

**ALMIGHTY** God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness, and live; and hath given power, and commandment, to his Ministers, to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins : He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel. Wherefore let us beseech him to grant us true repentance, and his Holy Spirit, that those things may please him, which we do at this present; and that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure, and holy; so that at the last we may come to his eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Saying Evening Prayer the other night, I was suddenly struck by one word in the Absolution. That word is *live*. *ALMIGHTY God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness, and live*. It doesn't say *turn from his wickedness and exist*. It doesn't say *turn from his wickedness and survive*, maybe survive the troubles of this world or perhaps survive the Last Judgment; It says *turn from his wickedness and live*. Knowing Jesus isn't simply about understanding how our existence can be possible. The knowledge of God isn't simply a matter of survival. To know Jesus is to have eternal life.

**Acts 4:** <sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. <sup>32</sup> And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. <sup>33</sup> And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, <sup>35</sup> And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

The early Church fizzed with eternal life. Christians effervesced. They overflowed with God's love. We're not really different from them. We are possessed of the same Holy Spirit. Our effervescent Christian life must be manifested in other ways than those in which the abundance of their life was revealed, but there is no reason at all why our Christian life should be any less ebullient than theirs. We may not meet daily as they did, sharing our goods, praying & breaking bread together, dividing the Word and experiencing miracles, but we are the children of the same God. We serve the same Lord. We are filled with the same Spirit.

*These things have I spoken unto you*, says Jesus not merely to His apostles, not merely to the first generation of Christians, *These things have I spoken unto you*, He says to every generation of Christians including us here and now in this parish in 2022, *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full* – that the sinner may turn from his wickedness and live.

*He hath given power, and commandment, to his Ministers, to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins*. This is a tremendous privilege and responsibility which God has given to us ministers, *to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins*. It is not, of course, we who forgive. It is God Who forgives. We merely pronounce God's Absolution and Remission of sins. When we do so, we generally make the sign of the Cross because it is only through the Cross of Jesus that our sins can be forgiven. God forgives us all our sins when we come to Him in penitence and faith because Jesus died for us on the Cross.

The old prayerbook is stark. The meaning is clear. Jesus said, *He that is not against us is on our part*. He also said, *He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad*. There you have it. We walk in the light or we walk in the dark. *He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel*. There is no fudge. If we wish to be forgiven, we must repent and believe. There's no two ways about it. Neither I nor any other minister of religion can

pronounce the absolution and remission of your sins unless you truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel.

I don't think we always full grasp this point that we must either walk in the dark or the light. Spiritual light and dark don't mix. Yet the temptation is to view ourselves and other people as dwelling in a sort of half light – a twilight zone. I guess most of us here are reasonably decent people. We don't perhaps feel like sinners. We maybe don't actually feel the need for thoroughgoing repentance. We're not in total darkness, but neither are we entirely in the light. We're in a mist, not perhaps a thick fog, but we are in a mist and we've got so used to it that we don't feel the need for a thoroughgoing repentance of everything in our lives which does not spring from perfect love. Maybe we can't honestly say we *are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; The burden of them is intolerable*. We need to ask ourselves if we are complacent Christians and, since we are less than perfect, to repent of everything in our lives which is unworthy of Jesus. Walk in the light.

*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. This is eternal life, the abundance of the joy which Jesus brings us. Thou shalt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is the fulness of joy : and at thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore.*

On the other hand, we may feel that there are some sinners who are beyond redemption, Vladimir Putin perhaps, but if we don't believe the words *The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives*, why do we sing them? Perhaps we think that nobody, not even in Hitler, is in total darkness, but that people like him are in a very much deeper twilight than we are, a thick fog, a peasouper much more dangerous than the morning mist in which we mostly dwell. Varying shades of grey rather than good honest light and dark.

But what if we admit that *We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us?* What happens when we acknowledge that we are *miserable offenders?* Well, we're set free. We no longer have to delude ourselves that we are just about good enough for God. We know that we cannot pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps and we know that we don't have to try. Our salvation depends wholly on God as would the salvation of Adolph Hitler or Vladimir Putin. *But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults. Restore thou them that are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord. But thou, O Lord. It all depends on Him. We can relax. We don't have to justify ourselves. He has done it all in Christ Jesus our Lord. Wherefore let us beseech him to grant us true repentance, and his Holy Spirit, that those things may please him, which we do at this present; and that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure, and holy; so that at the last we may come to his eternal joy.* It is all of God – our faith, our repentance, our forgiveness, our salvation. We rely on Him to do everything necessary to make our worship acceptable to Himself, to sanctify our lives on earth, and at last to bring us home to heaven, *through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*Thou shalt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is the fulness of joy : and at thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore.*