

The Lord's Brother

As we gather to worship today , our all to worship come from 1 John 5:11-12.

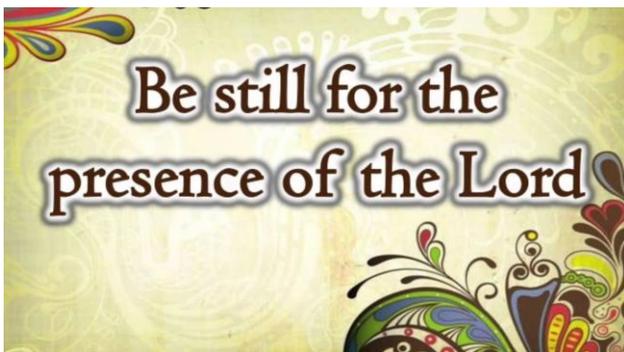
“This is the testimony in essence: God gave us eternal life; the life is in his Son. So, whoever has the Son, has life; whoever rejects the Son, rejects life.”

Take a moment to read the words of this song as come into worship today, words that were written by David J Evans in the 1980s. David was born in 1957 in Dartford, Kent. This is a song that calls us to tune out everything and focus on the Lord. The Holy One is here and nothing else matters.

The song is found in the **Church Hymnary 4** at number **189**.

Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here
Come bow before Him now
With reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here

Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire
With splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around



Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place.

Let's join in **prayer**:

Father God, I gather in your presence. I have missed being able to be in the church building that I so love. A place that brings me near to you, although I know you are always near to me, wherever I am. Yet this time away from the church building has felt strange and I come still anxious of the pandemic but with expectation, hungry for an encounter with you, eager to hear your Word.

Open my eyes and ears to the presence of your Holy Spirit. May the seeds of your Word scattered around me this morning, fall on fertile soil. May they take root in my heart and life, and produce an abundant harvest of good words and deeds.

Triune God, you are all in all; my wholeness and protection; You are everything to me. By your invitation of grace, I lay down before you the burdens I carry, the suffering I endure, the issues with which I wrestle, and the memories of past wrongs, hurts, shame and failures. May I know the touch of your hand, Lord Jesus Christ.

I confess my wrongs: my craving for earthly things, my insatiable need for worldly status, power and wealth, my words of malice and meanness, my shallow thoughts, and my pretence that I am better than I am. I am made for heaven, for life with you Risen, ascended Christ. I am made for fellowship with all the saints. You call me to be a bearer of the Divine image - nourish me, Holy Spirit with the peace and calmness in my spirit.

Lord, I am at home in you and that you make your dwelling-place in me. Hear my prayer of praise and confession in your name Jesus, my teacher and my Master. Amen.

~~~~~

The **Scripture Reading** today is firstly taken from the letter to the Galatians 1:18-19 from the NIV

Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles - only James, the Lord's brother.

Then from the Gospel of Matthew 13:53-58 and from the NIV

### **A Prophet Without Honour**

When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him.

But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour except in his own town and in his own home." And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

~~~~~

James, The Brother of the Lord.

During the lockdown and these few months we have not been able to gather in church, we have been reflecting on what it means to be an apostle, "one sent out" to tell the story of Jesus. We have been exploring the lives of some of the early church people we read about in the New Testament.

In Galatians 1:19, Paul refers to James, the brother of our Lord Jesus who is now one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. The New Testament repeatedly makes a distinction between the disciples of Jesus and his brothers. James, who is the Lord's brother, could not have been one of the twelve disciples. James, the disciple is either James, brother of John or James, the son of Alphaeus.

Jesus' four brothers are all mentioned by name in two Gospels. When Jesus returned to his home community, we are told the local people were amazed at his wisdom and miracles. They remarked, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? (Matt 13:55-56).

There are some who would wish to maintain the perpetual virginity of Mary and so hold that these brothers and sisters were really step brothers and step sisters. They are the children of Joseph by a previous marriage. Others argue that brother and sister here really means, "cousin". What does seem evident is that Mary bore other children because in Matthew he tells us that Joseph did not have sexual relations with Mary until she delivered "her first born" (Matt 1:25) and Luke writes of Mary delivering "her first born son" (Luke 2:7). Now if Mary never had other children, should Matthew and Luke not

have said "her only son"? The natural meaning would indicate that James was the son of Joseph and Mary. Jesus was miraculously virgin-born, but James was of natural descent.

Imagine the happiness of this home as the sons and daughters were born, each passing through the various stages of life - infancy, childhood, adolescence and young manhood and womanhood. James has the model of a perfect older brother in Jesus, who was obedient to His parents and who set a perfect example of godly living. I think James would have been greatly influenced by Jesus' life and this would leave a profound mark on his life, however, James and his brothers did not believe on Jesus during Jesus' lifetime. Their mother Mary was ever mindful of Jesus' miraculous conception: the visit by the shepherds and the wise men, the demonstration of her 12 year old's wisdom in dialoguing with the temple doctors, she had no trouble accepting His claims but his brothers reacted differently. At first perhaps, they rejoiced in his miracle of turning water into wine at Cana of Galilee, for they seem in good fellowship immediately following the wedding as they journeyed to Capernaum. (John 2:12)

We just cannot put our finger on the origin of their distrust nor can we trace its undeniable growth. By the time Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth and spoke in the synagogue there, His brothers and sisters seem to also share the populace's resentment of Jesus. (Luke 4:14-29) At one time his friends considered him mentally unbalanced and Jesus' brothers and mother came to shield Him and trying to take him home (Mark 3:21,31). Such ill-advised treatment by his own family led Jesus to assert: "Who is my mother and brothers? For whosoever shall do the will of God, they are my brothers, sisters and mother" (Mark 3:33-35) openly declaring that those who listened to his teachings eagerly and obediently were his real family.

