

Sunday 7th. January 2018 The Epiphany of our Lord

This morning's Service is led by the Revd Canon Adrian Alker

Pulpit Elder: Ann Cathels Organist: Douglas Jones Crèche: Jean Dickson Flowers: Seasonal decorations

Welcome to St Andrew's Church.

We hope you will quickly feel at home here, enjoy the service and discover new friends.

The church has an audio induction loop. To use it, please turn your hearing-aid to its T setting.

Children are welcome to join the crèche or special activities in the Garden Room, after the first part of the service. The service is fully audible there. There is also a carpeted area in church with toys for young children.

You are warmly invited to stay for tea or coffee in the hall after the service. You are also invited to sign our Visitors' Book, near the main door.

Order of service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices

Call to worship:

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Hymn: R&S 181 Of the Father's love begotten Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Hymn: Songs of thankfulness and praise (on sheet)

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

The Old Testament reading: Isaiah 60. 1 – 6 The Gospel reading: Matthew 2. 1 - 12

Carol Kings of Orient (on sheet) Traditional English melody arranged by Douglas Jones.

The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 183 Brightest and best of the Sons of the morning (Second tune)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:

The Lord's Prayer: (inside back cover of Rejoice and Sing.) The Offertory

Doxology: R&S 21

Hymn: The first Nowell (on sheet).

Benediction

Three-fold Amen

Notices

Robert Beard is in the vestry every Monday morning 9.am – 1.pm for anyone who

would like to talk to him.

The flower and coffee rotas for 2018 are on the hall notice board. Please see Jean Dickson if you can help with flowers and Kathleen Smyth if you can help with coffee.

Sunday January 14th.10.45am Morning worship led by The Revd. Robert Beard. There will be a church meeting after the service.

Friday January 19th.7.00pm – 8.00pm in the church. 'Chamber music at twilight' featuring Ruth Gibson, an internationally acclaimed viola player both as soloist and ensemble member (including Sheffield based Ensemble 360) and winner of many awards. Refreshments served. Suggested donation of £7 on the door. This is the third in Anabelle Lawson's 'In: spire Chamber music at twilight' series of concerts which are attracting growing audiences.

Judith Adam is preparing the service sheets for January. Please let her have any notices or changes to duties.

Contact information

Pastoral Adviser: Revd Robert Beard
0114 255 6335 arjay61@hotmail.com Church Secretary: Elizabeth Draper
0114 230 7252 elizdraper@btinternet.com Lettings Officer: Ian Cooke

0114 262 0718 i.d.cooke@sheffield.ac.uk Website: www.standrewschurchsheffield.org.uk We are also on Facebook and Twitter

14th. January 2018 **First Sunday after the Epiphany**

This morning's Service is led by the Revd Robert Beard

Pulpit Elder: Sheila Dunstan Organist: Douglas Jones Crèche: Wilma Love Flowers: Seasonal decorations

Welcome to St Andrew's Church.

We hope you will quickly feel at home here, enjoy the service and discover new friends.

The church has an audio induction loop. To use it, please turn your hearing-aid to its T setting.

Children are welcome to join the crèche or special activities in the Garden Room, after the first part of the service. The service is fully audible there. There is also a carpeted area in church with toys for young children.

You are warmly invited to stay for tea or coffee in the hall after the service. You are also invited to sign our Visitors' Book, near the main door.

Order of service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices.

Call to Worship

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Hymn: HS 6 O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness Prayers of Adoration and Confession
The Old Testament reading: 1 Samuel 3: 1 - 10
Hymn: CG 50 I, the Lord of sea and sky

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

Psalm 139: 1-6, 13 - 18 (please join in the words in bold type): O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,

O Lord, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
I try to count them – they are more than the sand;
I come to the end – I am still with you.

Hymn: R&S 731 You are before me, Lord

The New Testament reading: 1 Corinthians 6: 12 - 20

The Gospel reading: John 1: 43 - 51

The Anthem: 'Who is he in yonder stall' (Words by B. Russell Hanby, Tune 'Resonet in Laudibus'
from Piae Cantiones of 1582.)

The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 285 O for a thousand tongues to sing

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Lord's Prayer: R&S – inside back cover

The Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

Hymn: HS 5 Trumpet of God, sound high

The Benediction and Three-fold Amen

Urgent request

Fatih, one of our St. Andrew's family, and his wife and young baby, need to move out of their
present accommodation by the end of January and they have not been

assessed by the Council. Do you know of anyone who could help them temporarily? If so,
please speak to Robert Beard.

Notices

Next Sunday's service marks the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and will be led the Revd.
Sue Hammersley. After the service there will be a bring and share lunch at St. Mark's Church.
St. Andrew's members are asked to bring puddings to share.

Friday 19th. January 7.00pm – 8.00pm in the church. A recital by Ruth Gibson, an
internationally acclaimed viola player both as soloist and ensemble member. Ruth has won
many awards, has performed around the world and is a member of Sheffield based Ensemble
360. She will be accompanied by pianist Annabelle Lawson. This is the third in the 'In: spire
Chamber music at twilight' series of concerts organised by Annabelle. Refreshments served.
Suggested donation of £7 (cash only) on the door.

Robert Beard is in the vestry every Monday morning 9.00am – 1.00pm for anyone who would like to talk to him.

The flower and coffee rotas for 2018 are on the hall notice board. Please see Jean Dickson if you can help with flowers and Kathleen Smyth if you can help with coffee.

Judith Adam is preparing the service sheets for January. Please let her have any notices or changes to duties.

Contact information

Pastoral Adviser: Revd Robert Beard
0114 255 6335 arjay61@hotmail.com

Church Secretary: Elizabeth Draper
0114 230 7252 elizdraper504@btinternet.com

Lettings Officer: Ian Cooke
0114 262 0718 i.d.cooke@sheffield.ac.uk

Website: www.standrewsurcsheffield.org.uk We are also on facebook and twitter

A sermon preached on the Second Sunday after Epiphany 14 January 2018

Identifying Jesus

John 1.43-51

As I'm sure you all know, we are currently in Lectionary Year B, in which many of our Sunday Gospel readings are found in the St Mark's gospel. Every so often, however, the compilers of the Revised Common Lectionary have decided to present us with a passage from St John's gospel. Because these readings from St John are spread throughout the year, it's helpful to spend a few moments looking at their preceding context, in order to make better sense of them.

The Gospel of John opens with the familiar Prologue:
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...

John 1.1-18 This is followed in chapter 1 by four events, beginning with St John the Baptist's witness to

Jesus (1.19-28) beside the river Jordan. Then St John the Evangelist introduces three scenes in rapid succession, each opening with the phrase, "The next day..." (Perhaps there's an echo here of Genesis chapter 1, paralleling the successive days of revelation with the successive days of creation, but I'd not want to press this too hard.)

1. The first "next day" text presents the titles of Jesus uttered by John the Baptist (1.29- 34)
2. The second "next day" text presents the invitation and promise of Jesus (1.35-42)
3. The third "next day" text presents the invitations of Jesus to Philip and Nathanael and the promise of the Son of Man (1.43-51), and this is today's gospel reading.

This sequence of texts is significant because, following the Prologue, John – both Johns, in fact: the Evangelist and the Baptist – continue to bear witness to Jesus' identity, which will be fully revealed as the gospel unfolds. As we come to this morning's reading, Jesus has already been

revealed as “the Lamb of God” (1.29, 36), “the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit” (1.33), “the Son of God” (1.34) and “Rabbi” (1.38), and we’ll return to the seemingly simple title “Rabbi” a little later.

The first words Jesus speaks in St John’s gospel comprise a question. John’s gospel was written anything up to ninety years after the Crucifixion, so the question he records is one addressed not only to the first Christian disciples, but to the disciples of his own time, and to every subsequent reader or hearer since then, including us. The question is phrased very simply: “What are you looking for?” (1.38). It’s a question that will be answered throughout the gospel, as Jesus himself revealed as ‘what we are looking for’.

The question is followed, not by an answer, but by an invitation and a promise: “Come and see!” (1.39). The promise is more evident in John’s original Greek, which might be better translated, “Come and you will see!” And, just as the question is addressed to all Jesus’ disciples down through the ages, so also these words of invitation and promise are spoken not only to his first followers, but to everyone who hears his words. There is also an implicit word of guidance here for Christian mission and ministry – don’t just tell people about the love of God in Jesus Christ; invite them to come with you, but you’d better make sure you have something worth showing them! The invitation and promise are no less the context for the revelation of Jesus’ identity now, in the twenty-first century, than they were then, in the first.

This morning’s reading is set in Galilee, where Jesus calls Philip, with the familiar discipleship invitation, “Follow me” (1.43). John makes a link here between Philip and the disciples Andrew and Peter (1.44), noting that they were all from Bethsaida, probably the eponymous fishing town on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. Philip then goes to find Nathanael and tells him who he believes Jesus to be:

“We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

John 1.45

Interestingly, Philip’s words not only proclaim Jesus as the one who fulfils the expectation of the Jewish scriptures, but also identify him as the son of his earthly father, Joseph, from the Galilean town of Nazareth. This provokes Nathanael to the kind of response that southerners stereotypically have to anyone or anything from “oop north” – “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” – but Philip dismisses Nathanael’s sceptical assessment of Nazareth by repeating Jesus’ own invitation and promise, “Come and you will see” (1.46).

When Jesus meets Nathanael, he immediately recognises him as “an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” (1.47). He sees in Nathanael a person without guile, someone who can be relied upon to speak the truth.

Nathanael is bewildered by Jesus’ knowledge of him, and asks, “Where did you come to know me?” Jesus responds, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you” (1.48). This has sometimes been interpreted as indicating Jesus’ divine omniscience, but the fig tree traditionally denotes a place associated where rabbis study the Torah. As we noted earlier, Jesus has already been identified by the title “Rabbi”, and perhaps he – or John – intended his reference to the fig tree to reflect his role as the supreme teacher of the Jewish Law.

At any rate, Nathanael immediately makes his own act of witness to Jesus’ identity in the words, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (1.49). It’s such a rush of acclamations that it’s tempting to picture Nathanael as an enthusiastic puppy, the words tumbling out of his mouth in unrestrained excitement. Twice now, Jesus has been identified as “Rabbi” (cp. 1.36). Twice now, Jesus has been identified as “Son of God” (cp. 1.34). But Nathanael’s witness breaks new ground, too, as he identifies Jesus as “King of Israel”. There is a sombre foreshadowing here of Jesus’ passion and death, in which he is mocked as “King of the Jews” by Pontius Pilate, who subsequently writes “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” as the charge against Jesus which is placed on his cross (John 19.19-22).

Jesus himself doesn't treat his own remark about seeing Nathanael under the fig tree as anything very wonderful:

"Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these."

John 1.50 This promise is only spoken to Nathanael, as denoted by the singular form of "you" in the

Greek; modern English, of course, makes no distinction between the singular and plural forms of "you" (except in certain Yorkshire communities).

The final verse in our gospel reading completes this whole section, in which John presents the invitation and promise that Jesus offers. Now Jesus' words are spoken in a form that embraces both the first disciples and all subsequent disciples, ourselves included:

"Very truly, I tell you [plural], you [plural] will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

John 1.51

Immediately, we are transported back to the story of Jacob's Ladder in the book of Genesis. Jacob lies down to sleep, places a rock under his head for a pillow, and then has a vivid dream of a staircase connecting earth and heaven, upon which angels are continually ascending and descending. On awakening, he sets up the rock as a pillar to mark the place, which he names Bethel (בֵּיתֵאל, beth-el), meaning "the house of God" (Genesis 28.10-17). It's a wonderful image of the dynamic relationship between God and humanity, because it illustrates how God's communication with us is not a sporadic, occasional phenomenon, but a continuous and unending exchange, symbolised by the constant motion of God's angels (ἄγγελοι, angeloi) or "messengers".

For Christians, however, it is not a ladder but Jesus himself who now joins heaven to earth. Jesus himself is the house in which God lives. Moreover, Jesus is the "Son of Man", who will be lifted up (cf. John 3.14, 8.23, 12.32-34) on the cross, so that the cross becomes a new pillar, marking the place where the relationship between heaven and earth is most clearly seen, and upon which Christ completes the work of the Father, as he declares, "It is finished" .)19.30(

This opening chapter of John's gospel guides us on the start of our journey, as we follow Jesus to the ultimate fulfilment of his invitation and promise: "Come and you will see".

Revd Robert Beard BD

21st. January 2018 Epiphany 3 and Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

This morning's Service is led by the Revd Sue Hammersley

Pulpit Elder: Ian Cooke Organist: Douglas Jones Crèche: Isabel Sandland Flowers: Seasonal decorations

Welcome to St Andrew's Church. We hope you will quickly feel at home here, enjoy the service and discover new friends.

The church has an audio induction loop. To use it, please turn your hearing-aid to its T setting.

Children are welcome to join the crèche or special activities in the Garden Room, after the first part of the service. The service is fully audible there. There is also a carpeted area in church with toys for young children.

You are warmly invited to stay for tea or coffee in the hall after the service. You are also invited to sign our Visitors' Book, near the main door.

Order of service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices.

Call to Worship

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Hymn: R&S 489 Be Thou my vision

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

The Old Testament reading: Jonah 3 vv 1 – 5 and 10 Hymn: R&S 355 Jesus calls us o'er the tumult

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

Psalm 62 – Taize (on separate sheet)

The New Testament reading: 1 Corinthians 7 vv 29 – 31

Hymn: R&S 558 Will you come and follow me

The Gospel reading: Mark 1 vv 14 – 20

The Anthem: A prayer of St. Richard of Chichester (L. J. White)

The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 200 The Kingdom of God is justice and joy (Tune – Hanover)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession The Lord's Prayer: R&S – inside back cover The Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21 Hymn: R&S 195 Lord of the Dance

The Benediction and Three-fold Amen Notices

Next Sunday's service marks Homelessness Sunday and has been planned by St. Andrew's Worship Group. The Revd. Robert Beard will lead worship and our guest speaker will be Coral Sanderson, from NOMAD, a charity working with homeless people.

Robert Beard is in the vestry every Monday morning, 9.00am to 1.00pm, for anyone who would like to talk to him.

The flower and coffee rotas for 2018 are on the hall notice board. Please see Jean Dickson if you can help with the flowers and Kathleen Smyth if you can help with coffee.

Judith Adam is preparing the service sheet for January 28th. Please let her have any notices and changes to duties.

Contact information

Pastoral Adviser: Revd Robert Beard
0114 255 6335 arjay61@hotmail.com

Church Secretary: Elizabeth Draper
0114 230 7252 elizdraper504@btinternet.com

Lettings Officer: Ian Cooke
0114 262 0718 i.d.cooke@sheffield.ac.uk

Website: www.standrewsurcsheffield.org.uk We are also on facebook and twitter

SERMON St Andrew's, 21 January, 2018

Jonah 3.1-5,10; 1 Corinthians 7.29-31; Mark 1.14-20

The material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018 has been produced in the Caribbean. I begin by quoting from it:

“There are 1.4 million Christians living in the Caribbean region, across a vast geographical spread of island and mainland territories. They represent a rich and diverse tapestry of ethnic, linguistic and religious traditions, with a complex variety of governmental and constitutional arrangements.

