

Sunday 17th August 2003:
Harmony

That was a magnificent hymn by Charles Wesley... inspired from Hebrews 1:3

“... He Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High...”

*Rejoice, the Lord is King! Your Lord and King adore.
Mortals - give thanks and sing, and triumph evermore.
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice!
Rejoice - again, I say, Rejoice! AMEN!*

Two days ago, I received a copy of an email sent by a friend to someone else, and its contents may surprise you, because I'm not known for my brevity. It goes thus...

“eagles (that's me) and I were talking... I don't think I gave you his page on the end times.

I think it explains more and talks less.”

Now that is a compliment! I hope that today I can explain more and talk less here too!

Earlier we heard from Lynne that our gathering today has the theme of 'Hope' and we looked at several scriptures...

One of my favourite scriptures is Isaiah 40:28-31 with which Lynne started off... and please let me repeat it, quoting just verse 31 this time from the Authorised Version of 1611... and perhaps you can understand from this one of several reasons why my name on chat is 'eagles'...

“But they who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and shall not faint.”

What a wonderful promise!

What a wonderful hope for the future!

What a wonderful message to remember as we read God's word!

In Hebrews 6 (17-19) we can read about this hope, from the Amplified Translation...

Accordingly God, in His desire to show more convincingly to the heirs of promise (that's us) the unchangeability of His plan, intervened - or mediated - with an oath.

This was so that by two unchangeable or immutable things - His promise and His oath - in which it is impossible for God to deceive us, we who have fled to Him for refuge might have mighty indwelling strength, to grasp and hold fast to the hope appointed and set before us.

We have this hope as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, that reaches and enters the very certainty of the Presence behind the veil.

Isn't this worth rejoicing over? Halleluiah!

The "hope set before us" is a very factual and living hope, that only those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ can possibly have.

Last week we heard episode two of Ron's "most excellent" sermon at Pentecost this year - of course "most excellent" is the adjective used by Paul (the apostle) in describing salvation. I was reminded during Ron's preaching of something that had happened to me some years ago, and which I would like to share with you, in support of brother Ron's word to us... confirmation of the Spirit's work is crucial to being able to accept a brother's word as coming from the right source, because there is NO CONFUSION in the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

... describe the word of knowledge I had at Kalangadoo ...

Do you remember how Ron started his address on Pentecost Sunday?

He read a passage from Acts in a foreign language - HIS native tongue - Norwegian...

and asked us if we had understood in OUR language what he had just said.

Let's try this...

"Sut mae bore ma! Sut ichwi?"

That wasn't Norwegian, but Welsh, and was a greeting, "how are you this morning?" - and it then went on as an individual salutation.

You could have replied

"Da iawn"... if you understood... *"Very good"*.

And would you believe that the most important Swedish phrase I learned when I worked in Sweden's third largest city in 1990 was this one...

"Jag talar INTE Svenske"

- I don't speak ANY Swedish!

So what has that to do with today's sermon?

On the face of it, very little, apart from being support for the Biblical principle that God troubled all of the unbelieving people back in the time of Nimrod, by confusing the languages... something that we can explore on another occasion when we look at the historical record of the many times that God sent His people away into physical and spiritual exile or wilderness as a direct result of their willful disobedience and sin.

Thinking much deeper, though, it does suggest that the Holy Spirit, since His coming as the Comforter promised by Jesus, will make the gospel message clear to you and me as we listen to it, providing that we are in tune with Him. That is even if He doesn't get involved in everyday trivia foreign language remarks like my greeting in a strange tongue a few minutes ago.

Today, I would like us to explore further from where we left off last time, when we looked at the Unity of both the Godhead and the Body of Christ. And that concept of "being one" requires us to have the "Hope" that Lynne introduced to us a while back. No hope, no real desire for one-ness.

First, let's try something that may colour our understanding in a way that may make more sense of it.

The Oxford dictionary says this about the word "unison"...

... coincidence in pitch,

combination of voices or instruments at the same pitch, or loosely in octaves; it also means agreement in general terms.

===== trivia =====

12 semitones to an octave (name suggesting eight!)

C>D>E F>G>A>B

full tone increments

B>C E>F

semitone increments

===== end trivia =====

(exercise in singing in unison)

followed by...

