

**REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2008: MORNING SERVICE**

**Sing before:** Psalm 146:8

*Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:*

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

Psalm of praise: Psalm 89:1

**Confession of faith:** Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy catholic\* Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.

**Amen.**

*After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 119:63*

Law

Psalm: 119:63

**Prayer:**

- ***Doxology***
- ***Worship***
- ***Confession of sins***
- ***Forgiveness***
- ***Gratitude***
- ***Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.***
- ***General prayer***
- ***Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.***

**Amen**

Psalm: 40:6

**Scripture:** Luke 17

**Text:** Luke 17:5

*"The apostles said to the Lord, 'increase our faith!'"*

Increase our faith!

- That is not a mere exclamation – it is a prayer.
- And not only a prayer for more faith for my own benefit.
- Here it is a prayer for more faith so that I may have a better relationship with my neighbour.

When we celebrate Holy Communion one of the matters about which we must have certainty is our relationship with other people.

- Not without reason for people cause one another to stumble.
- Among Christians difficulties among people create difficulties in their spiritual and church life.

In verse 1 Jesus says that it is inevitable that things that cause people to sin will come but woe to those people who cause it.

- That is a serious warning.
- No believer may be a stumbling stone for a fellow believer.
- The Lord says that such a person should be put to death, thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck!

Are these not terrible words? The Greek word for stumbling stone is the same as for scandal.

- Somebody who causes a fellow believer to stumble causes a scandal in his faith.
- What makes it difficult for us to heed this warning is the fact that we are all subjected to sin – sooner or later we all give offence to our neighbour.

In this sermon the Lord Jesus Christ narrowed the circle.

A command annexed to the warning and which is more difficult to obey than to refrain from being a stumbling stone, is to be truly forgiving.

- Rebuke your brother and if he repents, forgive him.
- It is very difficult – even if he sins against you seven times in a day and he comes back to you and says that he repents you must forgive him every time.

That does not suit us, for we have claims and we are always in the right!

- It is difficult enough to stand back once and almost impossible to do so seven times in a row!

What matters is disposition:

- What is your heart like?
- How do you feel in your heart towards other people?

Mark well, all hypocrisy is eliminated because God knows your heart!

- This command is inexorable – the Lord demands of me complete forgiveness.
- So complete that the matter is concluded finally and forever.
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In Matthew 18:22 this command is put even more strictly than here for there the Lord says: *“I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times”*.

- The repetition of the number seven signifies the perfection in which the command is to be obeyed.
- It tells us how difficult the life of faith of a Christian is – especially when we remember that the command was not given only to the disciples but that it applies to us well.

Let us test our disposition – often people apologise to us. We say that we accept the apology, but we then tell our friends that we may not say what we think but that we have our opinion of that person.

- A true Christian may not do so for our heart and disposition, that what we think, must be sincere.
- Lord, increase our faith, so that with more faith we can purify the dark origins of our thoughts!

In 1 John 5:5 it is written that our faith overcomes the world.

- That startles us for we realise suddenly how little our faith has grown and how little we use.
- There is a reason:
  - to overcome in the power of faith one has to relinquish the world.
  - if one has not done that one remains entangled in the power of sin.
  - many of us continue to justify our sins so that we may have the comfort of material things.
  - we are so concerned about money, comfort and our rights that little spirituality or faith remains in us.

The passage from John presupposes that we should not only receive faith.

- There must not be only a working of faith in us.
- There must also be a vigorous demonstration of faith out of us.
- The fruits of our faith must radiate from us and overcome the world.

That is not impossible, for we remember that the Lord Jesus said that we can throw a tree into the sea if we have faith the size of a mustard seed. In another passage He says the same of a mountain.

- These things are therefore possible but require much energy.
- We shall have to put in much practise and concentration and sincerity before we achieve that ability.
- Not one of us has it.

That is why the disciples in dismay prayed the Lord to increase their faith.

Thereafter the Lord Jesus gives a practical example of a believer's relationship with his neighbour.

- He tells of a servant and his master.
- The master shows little pity for the servant and requires of him to do more work for him after he has completed his daily task in the field.
- The servant receives no thanks.

The servant is no better for he only does his duty.

- The Lord Jesus Christ says we are like that servant – unworthy servants for we have only done our duty.

We should apply this to ourselves before we sit down at the Lord's Supper.

- We must come to it with a prayer that the Lord forgives us all our sins.
- And we must pray that the Lord increases our faith.
- Lord, give me more childlike faith so that I may trust and appreciate my fellow man.
- Grant me the conviction that I may forgive seventy seven times in a day – though I am in the right.
- Give me faith that enables me to move mountains if I must do so to glorify You.

With more faith we shall see the richness of life! We so often see life only as the daily grind.

- We fail to see the glory of God that passes over us during the night. The Lord's almighty that causes the sun to rise over our life does not tell us anything about faith and love of God and of our neighbour.

Our Lord Jesus saved us from the kind of life in which we find ourselves:

- We use the night to rest so that the next day we can work for money.
- We use the light for our own gain and my neighbour is not part of the beauty of God's creation.

- The Lord Jesus Christ returns to us this cheerful experience that we who are here next to one another together belong to this God of glory.

You see, faith makes us see matters in a way that is different from that to which we have become accustomed in this world of sin and misery.

- The Holy Spirit tells us moment to moment that we must believe in the Lord Tri-une, for He died to restore this broken relationship between us and our neighbour and us and our God and us and creation.
- He teaches us to value ourself little so that we can more easily comply with the command to forgive our neighbour.
- He teaches us to perfect our worship with an increasing faith.

We ought to know that we must pray often for an increase in our faith because our faith is subjected to greater demands every day.

- Without faith the incomprehensibility of life becomes unbearable.
- Without faith we are unable to comprehend the error and sin of our neighbour.
- Without faith we are unable to truly forgive our neighbour his sins.

Only within the compass of faith will be able to see and comprehend that we received all these things from the Lord Jesus and that we must obey His command for we stand before Him worse than debtors.

Only a true faith will enable us not to lose our fellow believers in this world of political and cultural chaos, but to keep them.

- We need one another as never before since creation and this knowledge can only be born out of faith.
- We are now more dependent from God than ever before and only faith can keep us all tied to God in this torn world.

Most important is that only faith can open the correct doors for us in future.

- Because faith sets us free – it frees us from the stresses and strains of sin and all that it causes.
- On the other hand, faith is demanding – it demands the last drop of your strength, your insight, perseverance, even humiliation and worship.

Beloved, we must pray for an increase in our faith so that:

- Our worship of God may improve day by day.
- Our relationship with our fellow man may improve day by day.
- We ourselves may improve day by day.

That can happen only when our knowledge of and trust in God increases.

**Amen**

Closing prayer

Closing Psalm: 149:1

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**Amen**