

**St Nicholas Sighthill Parish Church
Sermon: Sunday 22nd February 2015:
Psalm 25: 1-10 & 1 Peter 3: 18-22
Jesus died for our sins once and for all**

Psalm 25: 1-10

It is a prayer for God's guidance, driven by the conviction that there is an approach to life in which we discover the ways of the Lord.

Divine guidance is not a matter of omens appearing out of the blue. Rather it is a matter of having a heart for God and a way of life, in which we discover the character of God and what it means for our conduct in any given situation.

A Prayer for Guidance and Protection

²⁵ To you, O LORD, I offer my prayer;

² in you, my God, I trust.

Save me from the shame of defeat;
don't let my enemies gloat over me!

³ Defeat does not come to those who trust in you,
but to those who are quick to rebel against you.

⁴ Teach me your ways, O LORD;
make them known to me.

⁵ Teach me to live according to your truth,
for you are my God, who saves me.
I always trust in you.

⁶ Remember, O LORD, your kindness and constant love
which you have shown from long ago.

⁷ Forgive the sins and errors of my youth.
In your constant love and goodness,
remember me, LORD!

⁸ Because the LORD is righteous and good,
he teaches sinners the path they should follow.

⁹ He leads the humble in the right way
and teaches them his will.

¹⁰ With faithfulness and love he leads
all who keep his covenant and obey his commands

1 Peter 3:18-22 Good News Translation (GNT)

¹⁸ For Christ died for sins once and for all, a good man on behalf of sinners, in order to lead you to God. He was put to death physically, but made alive spiritually, ¹⁹ and in his spiritual existence he went and preached to the imprisoned spirits. ²⁰ These were the spirits of those who had not obeyed God when he waited patiently during the days that Noah was building his boat. The few people in the boat—eight in all—were saved by the water, ²¹ which was a symbol pointing to baptism, which now saves you. It is not the washing off of bodily dirt, but the promise made to God from a good conscience. It saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone to heaven and is at the right side of God, ruling over all angels and heavenly authorities and powers.

Sermon:

The psalm begins with an expression of confidence in God and a plea for vindication. There follows an appeal for teaching, not so much for new information as for a taking to heart of what we know of the Lord – “teach me what I already know”.

It is a prayer that evokes for us “the way, the truth and the life” which ultimately we find in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is honesty and humility in acknowledging the issue of “the sins of my youth”. None of us bring an unblemished past when we come seeking the guidance of God. But past failures are met by the mercy and steadfast love of God.

Christ suffered for sins – all sins – once and for all.

We should certainly not suggest that sin is not sin, or that we should not struggle against sin, that sin is not serious, or that sin is not potentially deadly. It is.

But in the face of Christ's suffering and death, sin is not the power that it once was. To suggest otherwise is to make light of the crucifixion, and what it really means for us.

Our second reading is Peter's illustration to explain that we are called to bear witness in a hostile world, but we can trust God to vindicate us.

It also reminds us that Jesus died for our sins on the cross.

Peter uses Christ as the main example, showing that His unjust suffering resulted in witness and that He was vindicated through His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God.

Noah was another example of a man who bore witness to a hostile world and was vindicated by God who delivered him and his family through the flood. Thus Peter's readers should be willing to bear witness through baptism, even if it meant persecution, knowing that God will vindicate them.

1 Peter 3 follows this declaration about Christ's suffering, making a connection between the Noah story and the baptism of all flesh as the source of salvation.

Connecting Noah and baptism is surprising. Peter's overall point is clear, but the details are complex.

Most bible commentators acknowledge that these are some of the most difficult verses in the New Testament to interpret. Even Martin Luther says that this is perhaps the most obscure passage in the New Testament and admits that he does not know for certain just what Peter means.

What we do know for certain is in the Noah story, few righteous people survived, while those who have sinned are washed away. God is wearied by the wickedness of humankind, with its inclination “to do evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).

Is this really what we believe baptism is all about? Is this what happens in baptism, that the sinner in us is washed away?

The behaviour of the average Christian heart seems to discredit this idea.

The reading describes baptism not so much as a cleansing ("not as a removal of dirt from the body"), but as an appeal on the behalf of the baptized to God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Thus baptism is not, for 1 Peter 3, a cleansing or a washing away of sin (or the sinner), but a claiming of the sinner by Christ Jesus.

"Baptism now saves you."

In Peter this cleansing is not tied as explicitly to the death and resurrection of Jesus as it is in Paul (cf. Romans 6:4), but the implicit connection is obvious.

Christ suffered for all sins, and baptism is how we are joined to his resurrection— his victory is over sin and death.

Noah found favour with God in the face of the world's wickedness (Genesis 6:6-8). Noah's righteousness saved him. Baptism now saves us we are told in our second reading.

Like the Great Flood, the suffering of Christ is a one-time event. "It is finished."

In baptism we find ourselves connected to the resurrection of Christ. Unlike Noah, the righteous man who is brought safely "through water" while the unrighteous are washed away.

Today, we are the unrighteous but this time we are saved in the water.

Christ suffered on our behalf, and the claim that Christ makes for us in baptism – not after we are cleansed, not on account of our righteousness, but in direct opposition to what we might deserve.

Instead we are baptized in Christ's name, delivered from the power of sin through his suffering, and so saved. We do not deserve it and we have not earned it because we always fall short of the glory of God.

But for those, who believe in the risen Christ, are saved because Jesus brings us to God.....and for many of us, we are reluctant Christians.

"For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

Three questions we each need to answer in our hearts:

(1) Have I truly trusted in Christ as my sin bearer?

To do that I need to recognise myself as unrighteous, unable to present myself to God by my own good works. The pride of the human heart always wants to earn salvation based upon personal merit or worth.

But God's way is to humble our pride and strip us of everything in ourselves that would commend us to Him. Many who have attended church for years do not understand this basic point that salvation is a free gift, not one that we can earn.

Let us trust in the righteous Christ who died for us - the unrighteous.

(2) Have I testified to my faith in Christ through baptism and communion?

Baptism and communion cannot save anyone, but it is an important step of obedience to Christ in which we publicly identify ourselves with Him in His death and resurrection.

It was important enough that Jesus mentioned baptism as a part of His Great Commission ([Matt. 28:19-20](#)) and he instigated the communion at the last supper when he took the bread, gave thanks, and broke it saying this is my body broken for you.

In the same way he took the cup saying this is my blood, which is shed for you, do this in remembrance of me.

We should not neglect the importance of the sacraments and how we can sense the presence of the Lord.

(3) Am I standing alone for Christ in my sphere of influence?

By standing alone, I mean, standing for Christ even if I'm the only one, or standing with others who are following Him.

The Bible is clear that we can expect opposition and hostility if we take a stand for Christ.

But if our Saviour had to face hostility at the hands of sinners before He entered into glory, why shouldn't we?

Even if, like Noah, no one else listens to our witness, we know that God listens and His cause will ultimately prevail.

Make a commitment to be like Noah—to stand alone for God—and He will vindicate you in the next life.

Amen.