The contemporary context is deeply marked by the history of colonialism which stripped people of their identity, dignity and freedom. Christian missionary activity, closely tied to the colonial system, seemed to support, encourage and excuse it. During these five-hundred years, scripture was used to justify the enslavement of the indigenous people. In a dynamic reversal, those same scriptures became the inspiration and motivation for people to reclaim their liberty.

Like the Israelites, the people of the Caribbean have a song of victory and freedom to sing. Yet, contemporary challenges continue to enslave and threaten the dignity of the people. Many of the contemporary challenges are the legacy of the colonial past. The Caribbean economies have traditionally been based upon the production of materials for the European market – sometimes producing only a single commodity.

They have never been self-sustaining and their development has required borrowing on the international market. The servicing of the debt has caused a reduction in spending upon the development that it was meant to facilitate.

Abuses of human rights are found across the region and we are challenged to consider our manner of welcoming the stranger into our midst. Human trafficking and modern-day slavery continue to be huge issues. Addiction to drugs and pornography, are serious challenges to all societies. The debt crisis has a negative impact upon nations and upon individuals – their economies have both become precarious. Family life continues to be challenged by the economic restrictions which lead to migration, domestic abuse and violence.

The Caribbean Churches work together to heal the wounds in the body of Christ. Reconciliation demands repentance, reparation and the healing of memories. The whole Church is called to be both a sign and an active agent of this reconciliation.”

Our Service today has picked up the theme of being loved, following Christ and loving others. Our Bible readings speak of change:
In the passage from Jonah, we hear that God changed his mind and saved the Ninevites from the destruction God had planned;

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians we hear of the urgency of accepting the message of salvation – for the present form of this world is passing away;
In the Gospel reading from the beginning of Mark, we hear Jesus urging repentance – a change of heart, a change of mind, turning away from that which is familiar towards a new way of life: turning away from fishing nets to follow Jesus.

When we stop for a moment and consider our own lives, the habits we have come to rely on, the values we live by, the people we trust... very few of us would describe ourselves as revolutionaries... we tend to keep our eyes on the furrow we're ploughing and don't suddenly start the next row diagonally across the field. Those who do behave erratically are considered

trouble-makers or deemed to be unfit in one way or another – depending on their age or state of mind...

Change can be exceptionally difficult to handle – not least when it is accompanied by illness, misunderstanding, social isolation, loss of one kind or another. Confronting significant change can be painful... But it can also be creative and life-giving.

I find it hard to imagine what it must have been like at the time when slavery was being challenged. Slavery suited the western world, it allowed the merchants and their/our economy to get richer, to build their empires – it even allowed them to have enough money to do good works. Slavery was accepted as a norm, upheld within the Bible and justified by a patriarchal society which diminished the value of black African and Caribbean people, with dire consequences.

Changing the mindset of those with power and authority took several decades and a great deal of courage and hard work. It is hard for us to look back and imagine how difficult it would have been to convince good Christian men and women that the people they saw as very different from themselves were actually just the same – their brothers and sisters, in fact.

In this week of prayer for Christian Unity I find myself wondering what contemporary issues enslave us and our fellow human beings.

What issues diminish our own potential or that of those around us? I am still troubled by the events within the Anglican Diocese of Sheffield which took place at the beginning of last year over the nomination of a bishop with traditionalist views, which made me speak up about the equality of women'

I found it hard to make a scene, even though it was something I was passionate about, understood well and believed to be an injustice. I knew that rocking the boat would cause pain to others and potentially exclude a minority whose view was very different from my own.

Does unity invariably mean compromise, finding the lowest common denominator, or can unity allow us to find a better way of relating to one another, even when we profoundly disagree? I am not sure that I can answer that yet.

It is something which I am struggling with again now because of our different attitudes, within the church, towards human sexuality.

Throughout the history of the human race, people have had different experiences of gender and sexuality.

We think we are being progressive but some of the ancient native American tribes have much richer understandings of gender than the binary male/female, I believe that one tribe understood there to be five genders.

In our own times, we know that there are some people who feel that the descriptions of male or female simply don't work for them and that can create a terrible social isolation. Other people feel that they were born in the wrong body – a man in a female body or a woman in a male body. These days we are more open to conversations about gender and transgender, within schools and GP practices but people still suffer appalling misunderstanding and rejection.

In society at large we seem to be more understanding of different sexual orientations - that many people are not attracted to the opposite sex but to someone with whom they can identify more closely.

It's complicated and it's changing and so it's unsettling.

I believe that we, in the church, have got to find a way of engaging with these issues, theologically, sensitively and pastorally. It would seem that the church has a way of attracting those of us who are more resistant to change but there are times when we have to come out of our comfort zones and face up to realities which we would rather ignore.

The people of the Caribbean are encouraging us to face up to modern day slavery and they include among that, addiction and domestic violence. I would like to add sexuality. One way in which we enslave our fellow human beings is by telling them that they have to identify with a particular gender or sexual orientation because that's what the bible tells us is right.

It is dangerous when we use the bible as a weapon to maintain the status quo, as it suits us. Our readings this morning, from the Hebrew scriptures, from one

of Paul's letters and from the gospel of Mark, paint a very different picture. They talk of radical change, of allowing God to reach out to those we might not immediately think would be invited to God's banquet.

Do we think that God needs protecting from people who break the rules?

It would seem that Jesus was pretty good at breaking all kinds of rules about who was in and who was out...

As people of faith we must constantly be alert to what God is doing, not what we think God ought to be doing. It is a risk to follow the God who is present on earth, the God who challenges us in those who are most unlike us, those with whom we most profoundly disagree...

Here at St Andrew's you face another period of change and the challenges that presents to you. I hope and pray that you will also find it is a time of new opportunities.

As fishermen are called to leave their nets and follow an itinerant preacher perhaps all of us are being called to think again about the things we take for granted, our health, our success, our identity, our faith, our church, and listen again to the God who calls us to step out in faith...

I was recently reminded of a quote from an Aboriginal woman called Lilla Watson, with which I end:

"If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time.

But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

28th. January 2018 Epiphany 4 and Homelessness Sunday Order of Service

This morning's Service has been planned by the Worship Group and is led by The Revd. Robert Beard.

Pulpit Elder: Raymond Smyth Organist: Douglas Jones Crèche: Shelagh Beach Flowers:
Seasonal decorations

Welcome to St Andrew's Church. We hope you will quickly feel at home here, enjoy the service and discover new friends.

The church has an audio induction loop. To use it, please turn your hearing-aid to its T setting.

Children are welcome to join the crèche or special activities in the Garden Room, after the first part of the service. The service is fully audible there. There is also a carpeted area in church with toys for young children.

You are warmly invited to stay for tea or coffee in the hall after the service. You are also invited to sign our Visitors' Book, near the main door.

Our guest speaker is Coral Sanderson from NOMAD.

Order of service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices.

Call to Worship

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Hymn: R&S 192 Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Hymn: R&S 500 Jesus, united by thy grace

The Old Testament reading: Texts relating to hospitality

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

Psalm 84 vv 1 – 8 (please join in the words in bold type) How dear is thy dwelling-place, thou LORD of Hosts!

I pine, I faint with longing for the courts of the LORD'S temple; my whole being cries out with joy to the living God.

Even the sparrow finds a home,

and the swallow has her nest,

where she rears her brood beside thy altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God.

Happy are those who dwell in thy house; they never cease from praising thee.

Happy the men whose refuge is in thee, whose hearts are set on the pilgrim ways! As they pass through the thirsty valley they find water from a spring;

and the LORD provides even men who lose their way with pools to quench their thirst.

So they pass on from outer wall to inner,

and the God of gods shows himself in Zion.

O LORD, God of Hosts, hear my prayer; listen, O God of Jacob.

Hymn: R&S 703 How lovely is thy dwelling place The Gospel reading: Matthew 25: 31 – 46

The Anthem: He that is down needs fear no fall

(Christopher Tambling)

The work of NOMAD

Hymn: CG 4 Let us build a house where love can dwell Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Lord's Prayer: R&S – inside back cover

The Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

Hymn: R&S 520 For ourselves no longer living

The Benediction and Three-fold Amen

An appeal for help

Fatih, one of our St. Andrew's family, and his wife and baby, have to leave their temporary home by the end of this month. The Council has offered them a single room in B&B accommodation which is far from adequate. If you know of anyone who can help even on a temporary basis with better accommodation please speak to Robert Beard.

Notices

Next Sunday's service is a celebration of Holy Communion and will be led by The Revd. Dr. David Stec. There will be a Tradecraft stall in the hall.

Robert Beard is in the vestry every Monday morning, 9.00am to 1.00pm, for anyone who would like to talk to him.

The flower and coffee rotas for 2018 are on the hall notice board. Please see Jean Dickson if you can help with the flowers and Kathleen Smyth if you can help with coffee.

Jean Dickson is preparing the service sheets for February. Please let her have any notices and changes to duties.

Contact information

Pastoral Adviser: Revd Robert Beard

0114 255 6335 arjay61@hotmail.com

Church Secretary: Elizabeth Draper

0114 230 7252 elizdraper504@btinternet.com

Lettings Officer: Ian Cooke

0114 262 0718 i.d.cooke@sheffield.ac.uk

Website: www.standrewsurcsheffield.org.uk We are also on facebook and twitter

SERMON St Andrew's 4.02.18 1

Isa 40:21-31 Mark 1: 29-39

Isaiah 40:25 “To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.”

“To whom then will you compare me?” – This is a profound question, when it is the Holy One who asks it.

The English word compare comes from the Latin, meaning “to make or esteem equal”.

In Isa 40:25 the Hebrew word translated compare means literally “to make like”.

You can only compare something which is similar, or at least has some superficial similarity, otherwise you would be making a contrast between things which are dissimilar.

It is not always easy compare things, particularly those which are very complex.

For example, when you have an insurance policy which is due for renewal, and your insurance company has quoted a price which seems much too high, you might want to look around to see if you can get a better deal.

If your only concern is the amount you need to pay, then it probably will be quite easy to find another company quoting a better price.

But insurance policies are fiendishly complicated documents, and it can be very difficult to compare like with like.

Moreover, some companies have a better reputation than others for dealing with customers and settling claims, and you may wish to take this into account when making a choice.

Likewise, if you are thinking of changing your energy supplier, it is by no means a straightforward matter to compare the many different tariffs on offer.

Of course, nowadays you can make use of price-comparison websites to make such comparisons much easier, but they are only of limited use.

Whenever I use these websites, I am always left wondering whether the policies or contracts which come out on top are those likely to make the most in commission for the website, and whether perhaps the best deal of all lies out there somewhere in a location not listed on the website.

But if in our modern world we sometimes have to make complex comparisons, the prophet behind Isaiah 40 had no such problem.

He challenges the recipients of his message to make a comparison which is simple and straightforward, and yet at the same time also impossible.

“To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.”

This question was addressed to Judaeans exiles in Babylon.

After they had got over the initial trauma of being uprooted from their homeland and planted in a foreign land, they and their next generation would surely have been impressed by some of the things which surrounded them.

There they were at the centre of one of the foremost civilisations of the ancient world, with all its impressive architecture, art and learning.

If the writings of the prophet behind Isa 40-55 are anything to go by, we can surmise that the Judaeans were particularly impressed by the trappings of Babylonian religion.

This prophet several times refers to the skilled work of the craftsmen who made idols from wood and metal.

The exiles could look around them and see beautifully crafted images of Babylonian gods placed in their impressive shrines.

What did the exiles have in place of these?

An invisible God, who prohibited the making of images of himself, and who insisted that the centre of his worship was at the temple in Jerusalem which was (even as the crow flies) some 500 miles away, and which lay in ruins.

Some of the exiles, who supposed that their long-term future lay in their new surroundings, might well have wanted to assimilate, and might have been tempted to adopt the worship of Babylonian gods as a part of this process.

Thus the prophet more than once engages in a polemic against the worship of idols.

These are only wood or metal objects made by humans.

The craftsman might well take wood from the same tree and use some of it to make an idol and some of it to burn as fuel to warm himself or for cooking.

These idols can do nothing, and if they need to be moved, they have to be carried on beasts.

The God of Israel cannot be possibly compared with these idols or the gods which they represent.

“ ‘To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him?’ says the Holy One”.

It is the Holy One who poses this question, and as such he is utterly incomparable.

It is he who created all things, and it is he who is in control of the events of history.

In the words of our prophet: “It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nought, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing ... Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary, his understanding is unsearchable.” (40:22-23, 28).

This God, who is in control of the events of history, is working towards the fulfilment of a purpose, and as a part of his fulfilment of that purpose, he is about to act to bring his people back home from their exile in Babylon.

When we move forward in time by about 550 years, we see the beginning of an entirely new phase in the fulfilment of God’s purpose.

Our Gospel reading has its setting right at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee.

In the immediately preceding passage (Mark 1:21-28), Jesus was in Capernaum, teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and Mark tells us that they were amazed at his teaching, because he taught not like one of their scribes, but as one who had authority.

His authority is seen when a man, described as having an unclean spirit, cries out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”

At this Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit and it comes out of him, and in amazement, those present exclaim, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

It is at this point that our Gospel lesson begins.

Jesus leaves the synagogue, and enters the house of Simon and Andrew.

Simon's mother-in-law lies sick with a fever, and Jesus heals her.

We are then told: "That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered together about the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him." (Mark 1:32-34).

Here St Mark presents us with a glimpse of the dawning of God's kingdom in the ministry of Jesus.

The unclean spirit possessing the man in the synagogue recognises him as Jesus of Nazareth, and declares him to be "the Holy One of God".

We may recall that St Mark has opened his Gospel with the words, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Thus the reader of the Gospel knows right from the first verse who Jesus is, but as he begins his teaching ministry those who listen to him do not yet know this.

It becomes plain only when Jesus performs his first act of healing.

Not only does the spirit possessing the man declare Jesus to be "the Holy One of God", but it shows itself to be subject to his authority, as it comes out of the man at the rebuke of Jesus.

In the thought of the time, illness was caused by the possession of demons.

These demons were under the control of the devil or Satan, who thus held considerable sway in the present world-order.

But as soon as Jesus came onto the scene and started to cast out these demons in his acts of healing, this was the beginning of a new world order.

It was nothing other than dawning of the kingdom of God.

For Jesus's acts of healing were a practical demonstration of the rule of God.

The prophet in Isaiah 40 presents to us a God who is utterly incomparable because of his work in creation and his control of the events of history.

And in chapter 1 of his Gospel, St Mark presents Jesus to us, as God's own Son, demonstrating the supreme power of God by casting out demons, and thus declaring that God's kingdom has arrived.

SERMON ST ANDREW'S URC

11 FEBRUARY 2018 NEXT BEFORE LENT TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

This Sunday is designated Racial Justice Sunday, Church Action on Poverty Sunday, the Sunday next before Lent. We have two substantial passages from scripture, the ascension of Elijah into heaven and the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain top. And so over the next three hours I will try to do justice to these themes, whilst the rest of you go and enjoy your Sunday lunch!

