

Howrah Sandford Weekly Church Bulletin

9th August 2020

SUNDAY SERVICES at St Thomas's Howrah 8.30 and 10 am (both Holy Communion and I will be preaching) and St Barnabas's South Arm 10 am (Holy Communion and David Le Rossignol will be preaching)

There is also weekly online worship found on the home page of www.stthomashowrah.com

READINGS:

Acts 4: 23-31

Psalm 2

John 18: 33-37

SERMON: Prayers of the Bible 4: the believers' prayer for boldness

This year The Chinese government has ramped up an unprecedented persecution on all religious groups including Christians of whom there are between 40 and 100 million. It has involved the arrest of Christian leaders, the removal of crosses from churches, the bulldozing of churches and forcing people to replace Christian symbols with portraits of Mao and X Jinping. The State is coercing remaining churches to compromise their faith with leaders being replaced by Government-appointees, the publication of a new government-sanctioned translation of the Bible and congregations pressured to sing patriotic songs.

This is alarming but it is a simple fact that over the last 2000 years at any one time somewhere in the world Christians have been savagely persecuted. Persecution is aimed at intimidating people to renounce their faith. However persecution often has the reverse effect. Take for instance the very first persecution of Christians recorded in chapter 4 of the Acts of the Apostles. Earlier in the chapter Peter and John had healed in the name of Jesus a crippled man at the Temple and taken that opportunity to preach the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. To the dismay of the Chief Priest and his cronies the two apostles responded with bold disregard to their command to forthwith cease preaching and the accompanying threats.

On returning to the gathered believers Peter and John recounted their ordeal and the response by the congregation was group prayer. In verse 24 the prayer began with acknowledging God as creator and ruler of everything. In verses 25 to 26 they prayed recognising God's prediction that the leaders and their people would oppose God's appointed Saviour, as prophesied in Psalm 2. Then in verses 27 to 28 they expressed something remarkable. They firmly believed that even the authorities' opposition and killing of Jesus was part of God's plan.

Only then in verse 29 did they ask for God's help. Yet note, that these early believers did not ask that the persecution cease or that God would help them escape but rather that they would have boldness to proclaim the message that Jesus is the risen Lord. In verse 30, harking back to the healing of the crippled man, they asked God to back up the message that Jesus is Lord with healings and other signs.

Finally, in verse 31 we discover the effect of their fervent prayer. God answered them beyond their expectations, filling them with the Holy Spirit so they could speak boldly. So the early Church grew in numbers and faith much to the dismay of the authorities.

Unlike China, here in Australia we can thank God that we are free from persecution by our government. Nevertheless we are going through a time of trial, together with the other 7.8 billion people in the world. Our enemy is not a powerful totalitarian government but a tiny, insidious virus. Christians are suffering together with Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, atheists and the rest. But we can be inspired by that prayer of the first Christians:

First let us remember that God is Creator and therefore Lord of all.

Second let us be encouraged that God in his wisdom turns trials and tribulations to his purpose to bring people under the Lordship of Jesus Christ

Third let us resolve not to be intimidated by circumstances but ask God to give us boldness to proclaim the love of Christ by word and deed.

THE TAKEAWAY

The famous French General Ferdinand Foch was a man of action and few words which were always insightful. In 1914 at the First Battle of the Marne he was facing a rout at the hands of the Germans. He declared: "My centre is yielding. My right is retreating. Situation excellent. I am attacking."

We can let the trials and tribulations of life intimidate us or we can respond with boldness. Knowing that our heavenly Father loves us and is in control, in spite of appearances, can help us be bold and courageous.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS:

- For the southern part of our parish: for the South Arm School community, for the people of St Barnabas', for the residents of the villages of Sandford, Cremorne, Clifton Beach, South Arm and Opossum Bay.
- For our persecuted brothers and sisters in China
- For our missionary Kate and her team in South Asia
- For parishioners and their loved ones who are ill
- For the Anglicare ministries our parish supports
- For the process of appointing a new Rector for our parish with an announcement soon to be made.

FROM THE MINISTER:

Nominations for Parish Councillors and Wardens close this Sunday 16th August

Annual reports will be emailed this week for you to read prior to the Parish Annual Meeting Sunday 23rd August at 11 am. There will also be printed copies available this Sunday at church

Sunday 23rd there will be one service only in the Parish at 9.30 am at St Thomas'. It will be followed by morning tea prior to the 11 am meeting. There will be no lunch afterwards.

With a new minister soon to be appointed let's get updated and inspired about mission and ministry! **Online Bishop's Training Event** (10am-1pm, Saturday 19 September.) Register at www.bishopstrainingevent.com.

With the love of Jesus
Andrew Lake
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