

**Written Service Sunday August 27<sup>th</sup> 2023**  
**A service of worship for use at home**  
**Prepared by Jan Davies**

Charity number 1134226

**Theme: Letters to the Churches**

**Call to worship:** Psalm 139:1-2

Lord, you have examined me and you know me.

You know everything I do; from far away, you understand all my thoughts

**Prayers:** Adoration and Praise

God of all created things,

God of all space and time,

God of the morning light,

**We praise and adore you.**

Lord of the morning,

God of Trinity, three in one,

Saviour Jesus, man and God, lover and friend,

Holy Spirit, comforter and advocate, ever present God,

**We praise and adore you.**

Thank you living Lord God,

For the sure foundation of our faith:

Built not on rules, but on Life:

Your life in your son Jesus Christ.

**We praise and adore you.**

We thank you that your offer of love is unconditional:

Not governed by our ability to earn your love,

But by the deep and broad grace

You have shown the world in Jesus.

**We thank you that your grace is not offered to just a few,**

**But to all;**

**All are called to repent, all called to believe, all called to eternal life.**

**Amen**

**The Lord's Prayer - We pray the prayer that Jesus taught us...**

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 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.

**Hymn:** Singing the Faith 447: Jesus be the centre

Jesus, be the Centre, be my source, be my light, Jesus.

*Be the fire in my heart,*

*Be the wind in these sails;*

*Be the reason that I live*

*Jesus, Jesus.*

Jesus, be the centre, be my hope, be my song, Jesus.

*Chorus*

Jesus, be my vision, be my path, be my guide, Jesus.

*Chorus*

**Reading:** Ephesians 1:15-22 (Good News Bible)

For this reason, ever since I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks to God for you. I remember you in my prayers and ask the God of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you the Spirit, who will make you wise and to reveal God to you, so that you will know Him. I ask that your minds may be opened to see His light, so you will know what is the hope to which He has called you, how rich are the wonderful blessings He promises His people, and how very great is His power working in us who believe.

This power working in us is the same mighty strength which He used when He raised Christ from death and seated Him at His right side in the heavenly world. Christ rules there above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers and lords; He has a title superior to all titles of authority in this world and the next. God put all things under Christ's feet and gave Him to the church as supreme Lord over all things. The church is Christ's body, the completion of Him who Himself completes all things everywhere.

**Hymn:** Singing the Faith 465: Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

Guide me O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land;

I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand:

Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,

Feed me now and ever more; feed me now and ever more.

Open thou the crystal fountain whence the healing stream shall flow;

Let the fiery cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through:

Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,

Be thou still my strength and shield; be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan bid my anxious fears subside;

Death of death and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side:

Songs of praises, songs of praises,

I will ever give to thee; I will ever give to thee.

**Introduction to the reading:** We have two letters to the Church in Ephesus; the first, which we have just read, was written by St Paul. This was written some 40 years before the reading from Revelation. Much has happened in the meantime. This time we have Jesus writing to the church and He has some criticism of the church.

**Reading:** Revelation 2:1-7(Good News Bible)

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

“This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks among the seven gold lampstands. I know what you have done; I know how hard you have worked and how patient you have been. I know that you do not tolerate evil people and that you have tested those who say they are apostles but are no and have found out they are liars. You are patient and have suffered for my sake and you have not given up. “But, I have this against you: you do not love me as you did at first. Think how far you have fallen! Turn from your sins and do what you did at first. If you don’t turn from your sins, I will come and take your lampstand from its place. “But this is what you have in your favour: you hate the Nicolaitans as much as I do. “If you have ears, then listen to what the Spirit says to the churches!”

**Sermon Part One:** I do wonder what the reaction was in the church in Ephesus when they got this message? They have been used to being a very important church in Asia Minor. The church was founded by St Paul some 40 years before who probably spent longer there than anywhere else – He even sent them a letter which we have in the NT. It was the centre of outreach for the towns around and it was highly successful. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul gave them practical advice about how to live as Christians in a pagan society and how they could recognise heresies and corrupted beliefs.

Although this was not the capital of the area – which was Pergamum – it was the largest city and the centre of the commercial life of Asia Minor. It was a rich, bustling sea port where people from all over the Empire could be found (sound familiar?). Its real claim to fame was the huge and impressive Temple of the goddess Artemis (or Diana) one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This got the Christians into trouble as many people – especially among the silversmiths – who had got rich through the worship of this goddess, and they certainly didn’t want any other God preached – especially one that said Artemis didn’t exist

We read from this letter sent by Jesus Himself that the Ephesian Christians continued to lead lives free from any hint of heresy. They continued to work hard for Christ and to persevere in the face of opposition.

But something was wrong – this letter was not all praise. Jesus says that He has this against them that they have lost their first love; they had lost their passion. Perhaps they were relying on their past reputation. If you have ever had dealings with financial advisors who try to get you to invest your savings in some scheme which they recommend there is always a ‘get out clause’ which states that past performance does not guarantee future growth. And so it was with the Ephesian Christians – they have been full of passion in the past but you can never rely on the past; the passion had gone.

I wonder how many churches in this country have lost their passion. Has this church lost its passion? There is a theological college in this country called Moorlands and its mission statement says that they exist ‘to train people who are passionate about Jesus Christ’. It seems that Jesus wants people who are still full of love for their Lord and His service.