This city owes a huge debt to the work of Grace and John Vincent in the more deprived areas of Sheffield. I long remember inviting John to preach at one Ascension Day evening service at St Mark's when we had the story of the Transfiguration as our gospel text then. John in his own compelling style spoke of transfiguration and disfiguration. Transfiguration – the glory of Christ laid before his disciples, Rabbi how good it is to be here, says Peter. It's like being in heaven, so pure, so lovely, so peaceful. As Paul puts it in the Corinthians passage, light shines in the darkness – the summation of all our Epiphany themes – and that light can shine in our hearts as we inherit the mantle, as the spirit lights upon those gathered at Pentecost after the Ascension of Jesus. Transfiguration!

Before we taste of death,
we see your kingdom come;
we long to hold the vision bright, and make this hill our home.

We long to see your kingdom come, in other words we long to see transfiguration of our world.

But so often down on the plain, not on the hill- top we see disfiguration, disfigured lives blighted by racism, by poverty. In the last week I spent one day in Leeds and one day in Manchester, both cities I know pretty well. But I was struck afresh at how many people were to be seen sleeping in doorways, often in threes and fours, huddled together against this freezing cold. The

leader of Windsor Council might feel that the streets of his historic town are disfigured by the number of rough sleepers but it is the lives of such men and women that are the real disfigurement.

Our world as we know is so disfigured in so many ways – the seas are polluted, the ozone layer continues to thin because of global warming, millions of refugees are fleeing from war and insecurity and whole nations like Afghanistan and Syria are totally disfigured by years of conflict. But one headline caught my eye this week and that is the story of a young man, Stephen, who when he was just 10 years of age and living in the streets of Hanoi was picked up by a gang of traffickers and brought illegally to England where he was held as a slave, living alone in a terraced house looking after cannabis plants and treated like an animal. At 16 he was arrested in a drugs raid and then taken into foster care. From then his life turned around. He was cared for by a clergyman and his wife in County Durham. He learnt English, went to college and now has turned 19. But the Home Office are now intending to send him back to Vietnam.

Disfiguration is what happens to people when others do not see in them the face of Christ. Stephen, that Vietnamese young man, is of course no less a child of God, than you and me. As this season of Epiphany draws to a close we remember the magnificent prologue of John's gospel – in Jesus the Christ of God was the light and life of God and that light enlightens every person who comes into the world. That is the good news for our world, that we, every one of us, has been given the light and love of God. Elisha saw that light in Elijah and wished for the same Spirit to rest upon him. The disciples saw the light of God in the face of Jesus of Nazareth. But in both cases, that of Elisha and that of the disciples there was work to be done back on the plain, back in the messiness of a disfigured world. In 2 Kings we read of Elisha helping a poor widow, healing enemies, aiding a refugee through his influence with the king of Israel. In the gospels and subsequently in the book of Acts we see how those early followers of Christ tried to put into practice the teachings and compassion of Jesus.

We know how costly can be the work of bringing transfiguration to a disfigured world. If it were easy we would not need to have a Racial Justice Sunday nor a Church Action on Poverty Sunday for our society would have made racism and poverty and war and gross inequality things of the past. But Jesus never promised that the task would be easy. Shortly after the story of the Transfiguration in Mark's gospel, the narrator begins the journey to Jerusalem, that Lenten journey we shall embark upon this week, when Jesus made it clear to his followers that the road would be arduous and the sacrifice great.

The Church and its members who dare to proclaim Jesus as Lord will have to fight the good fight over and over again. I don't know if Stephen will be allowed to stay in the UK or face life back in Hanoi. But I do know that thousands of people have seen the light and petitioned the

Home office; I do know that Stephen has seen the love of Christ in the face of that couple in Durham who cared for him.

The post communion prayer in the Anglican church this week reads

Holy God, we see your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. May we who are partakers at his table, reflect his life in word and deed, that all the world may know his power to change and save.

In other words, that disfiguration may indeed be transfigured into a world nearer to the kingdom of God on earth.

Amen.

A sermon preached on the First Sunday in Lent 18 February, 2018

God's Servant

Mark 1.9-15

It's worth reminding ourselves that Mark was writing for a later generation of Christians than those who first heard Jesus proclaim the good news. So Mark is not simply spreading the word like a news reporter describing current events, but repeating Jesus' proclamation to his readers in his own time, and to all subsequent readers, including, of course, you and me. So what follows is not simply what Jesus said to the fishermen then, but what Jesus is saying to us now.

The sheer brevity of Mark's story seems to offer little material for the preacher. Indeed, as we move through the year of Mark, John's gospel is called on consistently and often, to fill out the Sundays when Mark's story does not have enough texts to go around. This passage for Lent 1 is typical of Mark. In six verses the events of "those days" are laid out, beginning with Jesus' arrival from Nazareth and extending to Jesus' first preaching in Galilee.

There is, however, a certain drama in the brevity itself. In a few swift strokes of the pen, Mark sets the stage for all that is to come. Our attention is focused precisely on the man Jesus and the message he brings. This clearing away of extraneous detail, this forcing of our attention on Jesus, is perhaps exactly what believers who are too absorbed in their own projects need in Lent to make them focus.

Mark's opening verses invite us to re-focus with verses that echo Jesus' own message, "repent and believe in the gospel." We might translate these familiar words "re-focus and trust the good news." Mark leaves us in no doubt about the good news that Jesus calls upon his hearers to trust. First, it's "good news about God." Secondly, it's all about timing: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand." Both verbs ("is fulfilled"/"is at hand") are in the perfect tense. Something has already happened, and the implications of that happening are emerging in "those days": the very same days referred to in verse 9. The time is ripe and the kingdom has

come near. No wonder Mark's gospel is marked by brevity. His message is urgent and there is no time to waste on unnecessary words.

Besides, so many words had already been spoken. Mark is able to be terse because his words are all so rich and weighty. In these six verses he alludes constantly to his own Scripture (and that of Jesus!), our Old Testament. As he has already told us (Mark 1.2), the words of the prophet Isaiah resound through the centuries, leading us to the fullness of time.

Isaiah provides many references for Mark 1.9-15. The placing of God's Spirit on his chosen one to bring justice to the nations is part of God's description of the servant in Isaiah 42.1. The "beloved one" (Mark 1.11) does not convey a message of warm feelings on God's part toward Jesus. Instead, it conveys the message that Jesus is the servant sent by God, as promised in Isaiah. Isaiah's prophecy also yields a deeper sense of what God's kingdom may be. Isaiah 52.7 connects the one who brings good news with the proclamation, "Your God reigns". The coming of the servant who will be exalted is preceded by his being almost unrecognisable as human:

See, my servant shall prosper;
he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.

Just as there were many who were astonished at him
– so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals –

so he shall startle many nations;
kings shall shut their mouths because of him;

for that which had not been told them they shall see,
and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

With these verses ringing in our ears, we hear Mark's description of Jesus coming into Galilee wondering what will happen to him. We know, of course, that the story leads urgently to the fulfilment of those prophecies about the servant, as surely as Lent drives toward Good Friday. Yet the promise of exaltation of the servant, as the one who ushers in God's reign, is already there, right at the beginning.

All this prophetic preparation does not diminish the qualities of loneliness and violence that this passage embodies: a loneliness that will be exacerbated for Jesus as the gospel story unfolds. We are shocked at the unceremonious and "immediate" follow-up to Jesus' baptism, when the Spirit literally throws him out into the wilderness. We are put on notice when we hear that John has been "arrested". Mark uses the same word to describes John's arrest as he uses to describe Jesus' betrayal and arrest, right from the moment Judas is introduced in 3.19 (See also

9.31; 10.33; 14.10, 11, 18, 21, 41, 42, 15.1, 10, 15.) The word “arrest” is always violent and negative.

(Isaiah 52.13-15).

The loneliness of God’s servant, a theme that persists throughout the gospel, is already suggested in these opening verses. It all begins in the wilderness, home both to the prophets of Israel and to Israel itself in the years of wandering. Jesus will be there too, his responses to Satan’s temptations witnessed by no one. Again, at his baptism, the voice and vision belong to Jesus alone. The words, “You are my Beloved,” are singular. It is Jesus who is beloved, as Isaac before him and Joseph: men whose lives belonged to God and who suffered much for God’s people. Jesus’ proclamation of the “gospel of God” follows immediately upon the arrest of John who had also been preaching repentance. That arrest will not bode well for John or Jesus.

At the end of Lent and the end of Mark, both violence and loneliness come to their culmination in Jesus’ cry of abandonment on the cross. We ponder the connection between the establishment of the reign of God, and the incarnation of peace where wild animals no longer exist in enmity with humans (a foretaste of that kingdom occurs during Jesus’ temptations in verse 13). Something new has begun and Jesus is announcing it as good news. Remember the words of verse 10:

Just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart.

Here at the commencement of Mark’s narrative, God tears apart the veil that has kept heaven’s power and intention hidden, but Jesus alone is witness to it. But at the end of Mark’s narrative, the suffering of Jesus the servant is on public view as he hangs on the cross,

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

Mark 15.38

This tearing of the veil between God and humankind and the opening of God’s reign among all humans, both begin in this lonely, isolated way. Who will see it? Who will recognise the truth of what Jesus is saying, and how he embodies God’s way of being among God’s people? Mark’s gospel sets before us God’s own beloved Son, who announces clearly what is going on in the cosmos. We who hear him may misunderstand, or be misunderstood, or even give up completely. Yet, it is Good News announced here. It is good news that some seed “brings forth as much as a hundredfold” (Mark in 4.8). It is good news that “to you (plural) has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God...” (Mark 4.11). During Lent, perhaps we can focus our own attention on that kingdom that Jesus bears among us, as he challenges us: “Let anyone with ears to hear listen” (Mark 4.9).

Revd Robert Beard BD

A sermon preached on the Third Sunday in Lent 4 March, 2018

Remember!

John 2.13-22

According to the synoptic gospels, Jesus symbolically cleanses the temple in Jerusalem as he nears the end of his ministry. In Matthew (21.12-17), Mark (11.15-19), and Luke (19.45-48), Jesus enters the temple, overturns the tables of the traders and quotes Isaiah (56.7), “My house shall be called a house of prayer” and Jeremiah (7.11), “You have made it a den of robbers.” Unsurprisingly, his action intensifies the Jewish leaders’ determination to silence him, indeed to destroy him (Mark 11.18; Luke 19.47).

John’s account differs from this account in several very important ways. First, in John, the cleansing of the Temple takes place when Jesus is just beginning his ministry. John tells us that after the miracle of water turned into wine at the wedding in Cana, that his disciples “believed in him” (John 2.11), and that Jesus then returned to Capernaum in Galilee “with his mother and his brothers and his disciples” (2.12).

Now, in this morning’s gospel reading, we see the disciples actively engaged in trying to understand this Jesus in whom they “believe”, with the help of Scripture. We also will see in these verses that understanding both the Scripture and the Lord is an unfolding process. In fact, the “remembering” of Scripture and Jesus’ own words are at the centre of the lives of Jesus’ disciples; and it is extremely useful to us as Jesus’ latest disciples to see his first disciples moving towards a deeper realisation of what it means to believe in him.

Belief on the basis of Jesus’ first sign would quickly prove shallow, even untenable. That belief, important as it may have been, had to be deepened and extended, and so the cleansing of the Temple elaborates Jesus’ identity for his disciples and for John’s readers, including ourselves. In addition, it prompts his disciples then and now toward continuing engagement with Scripture as God’s reliable – if not always crystal clear! – word about God’s purposes in this world which God loves.

The passage opens with several verses describing Jesus’ coming into the temple and making his whip of cords to drive out business people and all their paraphernalia. It then develops as a dialogue about his actions (vv. 16, 18-20), in which Jesus and the Jews talk at one another; this will become a familiar characteristic of John’s gospel.

Woven into this dialogue (vv. 17, 22) are descriptions of his disciples’ reactions to what is going on before their eyes and what is being said about it, with a comment from the narrator (v. 21) for the reader’s sake.

In essence, then, there are half a dozen characters in this short passage (vv.13-22):

- Jesus
- the Jews
- the disciples
- the narrator
- the voice of the prophet Zechariah
- the voice of the psalmist (David, according to Psalm 69)
- and the readers, implied by the narrator's need to interpret Jesus' statement. Central to the passage, and even more so for its use as a Lenten text, is the act of interpretation and remembering. Both times the disciples appear, they are remembering. Jesus explains the cleansing of the temple in prophetic terms, decrying the use of the temple for trade; and the disciples then reflect (v. 17) on Jesus' quotation of Zechariah 14.20-21 in terms of Psalm 69.9.

The historical fact that the trade going on in the Temple was legitimate, and indeed necessary for pilgrims and others who did not have suitable coinage to purchase the animals needed in temple worship, is irrelevant to Jesus. Rather, Jesus is declaring himself both as prophet and as one who claims that the Lord's house is his "Father's" house. In this, his disciples have the first hint of the extreme conflict that will be at the heart of Jesus' ministry, and recognise it as foreshadowing his death.

In spite, however, their dawning comprehension of the risks Jesus, Son of God, King of Israel (1.49) is taking, the disciples are no more able than "the Jews" to grasp fully his statement in verse 19; and remember that the disciples themselves, like Jesus, are also Jews. Jesus offers a sign so outrageous and so incomprehensible that it is not until after his resurrection that his disciples understand what he has just said.

Jesus seems to be speaking of the Temple building, but is he? By the time of John's gospel, the Temple in Jerusalem has been cast down, but Jesus has been raised from the dead. Is he, then, the Temple himself, the one whom God has sent to take the place of the Jerusalem Temple? Indeed it would seem so, given Jesus' statement in John 4.20-23, because the Jerusalem Temple is not raised again. Certainly, when John informs his readers that Jesus himself was raised from the dead in three days, they and we can clearly see that the old Temple building is now irrelevant to Christians.

The disciples, of course, have all this discernment still before them. They do not hear the John's explanation, while we readers, by contrast, are doubly reassured by his assurance.

First, we are informed that Jesus had a particular meaning in mind, which was not understood by his contemporary audience: a meaning that makes Jesus' prophecy abundantly true.

Secondly, we are reassured that the disciples come to understand this when their experience catches up with that of the readers; that is, when the disciples find out what the narrator and his audience already know, that Jesus will die and be raised in three days; then they, too, will look back at this prediction in verse 19 and fully understand it.

At that point, after Jesus' resurrection when the disciples remember this moment and understand their Lord more fully, they offer an example to us. For remembering and belief come together again in verse 22. They remember what Jesus said. They have seen it come to pass. They believe anew, both in Scripture (the prophetic word Jesus cites) and in Jesus' own prophetic word.

This passage lays before us a promise that if we pay attention and remember, then Scripture and its Lord will be revealed as true and reliable. However mysterious and incomprehensible Jesus' words or deeds may be in the present, to engage with belief and keep Scripture in mind will eventually bring his disciples to the place where things come together and belief is created.

The passage reminds us of two additional things (at least!). One is that expanding, deepening, maturing belief comes in a process of engaging, experiencing, and remembering. Another is that this is possible because the same God has sent the prophets whose words are Scripture (even for Jesus) and has sent Jesus. This God continues to be among us as the Holy Spirit. The reliability of Scripture, and the reliability of Jesus, are God's reliability, God's faithfulness.

