

2022 6TH NOVEMBER – WORSHIP AT HOME – QUESTIONS OF LIFE AND DEATH

Dear friends,

Another month! I hope that life is treating you as well as it can though I realise that we will all have different concerns on our minds, maybe for ourselves or for a family member, friend – or perhaps for the world situation. Whatever is on your mind, sit quietly and open your heart to God, for he will hear you. You may not yet hear his answer but trust in him.

With every blessing, *Margaret*

Call to worship:

We have come from a world full of questions – some simple, some quick to answer – some seemingly trivial and some immense – some quick to answer, others seemingly impossible.

As we come to worship now, do not leave your questions in the air, but bring them all – great and small – as part of your offering to God today.

God, our parent, teacher, mentor, and guide, may we come to you with enquiring hearts, eager to learn, confident that you will never reject our smallest question, and willing to walk with you in faith when no answers can be given.

God of life and death, we bring to you our hearts and minds – our questions and our fears – our understanding and our uncertainty – those we love and those who are in crisis of some kind, knowing that with you all are safe. **Amen.**

The words to ‘Amazing Grace’ written by John Newton [1725-1807]

Singing the Faith 440

1 Amazing grace – how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

2 God’s grace has taught my heart to fear, his grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

3 Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come;
God’s grace has brought me safe thus far, and he will lead me home.

4 The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

5 And, when this heart and flesh shall fail and mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil a life of joy and peace.

6 When we’ve been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun,
we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we first begun.

Prayer:

God of all, we thank you for Scripture, and for those around us who remind us that you are greater than our greatest fears – that you are the giver of life and do not let us go, even in death, but draw us into the resurrection life of your kingdom – that kingdom which, now, we only glimpse – but one day will see clearly. **Amen.**

God of life and wisdom, forgive us when we avoid asking questions that will help us to grow.

Forgive us when we settle for answers which are comfortable not challenging.

Forgive us when we do not trust you with our lives and our deaths but allow fear to fester, and uncertainty to undermine our faith.

Bless us, we pray, with confidence and courage, and the ability to live with mystery as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, his disciples, and saints. **Amen.**

Living God, you understand our fear of death, and forgive us.

You understand how hard it is to let go of life and support us.

You understand when we allow our world to cloud our vision of your kingdom.

You understand – you forgive – and one day you will call us home. **Amen.**

We praise you, living and loving God, for the breath of life – for the assurance of life eternal – for the lives of all those we love - and for your kingdom where all fear will pass and all questions be answered, as we grow into life in all its fullness. **Amen.**

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and 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**

Luke 20: 27-38:

Some Sadducees came up. [They deny any possibility of resurrection.] They asked: “teacher – Moses wrote that if a man dies and leaves a wife but no child, his brother is obligated to take the widow to wife and get her with child. Well, there were once seven brothers. The first took a wife. He died childless. The second married her and died, then the third, and eventually all seven had their turn, but no child. After all that, the wife died. That wife, now – in the resurrection whose wife is she? All seven married her.”

Jesus said: “Marriage is a major preoccupation here, but not there. Those who are included in the resurrection of the dead will no longer be concerned with marriage, nor, of course, with death. They will have better things to think about if you can believe it. All ecstasies and intimacies they will be with God. Even Moses claimed about resurrection at the burning bush, saying: “God: God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob!” God isn’t the God of dead men, but of the living. To him all are alive.”

Comment:

Jesus met with a group – the Sadducees - which denied the hope of resurrection. Sadducees were mainly wealthy Jews who were friendly with the Romans. Collaborators with the occupying forces – as rich groups often are because they would have so much more to lose if there were a rebellion. They were conservative and fundamentalist by nature and in dealing with the Scriptures they looked almost exclusively at the five Books of Moses, only allowing a minimalist interpretation of the Scriptures. Everything written by the great prophets, .etc, was ignored by them. There is no mention of the Resurrection in those early texts, therefore the Sadducees refused to accept such an idea. They were very strong on tradition – not good on relating new experience to it. [Unfortunately, there are still people like that in the church today.]

The Chief Priest and the High Priest were chosen from amongst the Sadducees – they were the ruling class. Here, when they met with Jesus, they came up with a nonsensical question because they didn’t believe in the resurrection anyway. According to their law [Deuteronomy 25:5]if a man’s married brother died childless, then he must marry the widow and so provide children for his brother!

