

Devotion for the week leading to the 6th of December 2020

This service is written for Stretton Park and McDonald Wing in Maffra, Laurina Lodge in Heyfield and Royal Freemason's in Sale, but with the intention of also being available for private use.

NOTE : If you have a recording of Handel's "Messiah", it would be appropriate to play or listen to "Every Valley" at the noted time in this devotion.

INTRODUCTION : This is the second week of Advent, the second week of the four week period leading up to Christmas. Today our theme is JOY. It is joy because we know that the Messiah is coming.

HYMN No. 9 - Praise my soul the king of heaven

You can read the words to yourself, or out loud. If you remember the tune well enough you can sing it yourself. You can, of course sing just the first, or the first and last verses.

PRAYER

We thank you, O Lord for all that you do for us. We thank you for your care and protection. Thank you Lord that our world seems to be coming back together again. We thank you for the good rain that has given many of the farmers plenty of hay this year. We thank you too, that the bushfire threat is much lower this year and we can take pleasure in the warm weather without feeling worried. Thank you, O Lord that you sent Jesus for us: to be our Messiah and point us towards you, and to be our Saviour and bring us forgiveness for our sins. Lord God, we confess again that we are not perfect people, that we have had our faults and failings, and we ask that you would make us right with you again. We also bring before you those times when we have let ourselves down. Lord God, ease our minds from those bad memories of the past, we pray. We bring these things before you, O God our Father, trusting in your never-failing love through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Optional reading - PSALM 85: 1-2 & 8-13

HYMN No. 28 - How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear

BIBLE READING - Isiah, chapter 40, verse 1 to verse 11

This would be a good time to play "Every Valley" from Handel's Messiah if you have it.

REFLECTION

This part of the Book of Isiah was probably written while the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon, but it is towards the finish of their time in exile. The people could tell that the end was in sight. They felt that the worst was over and things were starting to come good. There were political changes in the government in Babylon, and the new policy was one of returning defeated nationals to their lands so they could restore their economies and pay taxes. The Babylonians had enough slaves as it was.

And so, chapter 40 of Isaiah begins: comfort, be comforted my people, you have suffered enough, your hard service has been completed. The writer then imagines God with His people travelling back home again, from Babylon to Israel, across the desert. The prophet writes: Make a smooth straight path for the Lord, level out the mountains and the valleys so we can travel easily and quickly back to the land where we belong.

Then the writer remembers how long the people have been in exile and reflects on those who have died of old age in that time. So, the prophet writes that people wither and die like the grass and flowers do, but the word of our God stands for ever. People, even the people of God may come and go, but our faith in God continues on from one generation to the next. God's people, even in exile in Babylon, had not lost heart. They had not lost their solidarity. They had not lost the Faith. They were still the people of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were still the people of the one true God. Through thick and thin, through good times and bad, God had stuck with them, and they had stuck with God. Now was the time of the coming of joy, the time of homecoming was at hand. God was with them. Today, through all our trials of the past year or two, God is still with us. Today, we look ahead and remember that Christmas is coming when we celebrate God coming to live with us in human form through Jesus.

HYMN No. 16 - To God be the glory, great things he has done

PRAYER

Thank you, O Lord, that you never forget us and you are always ready to help us. Help us to remember that even in the worst of times, when everything seems to have gone wrong, that that you still love us. You still care for us, and you call us to come to you. We know, O God that you do not expect us to do what we cannot do, but help us to be positive, helpful people who do what we can to lift the spirits of those around us. We pray for all those who are sick, and for those who care for them. We pray for all those who work here to make our lives safer and better. We pray for our families, that they might be safe, happy and well, wherever they are. All these things, we pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

THE LORD'S PRAYER 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. 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 No 7 - Count you blessings

The BLESSING : God is with you wherever you are.

May the blessing of the almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you always, Amen