Revd Robert Beard B.D.

Order of Service 25 March 2018 – Palm Sunday (Lent 6)

Our service this morning is led by the Revd Walter Houston.

Pulpit Elder: Raymond Smyth Organist: Douglas Jones Crèche: Wilma Love Flowers: Elizabeth Draper

Welcome and Notices

Call to Worship

Hymn: R&S 208 – 'All glory, laud and honour'

Prayers of Approach and Confession Declaration of Forgiveness

Introduction to the theme Gospel reading: Mark 11.1-11 Distribution of Palm Crosses

The children leave for their own activities or crèche

Psalm 118.1,19-26,29:

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
his steadfast love endures for ever!

Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the LORD's doing:
it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!

O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.

We bless you from the house of the LORD.

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
his steadfast love endures for ever!

Hymn: R&S 209 – 'Ride on! Ride on in majesty!'

Gospel reading: Mark 15.1-32

Anthem: 'Were you there when they crucified my Lord?' (traditional, arr. Westbrook) The
Sermon

Hymn: R&S 221 – 'To mock your reign, O dearest Lord'

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Lord's Prayer

Offering and Doxology: R&S 21

Hymn: R&S 220 – 'O sacred head, sore wounded'

The Blessing and Three-fold Amen



Notices

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes

in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming

kingdom of our ancestor

David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Next week's Easter Sunday service will be led by the Revd Robert Beard.

Nora Huntley Ferrie Nora's funeral will take place on Thursday 5 April, 11.15 a.m., at Hutcliffe Wood Crematorium. Our sincere condolences go to her children Ian, Jill and Linda, and to all who are grieving.

Robert Beard is in the vestry every Monday morning between 9.00 a.m. and 1.00 p.m., for anyone who would like to talk to him.

The Flower and Coffee rotas are on the hall noticeboard. To help with flowers, see Jean Dickson. To help with coffee, see Kathleen Smyth.

Theatre trip: Tickets are still available to see Robert in the world première of Tea and Tentacles at Zeta Reticuli, 4-7 April at the University Drama Studio. See Judith, Robert or Sheila Cooke for details.

1st April 2018 Easter Day Order of Service

This morning's Communion Service is led by the Revd Robert Beard

Pulpit Elder: Judith Adam Organist: Douglas Jones Crèche: Isabel Sandland Flowers: Dorothy Adam

Order of Service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices.

The Call to Worship:

Minister: Alleluia! Christ is risen All: He is risen indeed! Alleluia

Hymn: R&S 287 – The light of morning sheds its rays Prayers of Adoration and Confession

The Old Testament reading: Isaiah 25. 6-9

Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24 (said responsorially) O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

his steadfast love endures for ever!

Let Israel say, 'His steadfast love endures for ever.'

The Lord is my strength and my might;

he has become my salvation.

There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:

'The right hand of the Lord does valiantly;

the right hand of the Lord is exalted;

the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.'

I shall not die, but I shall live,

and recount the deeds of the Lord.

The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them

and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.
The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvellous in our eyes.
This is the day that the Lord has made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Hymn: R&S 559 – Blessed city, Heavenly Salem
The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

The New Testament reading: Acts 10. 34-43
Hymn: R&S 233 Christ the Lord is risen again
The Gospel reading: Mark 16 .1-8
The Anthem: 'Thine be the glory (Handel arr. Peter Miller)

The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 195 – Lord of the Dance
Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession
The Offertory and Doxology (R&S 21)
The Great Thanksgiving (R&S 12)
The Lord's Prayer
The Communion
The Post -Communion Prayer
Hymn: R&S 246 The day of resurrection (tune: Ellacombe) The Blessing
Minister: Alleluia! Christ is risen!

All: He is risen indeed!

The Three-fold Amen Notices

Next Sunday's service, 8th April, will be led by Mrs Jenny Carpenter.
"Run for All" takes place that day from 8 a.m.-1.30 p.m. making access to the church

difficult. Please check the web on www.runforall.com/media/267774/yhms-route-map.jpg

Road Resurfacing on Upper Hanover St starts around 16th April, working Monday night to Saturday Morning.

Nora Ferrie's funeral will take place on Thursday 5th April, 10.15 a.m. at Hutcliffe Wood.

Pulpit Elder: Sheila Cooke Crèche: Shelagh Beach

8th April, 2018 Second Sunday of Easter Order of Service

This morning's service is led by Mrs Jenny Carpenter

Organist: Douglas Jones Flowers: Isabel Sandland

Order of Service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices.

The Call to Worship: Minister: The Lord is risen!

All: He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Introduction

Hymn: R&S 537 – O splendour of God's glory bright Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Psalm 133: A psalm of unity

The New Testament reading: Acts 4: 32-35

Hymn: R&S 564 - Jesus, Lord we look to thee

The Epistle: 1 John 1: v1-2. v2

Hymn: R&S 244 - O sons and daughters let us sing! (Part 11)

The Gospel reading: John 20: 19-31

Prayer: read together

Faithful God,

The strength of all who believe

and the hope of those who doubt;

may we, who have not seen, have faith and receive the fulness of Christ's blessing; who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Anthem: Lord I trust thee, I adore thee (GF Handel)

The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 240 Jesus, Lord, Redeemer (tune 1)

Prayers of Thanksgiving, Intercession and Petition The Lord's prayer

The Offertory and Doxology (R&S 21)

Hymn: R&S 278 I know that my Redeemer lives The Blessing

The Three-fold Amen Notices

Next Sunday's service, 15th April, will be led by the Revd. Robert Beard

after which The Annual Church Meeting will take place in the Church Hall at 12.15 p.m. promptly

If you have not already done so please collect your copy of the Annual Reports for 2017, the Agenda and the Minutes from the last ACM and bring them to the meeting. They are available at the back of the Church.

The next Elders' Meeting is on Wednesday, 11th April from 10 a.m.-12 noon in the Committee Room.

Please note: The Farewell Party for Robert is on Saturday 16th June and NOT on 1st July as stated on the Agenda of the ACM

Road Resurfacing on Upper Hanover St starts around 16th April, working Monday night to Saturday Morning. This may affect access to the Church while they are working.

SERMON

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH SUNDAY 8 APRIL 2018 at 10.45am

"Seeing is Believing" and "Believing is Seeing"

The nave of St. Peter's basilica in Rome is flanked by statues of the apostles, each distinguished by something with which they have become associated. We can all recognise Peter by the keys he carries (Matthew tells us that in response to Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah Jesus told him "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven") This congregation knows that Andrew's distinctive object is the

Saltire – the multiplication cross. What about Thomas? He holds a T square – the essential tool of the draughtsman or architect. That strikes me as appropriate for the disciple who needed proof of Jesus' bodily resurrection. He needed to be an eye-witness.

How unfair that the phrase "doubting Thomas" has become widely used of anyone reluctant to believe a story that has gained general acceptance. I suspect that among the scientists in this congregation there are many who identify with Thomas in his demand for proof. Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my fingers where the nails were, and put my hands into his side, I will not believe it." Until then, it is just an exciting theory for him, and he can't commit to it. After all, it flies in the face

of the laws of nature!

"Fake news"? Media have had a field day over the chemical attack on the former Russian spy and his daughter in Salisbury. Boris Johnson is accused of jumping to conclusions too readily and blaming the Russian government. Jeremy Corbyn is slated for sising with Russia because he refused immediately to lay it at Russia's door. The balance of probability is that it was attributable to the Russian powers that be, but the oiverwhelming majority of Russian people are buying the story that it is a British government ploy to divert attention from the Brexit debacle. We are all aware

that propaganda's job is to slew if not confound the truth.

Let's get back to Jerusalem and Thomas's dilemma.

There's been a whole week of animated discussion about Jesus' resurrection.

The women's tale of angels with the message "He is not here! He is risen!

Peter and John's description of the empty tomb.

Mary Magdalen "I have seen the Lord, but at first I thought he was the gardener!" Then Jesus materialising in the locked upper room on the Sunday evening with his

usual greeting of "Peace be with you" when as John tells us "the disciples were together". (not necessarily just the 10 (Judas had hanged himself and Thomas for some reason wasn't there – had he ventured out to buy food for them?

Mary, the mother of Jesus, and possibly his brother James could well have been there as well as MaryMagdalen, Salome and other women disciples in Jerusalem at the time.

John's gospel has Jesus showing his wounds as evidence.

And he re-commissions them. As the Father sent me: so I send you." He also breathes on them "Receive the Holy Spirit".

Thomas must have felt out of it, but over-reacted to the pressure the others put on him. He still insisted on seeing the evidence of the wounds for himself. Might this have been an apparition?

Then it's another Sunday evening, this time Thomas is with them. I'm going to let Dorothy Sayers take over

"The Man Born to Be King" Final Play Scene 4.....

"Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed."

John saw the empty grave – he "saw and believed".

Thomas saw the crucifixion marks but didn't need to touch them – he "saw and believed". "My Lord and my God!" Identification of the risen Christ with God - key to development of the early Church, especially in Paul's writings.

Church was to prove that believing without physically seeing was possible.
Trusting in Christ enabled you to see life and death more clearly.
The community inbreathed with the Holy Spirit was able to fulfil its mission.
"See how these Christians love one another!" Example of French policeman
substituting himself for a woman in the supermarket siege. Self-sacrifice in struggle for justice
and peace in all kinds of ways. The Church must always witness to the reality of the new and
eternal life we are offered and can share in through Christ's
death and resurrection. This is the gospel! This is the good news for the world!

Jenny Carpenter

15th April 2018 Third Sunday of Easter Order of Service

This morning's Service is led by the Revd Robert Beard

Pulpit Elder: Sheila Dunstan Organist: Douglas Jones Crèche: Barbara Macmillan Flowers:
Lorna Drought

Order of Service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church then sit for the Welcome and Notices.

The Call to Worship: Minister: The Lord be with you All: And also with you

Hymn: R&S 619 –We meet you, O Christ Prayers of Adoration and Confession

The New Testament reading: Acts 3. 12-19

Psalm 4: (said responsorially)

Answer me when I call, O God of my right!

You gave me room when I was in distress.

Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

How long, you people, shall my honour suffer shame? How long will you love vain words, and
seek after lies? But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself; the Lord hears
when I call to him.

When you are disturbed, do not sin;
ponder it on your beds, and be silent.

Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the Lord.

There are many who say, 'O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on
us, O Lord!'

You have put gladness in my heart
more than when their grain and wine abound.

I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.

Hymn: R&S 133 – How beautiful are their feet
The children leave for their own activities or crèche

The Epistle: 1John 3.1-7

Hymn: R&S 613 - Lord, speak to me, that I may speak The Gospel reading: Luke 24. 36b-48

The Anthem: This joyful Eastertide (arr. Charles Wood) The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 663 – Love divine, all loves excelling

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Lord's Prayer

The Offering followed by the Doxology (R&S 21)

Hymn: R&S 250 The strife is o'er, the battle won

Benediction

The Three-fold Amen

Notices

The Annual Church Meeting will take place this morning immediately after the Service, starting at 12.15pm promptly

Next Sunday's service, 22nd April, will be led by Mr Chris Limb.

Road Resurfacing on Upper Hanover St starts around 16th April, working Monday night to Saturday Morning.

A sermon preached on the Second Sunday after Easter 15 April 2018

Belief That Transforms

Luke 24.36b-48

What do people outside the Church see when they look at us – if, indeed, they ever do? Do they see a small minority community in hiding, like the disciples cowering behind locked doors at the beginning of this morning's reading from Luke's gospel? Or do they see fearless proclaimers of repentance and forgiveness, like the apostles of Luke's second book, The Acts of the Apostles? Do people see the Church of God as a fortress besieged and crumbling under the unremitting assaults of science and secularism? Or do they see it as the communion of saints, clad in the whole armour of God, tirelessly leading the struggle against suffering and slaughter?

Do people see a tired and tiny band, fearfully guarding the flickering flame of faith as the storm winds howl around us? Or do they see “salt” and “yeast” whose small but vital presence infuses and raises the whole of society?

The disciples' initial response to the death of Christ was total devastation. They became almost invisible, grieving behind closed doors (cf. Luke 24.12). This how we find them at the beginning of this morning's reading. And what led to this was their lack of belief.

At the end of our reading, however, their fear has turned to boldness, their confusion to conviction, their grief to joy, their wallowing to worship. Soon, they will be characterised by their witness as well; Luke writes a whole new book about that. And what led to this was their strength of belief.

What happened to transform them? If we were in a court of law, we'd have three exhibits to offer in evidence.

Exhibit One: the evidence of Jesus' resurrection

The two disciples who had met Jesus on the road to Emmaus couldn't wait to tell the good news to their friends at Jerusalem. Immediately after they recognised Jesus and he disappeared, they rushed back, only to discover that Jesus had also appeared to Peter, who told them Jesus was indeed alive.

I've never seen a ghost. I've never felt the presence of my dead sister, Miranda. I've never had an “out-of-body” or “near-death” experience. Indeed, I've never experienced anything that I would call “supernatural”. I've met many people who've described having these kinds of experiences, but I have no first-hand evidence of my own. I have, however, experienced severe mental illness, and been through long periods when I couldn't trust what was going on inside my own head. More recently, I've been present at my mother's hospital bedside while she's been having hallucinatory experiences, and I've read enough to know that the brain can produce very strange effects when the fine balance of its electro-chemical activity is disturbed. So all I can do when people recount these unfamiliar experiences to me is try to keep an open mind; and that's not always easy, especially when one person's perceived reality seems to contradict another's.

What must it have been like for those disciples who had not encountered the risen Christ, hearing the accounts of his appearances on the Emmaus road and to Peter? They think they believe, but when Jesus appears among them and says, “Peace be with you” (24.36), they are not at all peaceful, but “startled” and “troubled” (24.37). The disciples were familiar with the idea of ghosts and believed in them, as did almost everyone in the ancient world, and at that moment all they can do is interpret their experience in a way that makes sense to them. They assume that Jesus is a ghost, because it makes more sense to them than to accept that Jesus is really there.

Luke, however, is writing a generation later, after experiencing at first hand the extraordinary expansion of Christianity out from Jerusalem, through Israel/Palestine, across Syria, Turkey and Greece, all the way to Rome itself. For Luke, it is absolutely impossible that an encounter with a mere ghost, who is more likely to inspire fear than faith in a first-century mind, can account for the apostles' remarkable missionary zeal. No other crucified Jewish rabble-rouser has had this sort of effect even while he was alive, let alone after his death. Jesus is more than a ghost, then; but how?

Luke, like Matthew and John, does something amazingly bold, something that was as likely to earn him ridicule in his own day as it would today. He tells us that the recently executed Jesus was physically present with his disciples. He tells us that Jesus encouraged the disciples to touch Him, to see that he had flesh and bones, and to look at His hands and His feet (verse 24.40); the inference is clear that he still bore the marks of the nails with which he was crucified. He tells us that Jesus ate some of the disciples' fish. Luke tells us that, in these ways, Jesus' resurrection body is like his previous earthly body, and that he is certainly no ghost. In other ways, we must infer that his resurrection body is different from his previous body, uninhibited by earthly constraints and physical barriers, able to pass through locked doors, and to appear and disappear at will. Luke tells us, in effect, that the risen Jesus has all the abilities and capacities of the Jesus who was crucified, but is no longer subject to limitations of time and place.