(exercise in harmonising)

demonstrate both harmony and discord

Oxford dictionary

Harmony or harmonization:

agreement, concord, combination of notes to form chords, melodious sound

Harmonize:

bring into, or be in harmony

Harmonious:

in concord, free from dissent, tuneful

Harmonist:

one skilled in harmony

Discord:

disagreement, strife, harsh noise, lack of harmony

discordant comes from this root.

Let us examine what scripture says about harmony... surprisingly a search refers one to the NIV translation which is not my choice of English language versions. Interestingly, the NKJV still uses 'unity' in these particular passages.

Zechariah 6:13 NIV

It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne.

And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be *harmony* between the two.'

Romans 12:13-16 NIV

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Live in *harmony* with one another.

Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with humble people. Do not be conceited.

2 Corinthians 6:11-18 NIV

We have spoken freely to you, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us.

As a fair exchange--I speak as to my children--open wide your hearts also.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What *harmony* is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall (not will) be my people."

"Therefore come out from them and be separate", says the Lord. "Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters", says the Lord Almighty.

1 Peter 3:8 NIV

Finally, all of you, live in *harmony* with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil, or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it, for the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Let us ask "How do we keep ourselves out of harmony with one another?"

Sinfulness. Sin.

We can sin by deliberately doing something... or equally by deliberately not doing something; in olden times, these were often called "sins of commission" and "sins of omission".

Very interestingly, the (secular) Oxford English Dictionary suggests sin is caused by the conduct or state of mind of the *habitual* or *unrepentant* sinner

sin... a product of a deliberate attitude of rebellion against God, and rejection of what we know to be His will.

sin... a state of mind where we deliberately refuse to accept that something specific is sinful, usually because we want to control ourselves, rather than allowing God to control us.

sin... therefore keeps us at arms length from fellowship with... immediate family, church family, and of course God.

sin... actually prevents us from being relational, and therefore prevents us from exercising the new life in Christ.

sin... is seldom preached these days in many places because of the politically correct view in society around us, that Christians also have to be "inclusive", this is suggested as being of paramount importance to believers, rather than the absolutes as taught in the Bible.

What is "inclusive"? The opposite of "exclusive".

What is "exclusive"? something does not automatically include everyone or everything.

Could we say the gospel is actually, in fact, exclusive rather than inclusive?

YES

Why?

Because Jesus stated many times that ONLY HE was the "Way, the truth and the Life"... indeed His early followers called themselves "The Way" long before the term "Christian" was coined.

John 3:1-12 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, who came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these things that You do unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I tell you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered (almost repeating himself), "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"

Most assuredly, I tell you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.

If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

Israel in the New and Old Testaments is a generic expression which can be translated these days as "God's people".

Do we have modern-day teachers of God's people, who NEITHER ACCEPT nor UNDERSTAND the fact that the gospel is received exclusively by those who are born from above?

Yes, sadly, we do. Because those teachers appear unable to separate beliefs and practices of the world from those taught by Jesus and the apostles.

That does not mean that we who DO believe that Jesus is the ONLY way for salvation should be elitist. Absolutely NOT. Our responsibility is to present the truth of the gospel IN ITS ENTIRETY, to all. Not just little bits of it, mixed with modern mens' and womens' "good ideas".

It is so very important for EACH OF US to realise and understand that Christians wanting to be 'nice' and 'inclusive' to everybody, actually deny to sinners their opportunity for repentance - this therefore denies them the opportunity for their salvation, and is totally contrary to what Jesus taught.

If we ourselves believe Jesus and His message of salvation as being available to all who recognise Him, and His command to us to bend our knee and beg for forgiveness, and then go and teach that false doctrine to others, not only will those we teach believe falsely that they are fireproof in their sins, but we shall be incredibly condemned ourselves for allowing them to think like that.

Paul's comments are emphatic...

Three quotes from Romans, chapters 6, 8 and 10...

Romans 6:22-23 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and at the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:1-2, 5-11 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace, because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not Christ's.

And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Romans 10:8-10

“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach):

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus

and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead,

you will be saved,

for with the heart one believes unto righteousness,

and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame' - for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is richness to all who call upon Him, for 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.' ”

**Jew and Greek... in the language of the time...
and the region in which Paul was preaching... means simply...**

God's people... and those who are not, but may have heard of Him).