In many ways, this was to protect the woman from poverty and loneliness so was rooted in sense. Here, though, the Sadducees took it to ridiculous lengths by suggesting that seven brothers married this woman, died in their turn – so whose wife would she be in the resurrection?!

Jesus was no fool – he saw this for the trap it was, coming from people who were not willing to accept change and newness. The Sadducees weren’t like the poor as they didn’t have to worry about justice and fairness – they already had the lion’s share of everything that was going. They were rich enough not to have to worry about the future and their thinking was limited to this world and a God they contained within their own image.

But the God of Jesus is a God greater than us all – a God who is able to do whatever he wills and is not constricted by human limitations. The world beyond ours may be beyond all that we can imagine – but nevertheless it exists. David Adam puts it this way: ‘It is new and different, in the way an egg is different from a hen, a seed from a plant, or a caterpillar from a butterfly.’

If we believe in a loving and Almighty God who is a God of justice, we can believe in the possibility of the resurrection and Jesus came partly so that we might know that it is no possibility, but fact.

David Adam gives us this illustration:- High up on the moors there was a group of men setting the old heather on fire. The plants had become gnarled and twisted with age – they had come to the end of their usefulness. No longer did they provide food for the sheep or the birds. So the heather was burned and you could see large flames rising. Later there would be no signs of heather, only blackened ground where it had been. These men knew what they were doing. They made sure it was a controlled burning. Under the surface, hidden from sight, were living roots. The heather would rise again – having lost its gnarled and twisted quality, it would be fresh and nourishing to the creatures.

And so it is with the resurrection of the dead.

Meditation of the Apostle John:

They tried to tie him in knots with their questions – coming to him with some fanciful conundrum about marriage in the world to come. It was a fair enough point on the surface, but it depended on one assumption: that life in heaven will mirror our existence here on earth.

Is that how you see it?

It is hard not to, isn't it, for what else do we know?

However high our spirits soar, we're tied in imagination to what we know – to the world of our senses and what they alone can tell us. So we picture God's kingdom in terms of life now, its beauty and blessings akin to those that surround us, only writ more large.

True, there is enough in creation to move us to wonder – to speak of God's love and purpose in astonishing ways, but the joy he holds in store is greater than we can begin to imagine – more special than words could express.

They asked their question, those Sadducees, because they didn't believe resurrection was possible – the idea of God sharing with us eternity was, to them, preposterous. But it wasn't the impossibility of the idea that they proved that day, merely the limitations of the human mind. Never confuse the two.

Prayer:

Lord, we sometimes find it hard to believe in the resurrection, for death seems so stark – so final.

How *can* dust and ashes be brought back to life? We struggle to take it in.

Remind us that some truths are beyond us – that if we limit you to what we can fully understand we will never believe – for your ways are not our ways, or our thoughts yours.

Open our hearts to things unseen and may our daily experience of your living presence testify to the truth of what our minds cannot fathom – the victory of your love. **Amen.**

Lord of wisdom,

we pray for everyone who finds it difficult to believe in you.

God of kindness,

we pray for everyone who is sad because someone they love has died.

God of hope,

we pray for everyone who feels afraid.

God of understanding,

we pray for a deeper knowledge of you.

Come near to us, Lord, be the light in our darkness.
Lead us onwards to know you better.
Lord, you made us to be your friends.
Lord, you help us to care for others.
Lord, you are with us always.
Lord, we love you and want to love you more.
Lead us ever onwards so that we may come to know you better.
We bring all our prayers in the name of Jesus. **Amen**

The words to 'Lord, for the years' written by Timothy Dudley-Smith [b. 1926] Singing the Faith 470

1 Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned, and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

2 Lord, for that Word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us, and inspires us,
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

3 Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth, and care,
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

4 Lord for our world; when we disown and doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

5 Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us,
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

Using the closing verse of StF 351 – In Christ alone. [Keith Getty and Stuart Townend]
'No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me.
From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand;
Till he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand!' **Amen.**

And may the blessing of God – the Father who created us – the Son who found us and saved us – and the Holy Spirit who lives and works within us – be with us and all whom we love, and all for whom we pray, this day and for all eternity. **Amen.**