I mentioned in passing that Jesus greets the disciples with the words, "Peace be with you." It's important always to remember that the Hebrew word *shalom*, and its Aramaic and Arabic counterparts, carry far more profound implications than their European translations, *eirene*, *pax* and "peace". In the Hebrew Bible, *shalom* is closely associated with God's presence (e.g. Leviticus 26.1-13; Numbers 6.22-26; Judges 6.11-24; Isaiah 9.1-7, 48.17-18, 59.1-8, 60.17-20; Ezekiel 37.24-28; Micah 5.5; Haggai 2.3-9), and the absence of peace is associated with God's absence or withdrawal. The peace of God and the presence of God are virtually inseparable. So when Jesus says, "Peace be with you," he is assuring them that God is present with them.

Exhibit Two: the evidence of Scripture

With the two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus, Jesus began with the biblical evidence concerning His rejection, suffering, death and resurrection. He was then revealed to them as he took bread, blessed and broke it at their dinner table, only to vanish from their sight. In this next encounter, the order is reversed: Jesus eats first and then interprets the Scripture.

First, Luke's account portrays Jesus explaining that there is nothing unfamiliar in what has happened; the rejection, death, and resurrection of the Messiah was one of the prominent prophetic themes of the Old Testament. Jesus refers to the Law of Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets; the three main divisions of the Hebrew Bible, reminding his disciples that the entire Old Testament bore witness to His suffering and death.

Luke made an allusion to this prophetic message at the start of his gospel, in Simeon's prophecy at Jesus' circumcision:

"This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed"

(Luke 2.34-35).

It was also hinted at in the suffering of the forerunner, John the Baptist, and anticipated by Jesus' rejection when he first public identifies himself as the Messiah in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4.14-30). The growing opposition of the Jewish religious leaders Jesus' ministry bore out Simeon's words. On several occasions Jesus himself told his disciples that suffering and death were his destiny (cf. Luke 9.21-23, 44-45, 18.31-34), and while the disciples did not grasp this truth at the time, and even resisted it, Jesus now reminds them that this is what he told them. It is only now, after his resurrection, that everything the prophets had said about the Messiah falls into place. From this point on, the disciples will turn to the Old Testament prophecies to prove the Jesus was the promised Messiah, and that all that happened to him was inevitable.

Secondly, Luke's account portrays Jesus explaining that Old Testament prophecy foretells the proclamation of the gospel to all nations:

Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

(Luke 24:46-48).

The idea that the Messiah's message of repentance and forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed to all nations – not just to the Jews – was, if anything, harder for first-century Jews to understand and accept than the prophecies that the Messiah was to suffer and die. But it's there right at the beginning of Luke's gospel, when the angel tells the shepherds,

"I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people"

(Luke 2.10), and at the start of Jesus' ministry, when he refers to God's mercy towards the widow of

Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4.24-27). In fact, of course, God's promise that the Jewish Messiah would be for everyone is stated way back, in the covenant with Abraham:

"I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"

(Genesis 12.3). The later prophets affirm this same promise of salvation and blessing for all nations. Second

Isaiah says,

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations”

and Haggai describes the Messiah as the treasure of all nations

(Isaiah 42:1),

(Haggai 2.7).

In the light of this fact, the Jesus’ commission to the apostles comes as no new revelation, but as an outworking of the Old Testament prophecies and the suffering of the Messiah. Luke, in fact, records the “Great Commission”, as more of a firm promise, a certainty, than a command: and not once, but twice (Luke 24.47; Acts 1.8).

In order for the gospel to be proclaimed to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem, the disciples must be empowered by the Holy Spirit, which again the Old Testament prophets foretold. We read in First Isaiah that,

The palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watch-tower will become dens for ever, the joy of wild asses, a pasture for flocks; until a spirit from on high is poured out on us,

and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.

(Isaiah 32.14-15), I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring

while Second Isaiah says,

(Isaiah 44.3),

Third Isaiah,

My spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children’s children, says the Lord, from now on and for ever

(Isaiah 59.21).

and Ezekiel says,

I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God.

(Ezekiel 39:29).

The promise of the Holy Spirit was reiterated by Luke in his account of John the Baptist, who contrasted his baptism with water to the Messiah's baptism with the Spirit (cf. Luke 3:16), and Jesus also spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit:

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

(Luke 11.13),

and

When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say

(Luke 12.12).

We should also note that, while Jesus commanded the disciples to be His witnesses, he also commanded them to witness only in the power that he would provide. The one who commands is the one who enables.

Exhibit Three: The change in the disciples

Finally, in Luke's gospel, Jesus leads the disciples out of Jerusalem to Bethany, where, as he lifts His hands in blessing, he "withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven". (Luke does a complete rewrite of this scene at the beginning of The Acts of the Apostles.) Now the disciples, who were devastated by the death of Jesus and hiding themselves start praising God in public, and not only in public but in the temple, the very heart of Judaism. Later, we know, they start to share Jesus message of repentance and forgiveness, and within a single generation, they have established Churches, "communities of the Lord", all the way from Jerusalem to Rome.

Honestly? I don't know what to believe about those days following the crucifixion of Jesus.

Maybe I've been taught to think too critically about the Bible, or maybe I'm too influenced by

scientific method, or both; but I don't know what experience the disciples had that made them describe it as "resurrection", with all the ambiguities about the risen Christ's body being both tangible and yet able to pass through locked doors. I wonder sometimes, if I'd been there, how I might have written about it, in 21st century, post-Enlightenment, post-Modern terms...?

What I do believe is that repentance and forgiveness constitute the only process by which we fallible and fault-filled human beings have ever – and can ever – find real, lasting shalom with ourselves and with one another. Nothing in my studies of Biblical criticism, post-Enlightenment

or post-Modern philosophy, has shaken my conviction that repentance and forgiveness are Good News for all the nations.

What do people outside the Church see when they look at us – if, indeed, they ever do? That depends on our behaviour, and our behaviour depends on how much we really believe in repentance and forgiveness: first, our own repentance and our own forgiveness, then in the possibility of repentance and forgiveness we hold out to others.

Revd Robert Beard B.D.

Order of Service 22nd April 2018 Fourth Sunday of Easter

This morning's Service is led by Mr Chris Limb

Pulpit Elder: Elizabeth Draper Organist:

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church then sit for the Welcome and Notices.

The Call to Worship: Minister: The Lord be with you

All: And also with you

Hymn: R&S 292 –When morning gilds the skies

Prayers of Adoration and Confession The New Testament reading: Acts 4: 5-12

Hymn: R&S 552 – The King of love my Shepherd is

The children leave for their own activities or crèche

The New Testament reading: 1John 3: 16-24

Hymn: R&S 261 - At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow The Gospel reading: John 10: 11-18

The Anthem: Jesu, joy of man's desiring (Bach) The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 207 – My song is love unknown

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Lord's Prayer

The Offering followed by the Doxology (R&S 21)

Hymn: R&S 586 - All my hope on God is founded (2nd tune) Benediction

The Three-fold Amen

Our organist Douglas Jones will play a voluntary Notices

Next Sunday's service, 29th April, will be led by the Rev. Margaret Herbert

Robert Beard is in the Church every Monday morning between 9 a.m. and 1.00 p.m. for anyone who would like to talk to him.

SERMON

Easter 4 Sunday 22nd April

Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3: 16-24 ; John 10:11-18

“ I am the Good Shepherd”

Words said by the Lord Jesus in the opening verse of this mornings Gospel passage. Very familiar words

Jesus describing Himself as the Good Shepherd

But before we look a little closer at these words I wonder if I could first of all ask a question:

What is it that a shepherd actually does?

Now I realise that sounds a bit of a daft question.

I mean, everyone knows that a shepherd's supposed to look after sheep , yes ?

But of course there are shepherds and there are shepherds with different ways and means.

I'm guessing some of you here today ,people of a “ certain age” (like myself) may well remember watching the TV programme “ One Man And His Dog”

A kind of competition involving different shepherds from right across the country who would demonstrate their skills at being able to move small groups of sheep round obstacles and into pens or enclosures. They'd do this of course with the help of a dog , (hence the name) , sometimes with two or three dogs who they'd direct with a mixture of whistles and shouts ,(amazing to watch ! Clearly a very skilled sort of job. No question about it)

It was all about communication between shepherd and dog They'd be working as a team.

And of course the ones who performed the best , in the quickest time won the prize. Now when we read about shepherds in the Bible we discover a whole different way of doing things While the British or Western shepherds would rely on the relationship they had built up with the sheepdog to get the sheep to go were they needed to go, the Judaeen shepherd actually had a relationship with the sheep themselves who would trust him and who would follow him (or her) when the shepherd called to them (sometimes they'd play a musical instrument like a flute as well)

From what I hear , even today, shepherds in the Holy Land use these same time honoured methods of tending sheep.

Shepherd and Sheep : A relationship of trust and mutuality.

Now with this image in mind , we need to remember that the Old Testament in particular is peppered with descriptions of God as being a Shepherd to His people Israel

The 23rd Psalm of course is certainly the most best known and most well loved, but there are many others as well

“ Then we , your people, will always thank you. We are like sheep with you as our shepherd and all generations will hear us praise you “ (Psalm 79:13)

As a Middle Eastern shepherd leads his flock to good pasture , fresh water and places of safety , so God leads His people : The people who follow Him and seek to obey His commands .

Thing about sheep is , well they're not very bright are they?
They have a tendency to wander off and get themselves into all kinds of trouble.

And if we're honest , aren't you and I a bit like that as well ?

We know deep down where we're meant to be heading and what it is we're supposed to be doing ;but it is so easy to be distracted and become side tracked : We listen to the wrong voices , take a few wrong turns and before we know it we're headed in the wrong direction entirely.

Don't know about you , but I've sometimes thought that it would be much more simple ,more easy to follow if God were more like a Western Shepherd : The moment a sheep starts a-wandering he brings it to heel sharpish!

But of course God isn't like that. He isn't going to set the dogs on us!

See unlike sheep we each have Free Will , and that's a God given gift;something God Himself respects and treasures.

He wants each of us (nay He longs for each of us) to follow Him willingly and not under duress.

Perhaps the most well known Bible passage on the subject of wayward sheep is to be found in Isaiah 53 “ O we like sheep have gone astray , we have all turned to our own way” (Isaiah 53:6)

How God resolved this dilemma: How He managed to reach out and bring home a people seemingly bent on their own willful self destruction I'll return to in a little while.

Let's remain with the Shepherd image for a little longer.

Now as we've seen while throughout the Old Testament the relationship between God and His people Israel is frequently likened to that of a shepherd and his flock, the same is true (to a lesser extent) for leaders of Israel as well.

As we see in this passage when the recently anointed King David is finally accepted by the Northern tribes of Israel ; The tribal elders saying to David “ The LORD said to you : It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel” (2 Samuel 5:3)

And a couple of chapters later , as the prophet Nathan relates a message from God to David , we have these words : “ Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel , did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel?” (2 Samuel 7:7)

Interestingly, the word “Shepherd” here is being used as a verb : A “ doing word “ : Leaders are being called to Shepherd their people: Protect them , look out for them , keep them safe from danger.

It's not that they in any way “ own “ the people because they don't .The people belong to God. In a real sense they're meant to be acting on God's behalf: Performing Shepherding duties on behalf of The Good Shepherd .

And that responsibility would apply to both spiritual and secular leaders . Of course predictably they weren't always up to the mark.

In the writings of both Jeremiah and Ezekiel (a much later period) we hear quite stern words of rebuke concerning leaders whose “ shepherding skills” left a lot to be desired.

“ Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! Says the Lord
“ (Jeremiah 23:1)

And again , over in Ezekiel :

“ You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured you have not brought back the strayed you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them “ (Ezekiel 34:4) That's pretty severe isn't it? Some serious abuse of power going on there by the sound of things.

Which brings me to the Reading from the Book of Acts we heard read a short time ago. I have to admit, Acts of the Apostles has always been one of my favourite books of the

Bible : There's so much happening. It's all such an incredible adventure. In the previous chapter , we hear how Peter and John while on their way to the Temple have put into practice the promise which Jesus had made to them on the night before He died: “ Very truly I tell you , the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and in fact will do even greater works than these , because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12)

Peter and John had seen this guy who'd been crippled from birth , begging at one of the Temple gates, (basically the only source of income he could hope for) Instead of passing him by or simply tossing him a few coins Peter had uttered those immortal words: “ I have no silver or gold but what I have I give you;

in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth stand up and walk” (Acts 3:6)

Which is exactly what the man did!

Not only standing but leaping and dancing as well ; he was overjoyed . Filled with thankfulness , as was everyone else in the vicinity; Utterly amazed at what they'd just witnessed

Well, not quite everyone: The Temple authorities weren't impressed , taking a very dim view of Peter's explanation as to what had just taken place : The healing being performed in the power of Jesus' name.

So the two disciples are arrested and locked up overnight to face an interrogation the next day before the Ruling Council.

As we heard read , as the cross examination begins I rather think Peter “ hits the nail on the head” when he asks this:

“ Rulers of the people and elders if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed”

(Acts 4:8-9)

In other words “ Let's get this right, we haven't committed any crime here. Far from it. If you guys did your job right as true Shepherds of the people you'd be celebrating this healing just as everyone else is!” And that's the point isnt it?

They're letting themselves get hung up on a technicality: Sure a miracle may have happened, but it wasn't an authorised one. They hadn't asked permission first.

They hadn't used the right words. It wasn't official.

And so the authorities weren't happy.

It's the kind of opposition Jesus Himself encountered continually. Particularly when He did things like healing people on the Sabbath, which the authorities objected to most strongly.

Leading Jesus to make one of His most incisive comments about their insistence on “ Straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel” : In other words :Putting all their effort and energies into making sure the most trivial rules and regulations were being kept yet at the same time totally overlooking the most crucial ones , which as we heard summed up so beautifully in the other New Testament passage we heard read : “ Little children , let us love not in words or speech , but in truth and action” (1 John 3:18). Which pretty much sums it all up doesn't it ?

As Paul most famously wrote:

“ If I speak in the tongues of mortals and angels, but do not have love I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1)

“ What's love got to do with it ? “ (So sang Tina Turner) Absolutely everything!

Which brings us back to our Gospel passage and the greatest ever act of sacrificial love in history

Again some words said by the Lord Jesus :

“ I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down

His life for His Sheep” (John 10:11)

Jesus drew inspiration from those Judaeen shepherds so familiar to the people among whom He taught and ministered : People who braved all kinds of dangers including bears,wolves and armed thugs,in order to protect the sheep in their care; literally risking life and limb especially on those occasions when the odd sheep decided to go AWOL and they had to search high and low deep into the mountains probably at night time and during a storm in order to bring it back to safety.

I always think its a bit ironic how , at the time of Jesus' ministry , shepherds were actually “ looked down upon” by polite society; being regarded as “ not the kind of people you really ought to hang out with”. I think its mainly because the nature and demands of their job meant they weren't usually able to follow all the strict religious rules and protocols.