And translated into 21st Century English it means...

Those who are Christians... and those who may have heard SOME of the message but have NOT accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Paul continues, describing the historical scene and the scene of his day...

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’ - (Isaiah 52:7)

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: ‘Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world.’ - (Ps 19:4)

But I say, did Israel not know?”

Now this is a point, often missed... Paul is saying, in effect, “Okay, the Jews are God's people, yes, but they deliberately distanced themselves from God frequently... and then - as a result - they were banned from God's chat room”

Isn't this right?

Paul continues the same scripture, in the same vein...

“Isaiah is very bold and says (and this is placing the words in God's mouth): ‘I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.’ - (Isaiah 65:1)

But to Israel he says: ‘All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people.’ - (Isaiah 65:2)

I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, ‘LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life’ ?” - (1Kings 19)

I would like to refer you to a brilliant paraphrase of scripture in Murray Wylie's "Jerusalem Passion" oratorio... which has this recitative piece taken from Matthew 23 and 27, spoken by Jesus Himself...

*“O Thou that stonest the prophets and killed those who were sent,
When they came from the desert with the call to repent,
How you hardened your heart and would never relent,
Now you are full of the blood of the innocent”*

This, when combined with the music he set it to, usually has an enormous impact on those listening.

The composer concludes this piece, called the “*Jerusalem Entry*” with the prophetic statement that the Jews would be totally dispersed, and the composer's paraphrased words of judgement on the unbelief of the people was this, taken from Isaiah 59 and Micah 1, and Matthew 23...

*“Go and mourn for your temple, go and mourn for your walls,
Go and growl like the dragons, go and wail as the owls,
For your sin and your judgement are consummate
- and your house, it is left to you desolate!”*

He concludes the piece with what he calls the weep theme...

“Weep, and weep, and weep and cry... for Jerusalem”

God wept real tears of anguish for his unbelieving people, and here Jerusalem once again typifies His people - and remember, this means you and me...

He wept tears time, and time, and time again... and does not that include weeping for us, my brothers and sisters?

Yes, I think that at another time we could look closely at the repeated history of disobedience of God's people in the past - and it is very well documented. I had prepared a sermon on that for today, but in exactly the same way as was Ron last week, I was felt led to present to you further clarification of what the Spirit had already laid on our hearts last time, about unity and harmony.

We should not close on what seems a dismal note - a note without hope - because we DO have that sure hope we looked at earlier... Let us have another go at harmonising together, because we shall be singing again shortly, uniting our voices together in praise is always joyous...

Let's see if we can be ONE VOICE - yet being different in the voice's detail... like the way each of us is created in Christ's image - yet we are each unique...

May I suggest that each of us has our own individual set of disturbing discordant aspects. Each of us knows we need to identify them - and then fix them - don't we? In order to become relational...

Relational - with one another - as well as relational with our Creator, "this Jesus who is both Lord and Christ"

(harmonising - very briefly)

And so, in conclusion, let us look at the poetry of a great songwriter from a century ago... John Newton who gave us "Amazing Grace"...

He read in Psalm 87 verse 3

"Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God..."

The NRSV continues this passage like this...

Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; Philistia too, and Tyre, with Ethiopia – "This one was born there," they say. And of Zion it shall be said, "This one and that one were born in it"; for the Most High himself will establish it. The LORD records, as he registers the peoples, "This one was born there." Singers and dancers alike say, "All my sources of life and joy are in you."

Newton then composed a magnificent hymn of praise in five stanzas, called

"Glorious things of Thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God..."

Maybe some time we could also look at what the heavenly Zion, the city of the New Jerusalem actually is.

The New Jerusalem is NOT bricks and mortar.

Would you like a clue as to what it might be?

It is flesh and blood. It is you and me.

Verse 5 of John Newton's hymn, often omitted, reads like this...

*"Saviour, if of Zion's city, I, through grace, a member am,
Let the world deride or pity - I will glory in Thy name.
Fading is the worldling's pleasure, All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure, None but Zion's children know."*

And that isn't inclusive is it? No, It's exclusive... None but Zion's children