to every member of the Sibyls wherever we are, and that we too can preach the Gospel of Christ and bring peace to those who are far off and peace to those who are near to us now

Susan Gilchrist

11 June 2020.

The document "*Thoughts, Poems and Reflections in a Time of Pandemic*" can be accessed via: www.tqdr.co.uk/documents/247P-PandemicReflections.pdf

The order of service can be accessed via <http://sibyls.gndr.org.uk/documents/SuM0529b-SibylsEveningMeetingOrderEveningPrayer-11jun20.pdf>

This reflection is available on <http://sibyls.gndr.org.uk/documents/SuM0610a-ReflectionSibylsZoomService-11jun20.pdf>