Yet it's also interesting that on the night the Lord Jesus was born , it was a bunch of shepherds who received that invitation from the angels.

An example of God reaching out and embracing the most marginalised in society?

Yet also a sign of things to come: Humble Judaeen shepherds witnessing the birth of the Good Shepherd.

And as those tough working class fellows were willing to put their lives on the line for those ridiculous sheep who stupidly put themselves in harms way over and over again, so the Lord Jesus gave His All by willingly going to the Cross in order to bring each and every one of us back into a relationship with the Father.

As the hymn writer puts it

“ We may not know we cannot tell

What pains He had to bear But we believe it was for us He hung and suffered there”

It is, at the end of the day, a mystery.

We'll never fully grasp what it meant; what it cost for the Lord Jesus , as He trailed into the darkest of places ; as He endured the unendurable; as He suffered the most brutal of deaths: Not for any crime He'd ever committed or even contemplated, but in some incredible way to

save each and every one of us . Or to quote Isaiah once more: “ But He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities upon Him was the punishment that made us whole , and by His bruises we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5)

Mind blowing! And incredibly humbling! To know that we are loved to such an extent by the greatest most loving Being in the universe!

How do we respond ? Well, again the answer's there in John's letter: “We know love by this that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (1 John 3:16)

What does that mean? We're each of us called to share the Love of God with those around us – by our words , by our attitudes , by our actions the things we do. Yeah? Thing is, it's so easy to let the world, the media mould how we react to situations and the people around us.

Jesus reached out to those in need. He always did.

He reaches out to you and me.

I believe that as we in turn reach out in love to those around us , we'll deepen our understanding, our awareness of His Love.

And by so doing we will ourselves become shepherds

Following in the footsteps of The Good Shepherd

Amen

April 29, 1918 Sermon

In the name of Almighty Go, Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

I woke up this morning at 5.15 am listened to the dawn Chorus – I was warm and comfortable in my bed. The sky was grey and dull. Went into prayer mode – thinking of course led to prayer. I gave thanks for my comfortable home – my friends and family. Gave thanks to God for all he had done for me – for his son who died on Calvary to save me from my sin. Who brings new hope and new life into the world.

Then I remembered the folk in Syria and Iraq – My friend the Vicar of Baghdad Andrew White who could no longer return to the city that he loves – but is now exiled in Jerusalem. He had seen members of his congregation beheaded. I prayed for them too- Nevertheless prayers are only weasel words if not accompanied by protest and by practical aid.

I thought how fortunate I was to have been born in a Christian country. Then I reread the lesson for this morning.

The image of the vine in the bible is very evocative. It was a symbol of life. The Israelites were called the people of the vine. They saw themselves as the vineyard of the Lord – and the prophets show that, from time to time – sadly – God had very little joy in the vineyard. He

repeatedly called his people to return to the earth – to get busy and bear good fruit in this world again.

The image was so strong where the Jews were concerned that, in the two years they revolted against Rome (from AD69 – AD70) they minted their own coins – showing not the head of Caesar but a vine – a symbol of a vigorous new life.

Repeatedly Israel forgot that the Lord had planted them as a nation to bear good fruits for him. They did not exist for themselves but for the stranger in their midst.

As Isaiah records “The Lord said ‘When I looked to you to bear grapes why did you yield wild grapes?’ As Jeremiah records “God says ‘I planted a choice vine wholly of pure seed then why have you turned degenerate and become wild again?’

He threatens the nation with an axe. Here we are presented with a marvellous picture – the axe strikes at the root of the vine and new branches grow from the stump.

His name is – of course – Jesus and his followers are the branches fed by him – sharing a common life with him. The gift of God – they draw their strength from the true vine.

Our reading from the Gospel according to Saint John makes clear that – in the past God called the nation to his aid – theirs was a collective responsibility – with the coming of Jesus folk are called as individuals. Called to bear fruit - the fruit of the Holy Spirit. To abide in Christ as he will abide in them. Whoever does not receive and accept God’s will fail – as branches that are pruned and thrown into a fire. We can do nothing without his help. As God has loved Jesus so he loves us. His love is not for us alone. Warmed and strengthened we have work to do using whatever unique talents we possess.

Christian society is not going to arrive unless we really want it; and we are not going to really want it until we are fully Christian. I may repeat ‘Do as you would be done by ‘until I am blue in the face but I cannot really carry it out until I love my neighbour as myself and I learn to love God.

I cannot learn to love God except by learning to obey him.

Jesus still says ‘I am the vine and you are the branches’ the stress here is on life divine – we live his life to the full. Chosen, called and precious we belong to him and he belongs to us.

This needs to be affirmed constantly from our side. We have to be constantly saying ‘Yes’ to him. That is why we are here this morning. To be a community of his love. At one with God. The disciples had to be reminded to live in Christ and so do we.

First a litmus test concerning how real and deep your personal communion with Jesus? How deep and real is your personal commitment with your neighbour, with your brothers and sisters?

This chapter contains the divine command “Love one another as I have loved you”. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ only happens when you have really grasped what Easter love really is. When you have asked God to enter into your heart and change you forever. We all demand that change happens for the better. However, we do not wish to be changed ourselves: whether as a Church or a nation.

This takes us from Jesus to ourselves – from ourselves to this sad world of ours, called to be Christ-like – to re-present Christ to a weary world.

Saint Augustus wrote “Give me someone who loves and he will understand what I am trying to say – give me someone whose heart yearns – who is hungry and who feels the nostalgia of loneliness in this exile – give me someone who is hungry and thirsty and sighs for the coming of the kingdom of God – give me such a one and he will understand what I am trying to say – but, if I must explain myself to ice-cold indifference he will not understand.”

Does your heart yearn for the coming of God’s kingdom?

I know that my heart longs to see a weary world set free. Free from indifference to God – from fear and hatred – from terrorism – from depression – from exploitation of the world’s resources – from abusive relationships – from drug trafficking – from child labour.

I pray for the sharing of human resources – for the reaching out of the rich and powerful nations to the poorest on earth. For folk to be truthful and honest with no exception. For the comforting of the lost and lonely – the sick and the dying and that – distrust, prejudice, betrayal and injustice be a thing of the past.

Beloved let us love for love is from God – and we are the people of God. He is the vine and we are the branches.

We are, and must remain a welcoming, caring, sharing community of Christ.

Amen

M. Herbert

6th. May 2018 Sixth Sunday of Easter Order of Service

This morning’s Service is led by the Revd Robert Beard

Pulpit Elder: Judith Adam Organist: Douglas Jones Crèche: Isabel Sandland Flowers: Isabel Sandland

Order of service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices

Call to Worship

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Hymn: R&S 39 All creatures of our God and King

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

First New Testament reading: Acts 10 vv 44 - 48

Hymn: R&S 709 New songs of celebration render (a setting of Psalm 98)

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

Second New Testament reading: 1 John 5 vv 1 - 6

Gospel reading: John 15 vv 9 - 17

The Anthem: Blessed be the God and Father (S. S. Wesley) The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 413 What a friend we have in Jesus

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Lord's Prayer: R&S – inside back cover

The Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

Hymn: R&S 497 Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart

The Benediction and Three-fold Amen

Notices

Next Sunday's service will be led The Revd. Robert Beard

Robert Beard is in the church every Monday morning from 9.00am to 1.00pm for anyone who would like to talk to him.

Saturday 12th. May 10.00am to 5.00pm St. Andrew's tennis Club is holding an Open Day. Come and see the courts' new Italian clay surface. Refreshments will be on sale all day. Everyone welcome.

Friday 18th. May 7.00pm The latest in:spire concert featuring Jessica Burroughs, a distinguished cellist and Annabelle Lawson, pianist. Music by Beethoven, Schumann and Faure.

Sunday May 20th. The morning service is a CTBB service at The Beacon, Broomhill. It will be a celebration of Pentecost followed by the CTBB AGM and lunch. St. Andrew's will be open for a short act of worship for any visitors.

13th. May 2018 Ascension Order of Service

This morning's Service is led by the Revd. Robert Beard

Pulpit Elder: Jean Dickson Organist: Douglas Jones Crèche: Shelagh Beach Flowers: Jean and John Price

Order of service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices

Call to Worship

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Hymn: He is risen, He is risen (on separate sheet) Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Hymn: R&S 253 God is gone up on high

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

The 1st New Testament reading: Ephesians 1 vv 15 – 23 Psalm 93 (please join in the words in bold type):

The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty;

the Lord is robed, he is girded with strength.

He has established the world; it shall never be moved;

Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting.

The floods have lifted up, O Lord,
the floods have lifted up their voice;

the floods lift up their roaring.

More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, More majestic than the waves of the sea,
Majestic on high is the Lord!

Your decrees are very sure;

Holiness befits your house, O Lord for evermore.

Hymn: R&S 252 Hail the day that sees Him rise (tune R&S 102)

The 2nd New Testament reading: Acts 1 vv 1 – 11 The Gospel reading: Luke 24 vv 44 – 53

The Anthem: Ascension Carol (Now Christ our Lord is King) 17th. century Dutch melody arranged by Charles Wood.

The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 665 Round the Lord in glory seated Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Lord's Prayer: R&S – inside back cover

The Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

Hymn: R&S 657 Rejoice, the Lord is King

The Benediction and Three-fold Amen Notices

Friday 18th. May 7.00pm. The latest in:spire concert featuring Jessica Burroughs, a distinguished cellist, and Annabelle Lawson, pianist. Music by Beethoven, Schumann and Faure.

Morning worship, Sunday 20th. May 10.30am is a CTBB service to celebrate Pentecost and will be held at The Beacon, Broomhill. The service, conducted by the Revd. Will Fletcher, will be followed by the CTBB AGM and lunch. St. Andrew's members are asked to bring desserts. St. Andrew's will be open for a short act of worship to welcome any visitors.

Robert Beard will be in church Monday 21st. May from 9.00am to 1.00pm for anyone who would like to talk to him.

Sunday 27th. May 10.45 am. Morning worship led by the Revd. Robert Beard.

Saturday 2nd. June 7.00pm St. Andrew's Hall Nether Edge S11 9AL Summer fundraiser for ASSIST. Vegetarian hot buffet, music and games, Promises Auction. £18. Tickets from - assistsummerfundraiser.eventbrite.co.uk or the ASSIST office.

A sermon preached on the Sunday after Ascension 13 May, 2018

Into God's Glory

Acts 1.1-11

When I was at theological college, one of my colleagues claimed to have calculated how far away Jesus was. He said that, assuming Jesus ascended from just outside Jerusalem in about 30 AD, and assuming also that he didn't take off like a rocket but ascended at a stately 15 miles an hour, he would be somewhere around the orbit of Saturn. I have no idea whether his figures were accurate, and I'm glad to say that he made this announcement with a very naughty twinkle in his eye, but it did provoke an interesting – and at times heated – discussion about the meaning of the Ascension of Jesus Christ for modern Christians.

The Ascension is described only by St Luke: in his gospel (Luke 24.50-53) and in its sequel The Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1.1-11). These books weren't written until 58-60 AD, a generation

after the events they purport to describe; but the Ascension of Jesus into heaven is referred to, or at least implied, in many other places in the New Testament, not least in the letters of Paul, probably the earliest of our New Testament writings (Romans 8.34; Ephesians 1.20; 4.8-10; 1 Timothy 3.16; Hebrews 4.14; 1 Peter 3.22). A generation later still, around the turn of the first century, it became a major theme of John's gospel (John 3.13; 6.62; 8.14,21; 13.3,33,36; 14.4-5, 28; 16.5,10,17,28; 20.17).

What Luke says in his gospel is this:

While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.

(Luke 24.51),

and in Acts,

As they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

(Acts 1.9).

The Ascension had great theological importance for the early church, especially as a marker. First, it marked the end of the forty-day period during which the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples (Acts 1.3). Secondly, it marked the point after which the Holy Spirit would be poured out in power on the Apostles and on those who believed in the Good News they preached (John 7.39, Acts 2.33-34). Thirdly, it marked the final completion of Jesus' earthly ministry and the beginning his reign at the right hand of God (Romans 8.34, Ephesians 1.20-23, Colossians 3.1), which would be his location until his Second Coming (Acts 1.11).

The first point is important for understanding the resurrection of Jesus. According to Luke, the resurrection appearances of Jesus lasted for forty days (Acts 1.3). After that brief period, there would be no more physical, bodily resurrection appearances of Jesus. The church has traditionally taken this forty-day limit to mean that all later encounters with Jesus would have to be classified as something else, perhaps as visions or dreams; and these included Jesus' appearance to Paul on the Damascus road. Paul himself lists the other resurrection appearances of Jesus, but distinguishes his own experience as an "untimely" birth (1 Corinthians 15.8).

This point is crucial for the Church, because without it there would almost certainly have been endless stories of the risen Christ appearing all over the place, bringing all sorts of supposed new revelations to all sorts of people. But the doctrine of the Ascension meant not only the end of Jesus' resurrection appearances, but also the end of his authentic teachings. There have, of course, been many claims about fresh revelations, but the mainstream Church has been able to bat these aside because of the Ascension. It's important to note, therefore, that Paul's Damascus road experience contains no new teaching. With the Ascension, the revelation of God in Christ is perfected and completed.

Going back to my provocative colleague for a moment, Luke is very careful in his double account of the Ascension to guard against implying that Jesus simply took off from a launch site outside Jerusalem and kept on going until the Apostles lost sight of him. When he says, “a cloud took him out of their sight,” he’s not talking about just any passing cloud. You can see the Acts story depicted in our Ascension window. As Jews who were familiar with their own Scriptures and traditions, the early Jewish Christian communities who first read Luke-Acts would have recognised in the reference to “a cloud” a symbol of the presence of God.

In Exodus, we read that Yahweh went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way (Exodus 13.21),

and that Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of Yahweh settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud (Exodus 24.15-16),

and again that The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of Yahweh was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey (Exodus 40.34-38, cf. Numbers 9.15-23). Similarly, in the description of the dedication of the Temple by King David in 2 Chronicles, we read that The house of Yahweh, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of Yahweh filled the house of God (2 Chronicles 15.3),

And when King Solomon performs the same rite in 1 Kings, a cloud filled the house of Yahweh, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh (1 Kings 8.10). Finally, the prophet Ezekiel witnesses the departure of God’s presence from the Temple:

Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the house when the man went in; and a cloud filled the inner court. Then the glory of Yahweh rose up from the cherub to the threshold of the house; the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the glory of Yahweh. (Ezekiel 10.3,4),

I’m sure you get the very obvious point that Luke is not describing an Ascension away from Earth out into the vasty reaches of interplanetary space. The New Testament tradition of the Ascension could not have taken into account our modern understanding of how the solar system is constructed, but that doesn’t mean for one moment that its authors were naïve or stupid. Quite the contrary, they didn’t believe that Jesus ascended into the sky, but rather into heaven, into the presence of the glory of God, which is another thing entirely, sometimes

glimpsed perhaps, but ultimately unknown and unknowable to us on Earth. Hence what an anonymous 14th century English mystic called, 'the cloud of unknowing'.

