

**Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
12th October 2020**

READINGS

'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.' This is the message you must give to the people of Israel."

Exodus 19:4-6

For you are a holy people, who belong to the LORD your God. Of all the people on earth, the LORD your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure. "The LORD did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! Rather, it was simply that the LORD loves you, and he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors. That is why the LORD rescued you with such a strong hand from your slavery and from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Understand, therefore, that the LORD your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.

Deuteronomy 7:6-9

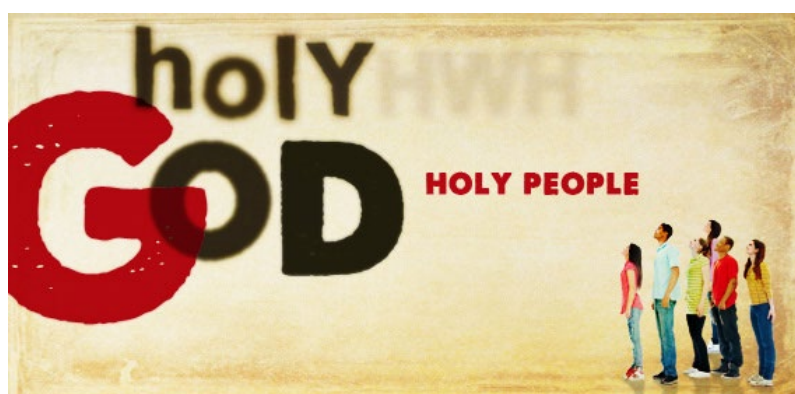
But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

"Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy."

1 Peter 2:9-10

"The church exists primarily for two closely correlated purposes: to worship God and to work for his kingdom in the world ... The church also exists for a third purpose, which serves the other two: to encourage one another, to build one another up in faith, to pray with and for one another, to learn from one another and teach one another, and to set one another examples to follow, challenges to take up, and urgent tasks to perform. This is all part of what is known loosely as fellowship."

N. T. Wright



REFLECTION

What is the point of the church? We hear much in our society that the days of the church's days are numbered, that the Church is falling away. That the Church represents an older way of looking at the world that is no longer true today. But I disagree! Maybe we are going through a time when we are declining, but the purpose of the church has not vanished, the reason for the church has not disappeared.

As you can see from all our readings this week, God has always drawn close to people. And God's people have always had a purpose. That purpose has two purposes, firstly to worship God and secondly to bear witness to the whole world of the love of God and the call of God.

Those purposes have not changed. We are still called to worship God.

Even during the pandemic we have been able to worship. Our online services may not be the same as our normal services and even our return to worship, limited as it is by restrictions, may not feel like normal. But none the less as God's people we continue to worship God. And that worship is not limited to Sunday morning. But in so many ways we worship God throughout the week. Moments of praise in the midst of ordinary life, in our own devotions, in those times when we sense God close and are able to speak out our thanks.

Likewise, the second purpose of God's people has not changed - to go on presenting the love of God to all people. To bear witness to all of the holiness and goodness of God. To tell the story of the Good News. Both of these purposes bear equal importance. And that challenge to speak God's message lies before us always. But perhaps it is there that we have found most difficulty in our world. Yet the message has not changed, the Good News has not become bad news. And the call of the Church, of the people of God, is to learn again how God calls us to bear witnesses in our community.

Tom Wright, in our quote this week, identifies a third purpose for the church. To support and care for one another as we fulfil God's purposes. That is the reason we are called to be a church family, to care for one another, to encourage one another, to inspire one another.

I do not think that the church has lost its purposes. And I do not think that the Church has lost its relevance! Now, more so than ever, the worship, witness and welcome of the people of God matters in our suffering world.

PRAYER

Eternal and everlasting God,
Invincible, all powerful,
In Jesus you make yourself vulnerable;
For our sakes you endure the pain of rejection
The agony of the cross;
To draw us close,
To bridge the gap created by sin

To make us family
You give everything.
And you are still ready to give all to draw people to you,
You have not given up on one person,
You reach out,
Longing to embrace,
To forgive.
To welcome home,
Even the ones who deny that you even exist.

You have made us into your people,
You have called us together as your church,
You have shaped us as your family,
Now inspire each of us to discover again your call in our lives.
Fill our mouths with praise,
So that we might truly worship you
That our voices can sound our love and adoration.
Fill our lives with your call to proclaim,
That our actions, our speaking might point others to you,
Might reveal your love.
Fill our church with your holy spirit,
That by your grace we might be family to each other,
Caring and supporting, helping and comforting.

In Jesus name
Fill your church with purpose
Fill your people with praise
Fill your servants with passion
So that all will see and hear the Gospel.
Amen

