

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Thoughts about the Church today with scripture readings for reflection

The Living Body

We are called to be living, loving, active members of the Body of Christ. People should be able to see Jesus embodied in His Church. Our responsibility is to reveal Him. He should be recognisable – here and now – in communities which love, care, serve and witness.

- You are the Body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it - 1 Cor. 12.27
- The body is not made up of one part but of many - 1 Cor. 12.14
- There is one body and one spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all - Eph.4 4-6
- God placed all things under His feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way - Eph. 1.22-23
- Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others - Romans 12.4-5

People of God

We are called to be a Holy people – distinct from the world. We are to be salt – preserving what is good and giving flavour. We are to be lights in a dark world. We are a people called by God and committed to Jesus.

- I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God - Ex. 6.7
- You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God - 1 Peter 2.9
- You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness how can it be made salty again? - Matt. 5.13
- You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden - Matt. 5.14
- If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love - Jn. 15.10

Being Church

Commitment to God in Christ is commitment to Christ's visible Church on earth. We are empowered by the Spirit to be the guardian of eternal truths and the irreducible Gospel. The forgiven and forgiving people of God are hope-filled and are a sign of the Kingdom.

- There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus – 1 Tim. 2.5
- The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children - Rom. 8.16
- When He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth - Jn. 16.13
- I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it - Matt. 16.18
- The Lord their God will save them on that day as the flock of His people. They will sparkle in His land like jewels in a crown - Zech. 9.16

Dark Clouds

The Church is under fierce attack in our land. Forces have been unleashed to undermine the foundations, witness and life of the Church. Powers of darkness threaten the Christian way and Christian civilisation itself. We are now engaged in spiritual warfare.

- Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil - Jn. 3.19
- Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction. Their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things - Phil. 3.18-19
- They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them - 2 Peter 2.1
- Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings - 2 Peter 2.10
- The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God - 2 Cor. 4.4

A Sick Culture

Our society is rapidly changing. It is increasingly insecure, unstable and stressful. Destructive forces have been let loose and we see broken families, dysfunctional relationships, violence on the streets, drug addiction, pornography and other social disorders. In our culture wealth, success and power matter. We act as God in matters of life and death. We embrace abortion and euthanasia. The past century has seen the greatest bloodshed and cruelty. The old western dream of progress has now been demolished.

The restraints of Christian morality have almost vanished. Absolute standards of right and wrong have been rejected. This has led to confusion and chaos.

- People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God - having a form of godliness but denying its power - 2 Tim 3.2-5
- They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator - Rom 1.25

Danger Signals

Danger signals are flashing. There are signs of imminent disaster with serious, social and spiritual disorder. God has been expelled from our society and there is widespread despair and hopelessness. Christians cannot be silent in the face of what is happening. We have a duty to point to a better way – the way of Christ.

- His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness - 2 Peter 1.3
- Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O House of Israel? - Ez. 33.11
- If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land - 2 Chr. 7.14
- Sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming - Joel 2.1
- Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me - Ez. 33.7

False Gods

Humankind needs an altar before which to kneel. Today we have created our own idols which we worship – power, wealth, sex and the celebrities of sport and entertainment. Elsewhere dictators act as God. Nearer home New Agers claim to be God.

- False Christs and false prophets will appear - Matt. 24.24
- 'They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge me', declares the Lord - Jer. 9.3
- 'My people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. Be appalled at this, O heavens and shudder with great horror', declares the Lord - Jer. 2.11-12
- They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trouble they say 'come and save us!' - Jer. 2.27
- My people have forgotten me - Jer. 2.32
- No one can say 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit - 1 Cor. 12.3

Churches in Retreat

Many churches in our land have been in serious decline throughout the past century. Vast numbers have left them and their teaching and morality have been rejected by millions. Our image is often one of irrelevance and death. We are seen as dry bones in a valley, dead and of little significance.

We must accept our responsibility for our failure to present the Gospel to our nation. We must not cry peace when there is no peace. We must beware of the dangers of self-satisfaction and lack of self-criticism. Although a degenerate world is under the judgement of Almighty God, we in the churches, are under greater judgement. We give the impression of being asleep and God is calling us to wake up.

- My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no-one searched or looked for them - Ez. 34.6
- I myself will search for my sheep and look after them - Ez. 34.11
- O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing - Matt. 23.37

Simplicity

Our churches are riddled with uncertainty, doubt and unbelief. We are easy victims of cults and new religions. Basic Christian claims and the uniqueness of Christ are being questioned. Many in the churches do not have a deep and personal relationship with God. Sadly some, seeking deeper spirituality, have not found it in the churches and have reached out to Eastern Religions and the New Age.