This raises another question: Can a person, whether divine or not, inhabit heaven while still in the body? Going back to the Old Testament – always a good idea! – we read of two significant individuals who appear to have entered God's presence while still in the body:

All the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him (Genesis 5.23-24),

and As [Elijah and Elisha] continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven (2 Kings 2.11). So there is Scriptural precedent for persons particularly favoured by God to be taken up into

heaven, and whether this makes better sense to us interpreted as a literal or as a symbolic acknowledgement of God's favour we can decide for ourselves. Both Enoch and Elijah are described as being assumed into heaven without experiencing death first. (Roman Catholics are taught the same thing about the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.)

The case of the Ascension of Jesus is different. Jesus undergoes crucifixion and resurrection, so that the body in which he ascends is his risen, transformed and glorified body, still bearing the marks of his Passion, but no longer vulnerable to earthly suffering. John Calvin, along with many other theologians, was clear on this point when he wrote in his Institutes of the Christian Religion that, "His body was raised up above to the heavens," and this is what Christians traditionally believe about our own ultimate destiny; as Paul writes in Philippians,

[The Lord Jesus Christ] will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself (Philippians 3.22).

Although we have a much better understanding than our forebears did of the solar system and our physical position within it, we still commonly use the sort of language that implies a heaven "above", while recognising, of course, that we don't mean it literally. And although Luke himself uses the same kind of language, he clearly intends something other than a literal "going up to heaven", and the cloud is a biblical symbol of the presence of God. So Luke tells us that Jesus passed from the presence of the disciples into the presence of God.

The 20th century Scottish theologian T F Torrance said, It should not need to be said that the use of spatial language... does not imply some alleged mythical 'three storied' picture of the world; even in the Old Testament it is clearly recognized that 'the heaven of heavens cannot contain God' (1 Kings 8.27, 2 Chronicles 2.6, 6.18; Acts 7.48f.) (Space, Time, and Resurrection, 1976).

And the American theologian Thomas Oden said,
It is doubtful that the language of descent and ascent in the New Testament ever really intended such a flat, unmetaphorical, literally three-story picture, even in the first century (The Word of Life, 1992).

In the end, I think, what matters is this: In their experience of the Ascension, our early Christian forebears learned that Jesus would no longer be with them in his own body. They were to return to his teachings and learn to recognise him in the bodies – the faces – of their fellow human beings, and especially in those to whom they could offer love and service. And as they did so, they found that God in Christ was in fact still present with them in the Holy Spirit, who equipped them with the love and power they needed to continue Jesus' ministry.

But that's a story for next week...

Revd Robert Beard B.D.

27th. May 2018 Order of Service

First Sunday after Pentecost and Trinity Sunday

This morning's Service is led by the Revd Robert Beard Pulpit Elder: Elizabeth Draper Organist:
Douglas Jones

Crèche: Jean Dickson

Flowers: Linda Callear

Order of service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices

Call to Worship

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Hymn: R&S 34 Holy, holy, holy

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Hymn: R&S 131 The voice of God goes out to all the world (Tune R&S 740)

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

The Old Testament reading: Isaiah 6 vv 1 - 8

Psalm 29 (please join in the words in bold type): Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendour.

The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders,
the Lord, over mighty waters.

The voice of the Lord is powerful;

the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes
Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox.

The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare;

and in his temple all say, 'Glory!'

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;

the Lord sits enthroned as king for ever.

May the Lord give strength to his people!

May the Lord bless his people with peace! Hymn: R&S 301 Holy Spirit, truth divine

The New Testament reading: Romans 8 vv 12 - 17 The Gospel reading: John 3 vv 1 - 17

The Anthem: God so loved the world (Stainer)

The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 645 Father of mercy, God of consolation Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Lord's Prayer: R&S – inside back cover

The Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

Hymn: R&S 578 Lord of light, whose name outshineth The Benediction and Three-fold Amen

Notices

Next Sunday's service will be led by The Very Revd. Peter Bradley, Dean of Sheffield.

There will be a church meeting after the service.

Robert Beard will not be in church to-morrow, Monday May 28th.

Saturday 2nd. June 7.00pm St. Andrew's Hall Nether Edge S11 9AL Summer fundraiser for ASSIST. Vegetarian hot buffet, music and games, Promises Auction. £18. Tickets from - assistsummerfundraiser.eventbrite.co.uk or the ASSIST office.

Saturday 16th. June. Farewell party for Robert. There will be an informal buffet in the hall from 4.00 – 6.00pm then reminiscences and tributes from Robert's friends and associates in the church.

A sermon preached on Trinity Sunday, 27 May 2018

Born Again From Above

John 3.1-17

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life John 3.16.

There's a story about a theatre goer emerging back out onto the street after seeing a production of Shakespeare's Hamlet, and commenting to a companion, "Well I didn't think much of that play; it was nothing but a string of quotations."

The Gospel according to St John can sometimes strike the reader similarly. It is extraordinarily quotable; and, like most quotable documents, it is extremely prone to having its words repeated out of context, as though John 3.16 (and many other verses) were slogans or mottoes or proverbs, rather than sentences uprooted from particular incidents or stories within an overarching narrative.

Many Christians will happily quote you John 3.16 at the drop of a mitre, but if you ask them about the context of that well-known verse, far fewer will be able to tell you that it comes from John's first story about Nicodemus. Even the fact that there are not one, not two, but three stories about Nicodemus in John's gospel comes as a surprise to many who reckon that they know the Bible well enough to quote it at people.

Read against the backdrop of Nicodemus' night-time visit, John 3.16 becomes the culmination of the response to him and people like him, and perhaps like us, who believe they know Jesus and who come to him not to be turned upside down by his holy newness, but to have their existing understanding affirmed and settled. Read in its entirety, however, we can see that the passage is not primarily about our knowledge and love of God in Christ, or our belief in the words of John 3.16, but about realising that it is we who are known and loved by God, and so drawn into a mystery far beyond our understanding and our wisdom.

So why this verse and, just as importantly, why this story?

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life John 3.16.

The connection between Nicodemus and John 3.16 may not seem immediately evident. In part, this is because Nicodemus finds his conversation with Jesus so confusing that we, as readers, end up experiencing some of that same confusion. But let's step back for a moment and look at the whole exchange; then ask ourselves, is it really so strange that a conversation about birth, to which there are no fewer than eight references in just six verses, should culminate in a statement about life?

In fact, let's take another step back, and look at what comes immediately before today's reading:

When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone John 2.23-25.

Who are those to whom Jesus "would not entrust himself" and what was that he knew about them?

Let's take a third step back, and look one more time. This time let's include the Prologue to John's gospel in our view of this story's context, where we read that Jesus is the incarnate Word, and that

In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it John 1.4-5.

In a gospel in which true life is light and, later, night will fall as the betrayer leaves the table (13.30), Nicodemus comes to Jesus under cover of darkness. The night-time setting of Nicodemus' appearance helps to suggest that he, for one, is among those to whom Jesus does not entrust himself, for he comes in darkness. Not only that, but rather than ask Jesus who he is, he tells him:

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God" John 3.2.

This confirms our suspicions. Nicodemus is indeed one of those many, mentioned at the end of chapter 2, who believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing John 2.24, and therefore thinks he knows who Jesus is. But what "we know" – or think we know – is not at all a firm foundation for faith in Jesus Christ.

And so Jesus immediately begins to undo Nicodemus' certainty: Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.

And now we can see that this is not in fact the non sequitur it appears to be. Rather, Jesus has cut straight to the heart of the matter, and told this Pharisee that he cannot rely on his merely

human knowledge. True knowledge of Jesus is not a matter of empirical observation and inference, but of receiving a wholly new world view: a new birth into an alternative life. Unless Nicodemus is born again into this new life, with its new view of the world, he can neither see the Kingdom of God, nor enter into it.

The light shines in the darkness John 1.3, and if Nicodemus wants to see clearly, he must come out of the darkness of night and into the light of God's day.

As their conversation proceeds, Jesus picks up on the words and ideas introduced by Nicodemus and repeats them, but each time with more profound meaning; and so we see the repetition of words such as "God" and "enter", and repeated references to being born. With each repetition Jesus expands the scope of the conversation, from the smallness of Nicodemus' world view to the breadth of his – God's – world view, from the signs on which Nicodemus and others base their hope, to the invisible mystery of the Spirit/wind (the two words are the same in Greek), which can give him birth into God's new life. And slowly... slowly... slowly... light begins to dawn!

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born "from above". The phrase "from above" is a translation of the single Greek word (ἄνωθεν, anóthen) which recurs in John's gospel when Jesus says,

The one who comes from above is above all. when he tells Pontius Pilate, You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above and in the description of Jesus' robe being woven in one piece from the top 3.31, 19.11 John 3.3, 19.23. But ἄνωθεν can also mean simply "again", and this is the meaning that Nicodemus hears, which so baffles him: "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" John 3.4

So Jesus elaborates on this birth from above for Nicodemus' benefit – and, of course, for ours. This rebirth is not a physical birth at all, but a birth of water and Spirit. It is the birth "from above", and it represents, not a literal being "born again" but a complete paradigm shift from the earthly, human perspective of those who, like Nicodemus, base their faith on signs and wonder, to the heavenly, divine perspective of God who loves everyone, whether they have received signs and wonders or not.

The phrase "with water and the spirit", reminds us of Jesus' own baptism, which John has already alluded to in his prologue, when John the Baptist testifies:

"I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel. I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God" John 1.31-34.

It's important to note that that when Jesus says, What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit John 3.6, he is not talking about two parts of the human person – this is not body versus soul - but about

the two perspectives, earthly and heavenly, from which the complete person, body and soul, can live. Birth “from above” into a life in which God's kingdom is visible and accessible, places the whole person in a new light. Nicodemus, who has not experienced it, has only seen Jesus' signs from the earthly perspective, What he – and we – need to do is to see, not just the signs, but the whole of human life from the heavenly perspective. Only then will we recognise Jesus for who he is, the light that shines in the darkness.

This brings us to the climax of the conversation. First, Jesus says,

Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life John 3.14-15.

This is John's first use of the term “lifted up” to refer to Jesus' death. In John, the crucifixion forms part of Jesus' glorification and so is both his exaltation and his lifting up to death.

And finally, Jesus says, For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life John 3.16.

In John 3.16, eternal life is linked inextricably with God's love. It is not our faith that brings us eternal life, but God's love for the world: not just for the followers of Jesus, but for the whole world.

In the Prologue to John's gospel, the world is shrouded in darkness and the light shines alone. But God's intention for this dark world is not condemnation, even when it lifts up and kills the Son. On the contrary, in that moment especially, the Son will be revealed as the Saviour of this dark world.

When we become too sure of what we know about Jesus, when we believe that we have grasped him at last, we can expect our certainties to be undone, just as Nicodemus had his certainties undone. That undoing – that overturning of our certainty -- may be a very good thing if it allows us to experience anew belief in the miracle of our birth from above into eternal life, which has nothing to do with what we know or what we are (any more than our birth from our mother's womb did).

Believing in Jesus Christ is not a matter of being convinced, or convincing ourselves, that Jesus is God, but of adopting that heavenly perspective on life that Jesus came to bring us, and which, through our actions, transforms the life of this world.

Revd Robert Beard B.D.

Order of service June 10th

The Old Testament reading: 1 Samuel 8 4-20

But the haughty he regards from far away.

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices

Though I walk in the midst of trouble,

You preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;

You stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. The Lord will fulfil his purpose for me;

Call to Worship The Lord be with you

Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures for ever.

And also with you

Do not forsake the work of your hands.

The New Testament reading: 2 Corinthians 4 vv 13 – 5v1

Hymn: R&S 536 New every morning is the day. Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Hymn: R&S 353 There's a wideness in God's mercy

The Gospel reading: Mark 3 vv 20-35

The Anthem: A prayer of St Richard of Chichester (L J White)

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

Psalm 138 (please join in the words in bold type)

I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart;

before the gods I sing your praise;

I bow down towards your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.

The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 41 For the beauty of the earth

On the day I called, you answered me,

Reception into membership of Suzanne Westran – Congregational responses

You increased my strength of soul.

Minister: In welcoming Suzanne as a fellow- member in the life of this church, do you promise your friendship in the Lord, and will you give her your support in prayer and service, so that she, with us, may continue to grow in the knowledge and love of God and witness to Jesus Christ our risen Lord?

All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.
They shall sing of the ways of the Lord,
for great is the glory of the Lord.

For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly;

Congregation: We do, and with God's help, we will.

Minister: God of grace, you call us to be your servant people, and gather us into the body of Christ. We thank you for sending us Suzanne to work with us in serving your kingdom. Confirm us all in the power of your covenant to live in your spirit, to love each other and to share the mind of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

All: Amen.

The new Church Member is greeted with the right hand of Fellowship.

All: In the name of Christ we welcome you.

May we grow together in unity, and be built up into the body of Christ in love.

To the glory of God, Father , son and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn: Precious Lord , Take My Hand See separate sheet

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession The Lord's Prayer: R&S – inside back cover The
Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

Hymn: R&S 414 When, in our music, God is glorified. The Benediction and Three-fold Amen

Hymn: R&S 312 Come , Spirit all our hearts inspire. Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Hymn: R&S 363 Lord Jesus think on me.

The Old Testament reading: Ezekiel 17: 22-24 Theme Introduction

The Anthem: Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels

Order of service June 17

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices

The Gospel reading: Mark 4: 26 34

Call to Worship The Lord be with you

Hymn: R&S 59 God moves in a mysterious way (Tune 1)

And also with you

The Sermon

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

Hymn: R&S 589 How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord (Tune 67)

Hymn: R&S 550 Put thou thy trust in God The Old Testament reading: 1 Samuel 8: 4-20

Prayers of thanksgiving and Intercesssion The Lord's Prayer: R&S – inside back cover The
Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

The Benediction and Three-fold Amen

SERMON St Andrew's 24.06.18

1 Sam 17:1, 4-11, 19-23, 32-49 Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32

2 Cor 6:1-13

Mark 4:35-41

1 Sam. 17:45 "Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.' "

The story of David and Goliath is one of the best known passages of the OT. Even many people with no church background and little knowledge of the bible have some familiarity with it. It is a story which all of us learned at school or in Junior Church, and which we remember throughout life (or at least that always used to be so; I am not sure how far that is still the case for the children growing up today). Yet surprisingly enough, this is a passage of scripture on which I have never before preached.

The setting of this event is the conflict between the Israelites and the Philistines, which provided the motivation for the formation of the Israelite monarchy. According to the biblical account, after the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua conquered the land of Canaan, and settled in the land, which was divided up and allocated to the Israelite tribes. For many years, the Israelite tribes were led by a series of charismatic judges, who arose from time to time and delivered them in various conflicts which arose with some of the neighbouring peoples. But eventually the Philistines came to pose a much more serious threat to the Israelites, and even to threaten their very existence.

The origin of the Philistines is not completely known, but seems to have been in the Aegean world, and there are biblical passages linking them with Crete. It is thought that they were allied with other sea peoples, who aimed to settle in Egypt, but when the Egyptians proved to be too strong for them, they settled in the coastal area of the Negeb, next to the land allocated to the tribe of Judah. Thus the Philistines and the Israelites were both outsiders, competing to settle in the land of Canaan, hence the conflict between them.