Still later, just before the feast of Tabernacles, Jesus' brothers sneeringly suggested that Jesus go to Judea and perform miracles openly. Cynical advice which Jesus disregarded and John adds this comment of explanation, "For neither did His brothers believe in Him." (John 7:3-5) Did James take the lead in mocking Jesus? Someone once wisely said, those who live at the foot of a beautiful mountain rarely appreciate the glory and grandeur of its peak. No wonder Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house." (Matt 13:57)

For 30 years Jesus lived an exemplary life before the other members of the family. They could find no fault in Him. So why didn't James believe Jesus? How then do we explain the rejection? Perhaps five factors contributed to it.

Firstly, Jesus would have been severe on every form of evil. He practised avid self-denial. He devoted much of his spare time to prayer. Did his brothers and sisters find his high standards far too demanding for them?

Secondly, Jesus denounced the religious leaders of the day for their hypocrisy and hardness of heart.

Thirdly, Jesus welcomed sinners, like tax collectors who were considered dishonest, scum of society who lined their pockets and were collaborators with the Roman authorities.

Fourthly, Jesus claimed to be the promised One, the fulfilment of all the Old Testament prophecies of the coming redeemer, with statements like, "Before Abraham was, I am". Or his remarks about how he would one day raise the dead by the power of his voice and that all people would stand before him as Judge.

Fifthly, James might not have been prepared for the suddenness of Jesus' ministry. For 30 years Jesus' life had gone on uneventfully until the last three years of Jesus' life when He made such graphic claims.

What was it that catapulted Jesus from the obscurity of a carpenter in a little Galilean town to the status of a Rabbi, a prophet, and ultimately, the long expected Messiah? Perhaps we should not be too hard on James and his sibling as they puzzled in unbelief over their brother's recent change of behaviour.

A story is told of a truck driver driving home one evening. A lady noticed this truck tailgating her car. When she sped up or slowed down, the truck driver did the same. When she exited the carriageway and ran a red light, he followed her. Panicking, she drove into a service station and screamed for help. The truck driver sprang from his cab, pulled open her back door, and pulled out a man hidden in her backseat. From his high cab seat, the driver had seen the would-be-attacker in the woman's car. The chase was to rescue, not to harm her. The driver had had a watchful eye and the lady had been running from the wrong person.

James too, had been running from the wrong person. We are not sure at what point the light broke through and James came to believe on Jesus. Through all the months of James' unbelief, Jesus had His eye on his brother. An ancient tradition places James at the last Passover meal and what seems to have solidified James' faith once and for all was Jesus' special appearance to him after the resurrection. Paul made a special point to tell us that the risen Christ was seen by James (1 Cor.15:7). Jesus knew some penetrating ray of light was needed to drive away the smog of doubt. So he appeared as tenderly to James as he did to Thomas. Perhaps James was filled with remorse for his unbelief and he needed the consolation of Christ. What a moment when James met the risen Messiah, not only his brother, but also as his Master.

Why did Jesus make a special appearance to James? I think that having seen the resurrected Christ, James could now influence his sibling to accept Jesus as their Saviour and Messiah too. Evidently, the brothers were converted immediately, for they were present in the Upper Room with their mother Mary, and the apostles, all waiting for the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. (Acts 1:14)

James' conversion should be an encouragement to all with long time unsaved loved ones. Jesus did not win His brother James or his other sibling during his life time. Not until after Jesus' death do they appear among the believing group. Yet Jesus did not give up, for James went on to become a great leader in the Church in Jerusalem as we shall discover next Sunday. It's never too late to share Jesus with family and loved one – you and I never know what the power of God's spirit can and will do.

~~~~~

Join now with this **prayer of thanksgiving and intercession**

Listening God, you call me to come to you with my prayers for others. And I do so in a spirit of gratitude for all the ways your grace and mercy fills my life.

I thank you Father God, for creation, and for all the blessings of this life, and, most of all, for your boundless love in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, my redeeming presence. Give me a constant awareness of your mercy. Call me to take time to immerse myself in your grace. Make me aware of signs and symbols of your love in action.

Loving God, in Jesus Christ you taught me to pray and to offer petitions to you in Jesus' name. Guide me by your Holy Spirit that my prayers for others may serve your will. You made all things in your wisdom, and, in your love, you saved and all people. So I pray for all creation, that evil powers might be cast down, that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness might be fed, and that all your children might enjoy in equal measure the fruits of your world.

I pray for the Church. Keep us one in faith and service, so that your Good News might be proclaimed, and so that your love and light might be beacons of hope and purpose in the darkest places. I cannot love you fully unless I love my neighbours as myself. So I pray for my enemies and my friends; I pray for all those in need, in body, mind and spirit; I pray for all who suffer from pain and sorrow; especially any known to me whom I name before You now.

*Silence*

God of compassion, bless me and those I love, that, drawing close to you, I may be drawn closer to others. Hold me always in communion with the Saints of all the ages, especially those dear to me, in the one Kingdom of your love.

In Jesus' name I pray and in the words he taught me saying;

Our Father ..... Amen



**A Blessing** - inspired by Matthew 10:40-42

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me.  
Quench my thirst for love,  
Satisfy my need to be known,  
Assure me that I am indeed a prophet of welcome.

Go now to proclaim this peace in God's name,  
with the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit upon you now and always. Amen.