There is a spiritual famine in our land and many hungry, searching people are consuming contaminated substances which poison and do not satisfy..

- I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven - Matt. 18.3
- Simply let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no' - Matt. 5.37
- Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? - Matt. 6.25
- He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly with your God - Micah 6.8
- He who is not with me is against me - Matt. 12.30
- God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him - 1 Jn. 4.16
- Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you - Matt. 7.7

The Fatherhood of God

For Christians God is a loving Father. We are called to be a family of believers. Jesus taught us to pray "Our Father". Believers are the 'children of God' and therefore brothers and sisters in the same family under the one Father, who loves, directs, guides and protects His children. Our churches should be caring, loving and serving families and should be seen as such.

- Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God - Rom. 8.14
- A Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His Holy dwelling - Ps. 68.5
- Live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love as brothers and be compassionate and humble - 1 Peter 3.8

The Lordship of Christ

The words of Jesus are simple and direct. He is the Lord and He speaks with authority. He speaks a language people can understand. Our message today is frequently muted and uncertain. We appear to be confused, complicated, irrelevant – even intellectually dishonest.

In a climate that favours agnosticism rather than belief, it is imperative that we are not ashamed of the basic certainties of the Gospel. There is an urgent need today for us to reaffirm the Lordship of Christ.

- Come to me - Matt 11.28
- Follow me - Mk 2.14
- Do you truly love me ? - Jn 21.16
- Who do you say I am? - Matt 16.15
- He who is not with me is against me - Matt 12.30
- Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons - Math. 10.7-8
- Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation - Mark 16.15
- I am the way the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me - Jn. 14.6
- Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father - Jn.14.9
- My peace I give you - Jn. 14.27

The Power of the Spirit

We receive power when the Spirit comes upon us. The Spirit-filled church is strong. Is the fire of the Spirit burning in our hearts? Is the wind of the Spirit blowing upon our lives? Is the oil of the Spirit penetrating our being? Are the waters of the Spirit washing over us? Are we truly listening to what the Spirit is saying to the churches today?

- I will put breath in you and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord - Ez. 37.6
- He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches - Rev. 2.7
- 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit' says the Lord Almighty - Zech. 4.6
- When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth - Jn. 16.13

Our Image

The Church should be the visible sign of the presence of Christ. It should be the evidence that He is alive. What does the world see when it looks at our churches? Are we sensitive to our responsibility to reveal Christ to a dying world? Do we project a distorted image of Christ? Do we recognise our need to repent?

- By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another - Jn. 13.35
- You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth - Acts. 1.8
- "You are my witnesses", declares the Lord - Is. 43.10
- Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her - Eph. 5.25

Our Shame

Christ prayed to the Father that we should be one. We should be ashamed of our divisions and our frequent inability to speak with one voice. It is intolerable for churches to proclaim a Gospel of reconciliation to a divided world when they themselves are divided.

The basic truths of the Christian Gospel, which unite all Christians, are far greater than the issues which divide them. Christian unity is an essential pre-requisite of revival. In a fragmented pagan society we are called to pray, praise, serve and witness as brothers and sisters in the one family. We urgently need to repent for our divisions. Jesus says that we are branches of the one vine. There is one flock, with one shepherd. We are one body, with one head, Christ. We are one family, with one Father, Almighty God.

- There should be no division in the body - 1 Cor. 12.25
- Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand - Matt. 12.25
- May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me - Jn. 17.23
- I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought - 1 Cor. 1.10

Change

The Church is an instrument of change. The Gospel is about newness and transformation. Churches which are afraid of change, deny the Gospel. Christ comes to change us and change the world. Transformation only happens when we admit that we are damaged by sin. When we lay our weaknesses before God, and come to Him in humility and repentance, He makes us whole. When the world sees freshness, newness and life in the churches, it will begin to believe.

- I am making everything new! - Rev. 21.5

- If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! - 2 Cor. 5.17
- I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full - Jn. 10.10

Healing

Christ comes to heal a sick, broken and hurting world. The healing of both society and of our bodies, minds and spirits is good news. Healing and evangelism go together. The authenticity of the Gospel is shown when the church provides evidence to the world that it is an instrument of healing.