Have you ever watched the film ‘Fiddler on the Roof’? It is actually a very sad film telling the story of the Jews being expelled from their village in Poland at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but it is told in an amusing way. In one of the songs Tevye asks his wife Golde (who was a bit sharp tongued) if she loved him. She then reels off all that she does for him – cooking, cleaning, mending etc – but he

replies 'But do you **really** love me'? He was asking about her passion, and this is what Jesus asks of His followers 'I know all that you do, but do you really love me'?

In his letter to the Ephesians, St Paul wrote that they should love their Lord with an 'undying love'. And this is what they have lost. Jesus tells them to recall what they have lost and to repent. Is this what He is asking us?

If we have lost our passion for Christ, we need help regaining it. Perhaps we should pray using the words of the hymn writer, William Cowper:

Lord it is my chief complaint  
That my love is weak and faint;  
Yet I love you and adore,  
Oh for grace to love you more.

**Reading:** Revelation 2:8-11 (Good News Bible)

"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

"This is a message from the one who is the first and the last, who died and lived again. I know your troubles; I know you are poor – but really you are rich! I know the evil things laid against you by those who claim to be Jews but are not; they are a group that belongs to Satan! Don't be afraid of anything you are about to suffer. Listen! The Devil will put you to the test by having some of you thrown into prison, and your troubles will last for ten days. Be faithful to me, even if it means death and I will give you life as your prize of victory.

"If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches!

**Sermon Part Two:** Of the seven letters it was inevitable that Ephesus would come first. It was just as inevitable that Smyrna should come second. She was a great rival to Ephesus and it is said that it was the most beautiful city in Asia Minor – she was called the 'ornament of Asia' or 'the crown and flower of Asia'. The historian Lucian called her 'The fairest of the cities of Ionia'. Like Ephesus it stood at the crossroads of east and west and she became a great trading nation to rival Ephesus. She was situated on the coast and it stretched up into the hills crowned by Pagos, a beautiful hill covered with temples. After the city had been destroyed in 600 BC it was rebuilt with broad avenues of trees, with excellent paving making travelling in it easy. Where ever you looked you could see fine blocks of buildings adorned with gold.

It was not only a city of riches, trade and beauty but was cultured with many places of learning. No wonder the city was known as the crown in the jewel of the Empire.

As with many cities in the Empire, Smyrna had a large number of Jewish merchants who had poured money into the city and paid for many of its embellishments. They were particularly anti-Christian, as many of the converts came from the Jewish synagogues and often stirred up trouble for the church. In the Book of Acts we see over and over again how the Jews stirred up the authorities against the Christians and it was just the same in Smyrna. The problem was that around the synagogues there were Gentile 'God Fearers' those who were attracted to the Jewish faith in one God. It was these Gentiles who were most attracted to the new Christian faith.

The Christians of Smyrna had their backs to the wall – poverty, prison, slander and possibly death awaited them – but we are told that the Christians of Smyrna stood firm. They did not give in to the

temptation to compromise their faith and Jesus praises them. There is nothing that He has against them, even though they may face death; as so many Christians face death today for their faith in Christ.

However, God often gets the blame for the terrible things men do, sometimes in the name of Religion. 'Why doesn't He intervene; why doesn't He do something to save His people?' But God allows human beings to do their worst. He has granted us the freedom of will to do as we please until His Kingdom finally comes and His will is done.

To those who remain true to their faith, He offers them an eternal crown. Not like the crowns of leaves won at the games, but one that lasts forever.

Which letter is more appropriate for our church? or us as individuals? In a few moments quiet think what Jesus would write to us – what would He praise us for? What would He have against us?

**Silence:** Consider what Jesus would write to us?

**Prayer:** Confession Lord of Light,

You fill us, your children with your light,

So often your light in us is dimmed by our selfishness and greed.

There are times when we ignore those in need.

We sometimes look at other people and feel we are better than them so we turn away.

We criticise other people who are doing the best they can.

We can make others feel inferior.

We are unprepared to speak out against injustice.

We are unprepared to stand up for Christ or witness to His love.

And so, the light is dimmed. Forgive us Lord and enable your light to shine through us so that others will see you in us and turn to you and find the answer to all their deepest needs.

We thank you Father that you have promised that when we come to you in repentance you are always prepared to forgive – so forgive us Lord and help us to change.

Amen

**Prayers:** Intercessions

Risen Lord,

Hear our prayers for this church,

For our vision for the future

For all in positions of responsibility,

For all called to serve you but have ignored your call,

May your Kingdom come,

**May your will be done**

Risen Lord,

Hear our prayers for the poor, for the weak and marginalised.

For refugees and asylum seekers,

For those who live with violence and hatred,

May your Kingdom come,

**May your will be done.**

Risen Lord,  
Hear our prayers for this country,  
For the scandal of those who exist on food banks, for those who have no homes,  
For those with mental health problems,

May your Kingdom come,  
**May your will be done.**

Risen Lord,  
Hear our prayers for those we know in need  
Through illness, depression or grief.

May your Kingdom come,  
**May your will be done Amen**

**Hymn:** 564: O thou who camest from above

O thou who camest from above the pure celestial fire to impart,  
Kindle a flame of sacred love on the mean altar of my heart!

There let it for thy glory burn with inextinguishable blaze,  
And trembling to its source return, in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire to work, and speak and think of thee;  
Still let me guard the holy fire and still stir up thy gift in me –

Ready for all thy perfect will, my acts of faith and love repeat,  
Till death thy endless mercies seal and make the sacrifice complete.

### **Blessing**

We accept this new day as your gift to us;  
We enter it now with eagerness;  
We open our senses to perceive you;  
And we lend our energies to things of goodness and joy. Amen