- I am the Lord who heals you - Ex. 15.26
- He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds - Ps. 147.3
- The power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick - Luke 5.17
- Your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear - Is. 58.8

Reconciliation

We desperately need God's reconciling love, because so often we have wrong relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with creation. Righteousness means establishing right relationships.

Wrong relationships are evidenced in division, confrontation, aggression and alienation. The church is commissioned to reveal a new and better way – the way of love. When we are reconciled with God, we are raised from a world dominated by hopelessness, depression and chaos to a new life where, through God's reconciling love, all relationships are made whole.

- He has committed to us the message of reconciliation - 2 Cor. 5.19
- God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ - 2 Cor. 5.19
- You have heard that it was said 'love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. But I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven – Matt. 5.43
- Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law - Rom. 13.10
- Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity - Col. 3.12-15

Mission

Every Christian is committed to mission. We belong to a missionary church. Our mission has eternal significance for all people. We are commanded to proclaim the Good News to all creation. Do we have a burning desire to proclaim the Kingdom of God?

- Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Good News to all creation - Mark 16.15
- I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! - Luke 12.49
- This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations - Matt. 24.14
- For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God - Deut. 4.24
- I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to God,

so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me - Acts 26.18

Church Alive

There is a widespread sense of tiredness, lifelessness and fear in many churches. There is a sense in which God's people today are asleep and in danger of dying in their sleep. The Spirit comes to awaken us from our slumbers. The Spirit comes to convict us of our sins. The Spirit comes to breathe new life into us. Churches touched by God's Spirit spring to life.

- Let your light shine before men - Matt. 5.16
- You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light - Eph. 5.8
- He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life - 2 Cor. 3.6
- I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God - Eph. 3.16-19
- Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil - 1 Thes. 5.19-22

The World

Christians are in the world, they are not of it. Sadly, we often allow worldly values to invade our churches. In spiritual warfare we may be captured and defeated by the enemy or collaborate with him. We can easily be guilty of compromise and even heresy. We can lack the courage to speak out and fail to admit that Jesus clearly pointed to the conflict between the Gospel and the world. We need a new boldness and readiness to be different if we are truly to be the Church of Christ today.

- No servant can serve two masters - Luke 16.13
- For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds - 2 Cor. 10.3-4
- If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him - 1 Jn. 2.15
- Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness - Phil. 2.5-7

Pilgrims

We are a pilgrim people on the move, travelling light. We need to discard unnecessary loads which may slow our progress. We must be ready to live dangerously and abandon the false security of the world. As travelling people we must be ever on the move, feeling the wind and sun on our faces.

- My presence will go with you and I will give you rest - Ex. 33.14
- The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you. - Dt 1.30
- At His command they would set out - Num. 9.20
- He brought His people out like a flock, He led them like sheep through the desert. He guided them safely, so they were unafraid - Ps. 78.52-53

- Do not be afraid for I am with you - Is. 43.5
- For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. Do not be afraid - Is. 41.13-14
- Teach me your way, O Lord and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart - Ps. 86.11

Prophecy

We walk in the footsteps of the Prophets and we have a prophetic message to proclaim today. We may have to walk the hard road. We may not be popular. We may be 'counter-culture'. We may be persecuted. We are called to step out in faith, ever seeking the truth.

- Speak to your countrymen - Ez 33.1
- Hear the word I speak and give them warning from me - Ez. 33.7
- I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? and who will go for us?' And I said 'here am I. Send me!' He said 'go and tell this people' - Is. 6.8-9
- The Lord reached out His hand and touched my mouth and said to me 'now I have put my words in your mouth' - Jer. 1.9
- I will make my words in your mouth a fire - Jer. 5.14

God's Call

God is not absent: He is present with His people today. He is not silent, He is speaking to us. We have an urgent need to encounter Him. We have an urgent need to hear His words of life. When we cry out to Him in repentance, He comes to revive and renew us. There is a pressing urgency about the call of God to His people today, as threatening and black storm clouds hover overhead. He comes to warn us of our crisis. He comes to reveal His glory.

- Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint - Is. 40.31
- 'I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh...they will be my people and I will be their God' - Ez. 11.19-20
- The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life - Jn 6.63
- Restore us, O God Almighty; make your face shine upon us that we may be saved - Ps. 80.7
- Lord I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy - Hab. 3.2
- The hour has come for you to waken from your slumber... - Rom. 13.11
- His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness - 2 Peter 1.3
- Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever! Amen - Eph. 3.20-21

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land". (2 Chronicles 7.14)