It became clear to the Israelites that they needed more organised leadership than the judges had given in the past, the kind of leadership that could only be provided by a king. Their first king, Saul, had some modest successes against the Philistines, but was unable to achieve any decisive victory. This is the background to the confrontation which took place in the Valley of Elah.

The story of David and Goliath is a long and very readable narrative, though it is evidently made up of material from more than one source, which does not always fit very well together. There is also the difficulty that some elements of this material do not fit very well with the previous chapter (1 Sam 16), which relates that David had been anointed by Samuel and had been received into the king's court to act as a minstrel to Saul.

Yet here in chapter 17, Saul does not appear to know David. The Israelite and Philistine armies stood on mountains on either side of the valley of Elah. From the Philistine side, there came out a "champion", named Goliath from Gath. This word translated "champion" means literally "a man of the space between", that is to say between two armies, thus a champion or challenger who was ready to engage in single combat for his army.

Goliath called upon the Israelites to provide a combatant to fight with him, and the army of whichever of them lost the fight would be subservient to the other. The story of how David killed Goliath with a stone from his sling is so well known that I do not think that I need to go over the details. It is a very well-liked passage of the bible, particularly because it epitomises victory against overwhelming odds. In any conflict or dispute between an individual and another person or group of persons, and the odds are stacked against one side, perhaps all of us have a natural inclination to support the side that we perceive to be the under-dog, particularly if it represents a just cause.

In the modern world this might be an individual person standing up against a large organisation, perhaps a government department or a multi-national company, which has acted unreasonably. When the small man wins against such overwhelming odds, probably all of us would want to applaud that victory. The fight between David and Goliath was a very unequal one in several respects. It was certainly unequal in terms of size and therefore sheer physical strength.

Goliath is said to have had a height of six cubits and a span, which is reckoned to be about 9 feet 6 inches. Even if this is an exaggeration, doubtless Goliath towered far above the young lad David. Moreover, Goliath was probably well-experienced in combat, whereas David had no such experience, and was accustomed only to keeping his father's sheep.

Goliath was well kitted-out in armour and weaponry, and his accoutrements recall those of medieval knights. Yet when David attempted to walk wearing armour, he was unable to do so. In any case, the Philistines and therefore Goliath may well have had superior weapons. There is a somewhat obscure passage in 1 Sam 13:19-23 which seems to suggest that the Israelites were dependent on the Philistines for their expertise in metal working. So the match between David and Goliath was on the face of it a very unequal one.

On the other hand, David did have some distinct advantages in his favour. Most obviously, there was his skill at using a sling, which he had acquired as a shepherd defending his sheep against lions and bears, a skill which he was able to use to lethal effect against the Philistine. But even more than this was his awareness that he was acting in the name of the God of Israel, whom his opponent had defied. And his conviction that what he was doing was for the sake of this God would surely have given him confidence in the outcome of his action.

Our Gospel reading is about a different kind of victory in the face of overwhelming odds. This time it is not about a little man versus a big man, but about man versus the forces of nature.

As Jesus was going across the Sea of Galilee in a boat with his disciples, a great storm of wind suddenly arose, so that the waves beat against the boat and it began to fill with water. But Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat, apparently oblivious to the danger that threatened them.

His disciples woke him with the words, "Teacher, do you care if we perish?" On waking, Jesus rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, with the words, "Peace! Be still!". At this the wind ceased, and there was a great calm, and Jesus questioned the disciples about their fear and lack of faith.

This event related by Mark, and likewise Matthew and Luke, was evidently regarded by the earliest Christians as saying something important about Jesus.

In order to appreciate its significance for them, we have to remember that in Jewish thought the original act of creation involved God being victorious in a contest with the forces of chaos and

evil, which were identified with, or at least, located in the waters of the sea. Therefore, the ability to control the sea and subdue tempests was regarded as a characteristic sign of divine power.

Thus the psalmist (in Ps 89:8-9) can say, "Who is as mighty as you, O LORD? Your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them." Moreover, the image of great waters was often used as a metaphor for the evil forces active in the world, and particularly for the tribulations of the righteous, from which only the power of God could save them (Ps 18:16; 69:1-2, 14-15).

The verses of Psalm 107 which we read earlier express an assurance that even in the most terrible storm God has the power and determination to save those who turn to him for help.

It is also interesting to note that the ability to sleep peacefully and untroubled was considered to be a sign of perfect trust in the sustaining and protective power of God. Thus the psalmist in Ps 4:8 can say, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety."

With this background in mind, we can see that the early church would have seen some important truths to be learned about Jesus from the account of his stilling of the storm. Although sudden violent storms were liable to blow up on the lake, Jesus was able to lie down and sleep in peace, for he had complete faith in the divine power to make him "lie down in safety".

By contrast, the disciples showed themselves, as on other occasions, to be men of little faith. Most importantly, Jesus was able to overcome even the forces of nature, in order to save his disciples. He was able to rebuke the wind and the sea on their behalf, as though these represented personal demonic forces which threatened their lives.

Ultimately, what St Mark relates here – Jesus among his disciples in the boat – is a symbolic representation of the risen Jesus standing among his followers in the church. The greatest of the forces of nature which all of us must come up against is death, and at the centre of our faith is one who overcame even death itself.

We believe in faith that his is a victory in which we shall all share.

Order of Service 1 July, 2018

Welcome and Notices Call to Worship:

We believe that God is light,
and in God there is no darkness at all; that God is Love,
and those who live in love, live in God.

Minister

The Lord be with you

Congregation

and also with you.

We believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh from God; that he was revealed to take away sins;
that in him the love of God reached perfection;
that he is the Saviour of the world.

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

We believe that God gives us eternal life;
that this life is in his Son;
that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us; that those who do the will of God live for ever.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

Order of Service

A Creed, based on the First Letter of St John:

R&S 45: Morning has broken (tune Bunessan, arr. Cat Stevens) Prayers of Adoration and Confession

R&S 67: Immortal, invisible God only wise

Old Testament reading: 2 Samuel 1.1, 17-27

We believe that the Spirit of love is holy;
that those who love are born of God and know God;
that there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; that those who love God must love their brothers and sisters

Psalm 130:

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!

also.

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

We believe that the Church is Christ's community;
that we are to purify ourselves just as he is pure;
that we abide in him and ought to walk just as he walked, proclaiming love in truth and action.

my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning.

Amen.

O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

Prayers of Intercession

R&S 454: Let all mortal flesh keep silence The Great Thanksgiving

The Lord's Prayer

The Communion

The Post-Communion Prayer

Hymn 537: God is working his purpose out The Blessing and Dismissal:

It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

New Testament reading: 2 Corinthians 8.7-15

Gospel reading: Mark 5.21-43

Anthem: Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes (Thomas Attwood) Sermon

R&S 104: Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven

Minister Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

Congregation in the name of Christ. Amen.

**A sermon preached on
the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost 1 July 2018**

Faith

(Mark 5.21-43)

When I was a student at the University of St Andrews, I used frequently walked past – and even occasionally entered – the modest doorway of the local Gospel Hall. On a glass-covered notice-board next to the door, there would usually be a poster presenting, in large and imposing but dull-coloured letters, a Biblical text, always from the Authorised or “King James” version. One such, I recall, sternly challenged passers-by with the question from Matthew 22.42,

WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

As Divinity students, we used to respond rather irreverently to these simple, unadorned quotations, with answers such as, “Bit of a party animal!” (thinking of the wine Jesus supplied at the wedding in Cana in John 2.1-12,) of “Hangs out with the wrong crowd!” (thinking of the accusation, “Friend of sinners” levelled at Jesus’ in Matthew 11.19 and Luke 7.34. I don’t think

these responses were exactly what the good people of the Gospel Hall had in mind when they put up their poster; but, on reflection, I suppose they were perhaps comforting ways for students to think of Jesus, having a tendency to be party animals ourselves and no doubt also, in our juvenile way, sinners.

St Mark's Gospel records a wide variety of responses to Jesus:

in chapter 1, verse 27, his hearers recognise something new about his teaching in chapter 2, verse 7, he is accused by the Pharisees of blasphemy

in chapter 2, verse 16, he is criticised for the company he keeps

and in chapter three, verse 21, he is simply dismissed as crazy.

In this morning's gospel reading, however, we encounter the first instance in which Jesus is met with flat-out disbelief, laughed at (Mark 5.40) for his faith in the healing power of God.

Let's rewind a bit and look at the story as a whole.

The stories of Jairus and of the woman with a haemorrhage are found in all three of the Synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Unusually, however, Mark, the shortest gospel, has longest version of these stories.

Mark's earlier healing stories are brief, business-like, almost terse; but here there is more in the way of context and set-up. In all three versions, the two healing stories are intertwined, as indeed they are in Matthew and Luke, too. Mark presents the first part of the story of Jairus, identified by Mark as a "leader of the synagogue," interrupts it with the whole story of the unnamed woman with a haemorrhage, and then presents the second part of the Jairus story.

Importantly, Jairus' request for healing is made not on his own behalf (cf. 1.40-45), but on behalf of someone else, albeit someone intimately related to him. Just after Jairus makes his request, however, a woman who knows Jesus only by reputation is introduced, but she doesn't even ask to be healed, only touches his cloak and is made whole again. Then comes the news that the woman's interruption has wasted crucial moments. Jesus is too late. Jairus' daughter has died.

I'm going to pause at this point in the story, because there's something very important about faith going on here. First, the actions of the unclean woman are borne of utter desperation. She's not like someone manoeuvring into a position where she can make eye contact or shake hands with a celebrity; on the contrary, she doesn't care whether Jesus even notices her; she just wants to touch the edge of his robe. But these actions are interpreted by Jesus as being borne, not of desperation but of faith. He is determined to find out who she is, to acknowledge her as an individual human being and a child of God:

"Daughter," he says, when she is identified to him, "your faith has made you well; go in

peace, and be healed of your disease” (Mark 5.34).

Although this unnamed woman has made no verbal profession of faith, Jesus himself has declared her faithful.

So here’s a question: Why does the Church so often insist on a statement in words, when for Jesus it’s so often actions that really count?

And Mark isn’t done with faith yet. At the point where he picks up the Jairus story again, the news is brought that Jesus is too late. Jairus’ daughter has died. Overhearing this, however, Jesus says to Jairus, very simply,

"Do not fear, only believe" (Mark 5.36).

His words to the woman were descriptive, bringing out the underlying meaning of something that had just happened: “Your faith has made you well.” His words to Jairus are prescriptive, almost gently imperative, about the importance of faith to something that is about to happen: "Do not fear, only believe."

And so we come to the first instance of sheer disbelief, cynicism and mockery in response to the presence and words of Jesus. When he tells the crowd gathered at Jairus’ house that his daughter is not dead, but sleeping, they laughed at him. But their laughter – contrasting with the desperate faith of the woman whom we have just heard about, and the urging to faith by Jesus of Jairus who is hoping against hope – serves only to heighten the tension of the story. Jesus takes the girl’s hand, bids her rise up, and she does so; and suddenly the disbelieving laughter of the crowds turns into *megale ekstaseis*, the literal translation of the Greek is “great ecstasy.”

The kingdom of God comes near to all these people in the presence of Jesus. The presence of Jesus is what transforms the lives of everyone.

In Mark’s gospel, Jesus is proclaimed both his deeds and his teaching, and by the book’s many and various characters; and the proclamation is that the promise of God has come to pass, made real and present and immediate in Jesus.

We may recognise that in this proclamation there is something new and worth investigating further.

We may, on the other hand, hear only blasphemy, in the sense of something that challenges the beliefs we cling to, in our fear and insecurity.

We may not like the company the proclamation requires us to keep, preferring to stay with children of God who are like us, rather than children of God who are hungry and thirsty, sick or injured, seeking asylum, fleeing abuse, experiencing addiction, sleeping rough or working the streets at night.

We may think that the proclamation is crazy, that it's one thing for Jesus to live like that, but quite another to expect us to do so.

Or we may decide to stop seeking salvation in the material possessions and false values that surround us, to try to find our way through all the crowd and noise of 21st century life, and focus all our efforts on just touching the edge of Jesus' robe; and, having touched him, we may take to ourselves his words to the woman in today's gospel: "Your faith has made you well."

We are about to take the bread and wine of communion: a simple action in itself, but one in which we make again the enormous commitment of really being the Body of Christ in the world today.

I am not the host at this sacred meal. It is not I who invite you. This is not my table or your table. Jesus Christ is the host. It is Jesus Christ who invites you. This is his table. Receive these gifts of bread and wine, set aside and sanctified for His purposes. We eat and drink, not because we feel worthy, but because Jesus Christ commands us. Having obeyed his great command, we may then take to ourselves his words to Jairus in today's gospel: "Do not fear, only believe."

And so I leave you with these two assurances, which come not from me but from Jesus Christ himself:

When you think about this wonderful, amazing Church of St Andrew, this wonderful, amazing neighbourhood of Broomhall, this wonderful, amazing city of Sheffield, and all that you and I have experienced together, remember the words of Jesus Christ: "Your faith has made you well."

And when you think about this wonderful, amazing Church of St Andrew, this wonderful, amazing neighbourhood of Broomhall, this wonderful, amazing city of Sheffield, our present plans and our exciting future, remember the words of Jesus Christ: "Do not fear, only believe."

Revd Robert Beard B.D.

Order of Service

5th August, 2018 Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

This morning's service is led by The Revd. Dr Walter Houston

Pulpit Elder: Ann Cathels Organist: Douglas Jones

Crèche: Jean Dickson

Flowers: Isabel Sandland

Order of Service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices.

Notices

The Call to Worship: Minister: The Lord be with you

All: And also with you

Hymn: R&S 106 – Thy ceaseless, unexhausted love

Prayers of Adoration and Invocation

Very young children leave for the crèche

Introduction: telling the story of David

The Old Testament reading: 2 Samuel 11: 26 - 12:13

Anthem: Turn thy face from my sins (Thomas Attwood)

Hymn: R&S 695 (Psalm 51) - O God be gracious to me in your love The Gospel reading : John 6: 24 - 35

Hymn: R&S 449 - I hunger and I thirst

The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 351 - Father of Jesus Christ, my Lord Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Lord's prayer

The Offertory and Doxology (R&S 21)

Hymn: R&S 345 - Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

Dismissal and Blessing

The Three-fold Amen

Notices

Next Sunday's service, 12th August, will be led by the

Mrs Jenny Carpenter

Sermon at St Andrew's, 5 Aug. 2018.

Readings: 2 Sam. 11:26—12:13; John 6:24-35

Many men have committed adultery, and some have murdered for it. But there is something special about David's crimes. Just this: David was the king. What he did he was able to do because he was powerful, and he was willing to misuse his power, as so many powerful men (and a few women) have done through history. He sent a message to a married woman

commanding her to come to him. When she came, she went to bed with him. Many people have assumed that she did so willingly. I doubt it, because you don't say no to the king however much you want to, and recent experience since the revelations about Harvey Weinstein, with the #MeToo movement, shows that a man, and especially a powerful man, can usually have his way with a woman whatever her wishes. And then David was able to get Uriah killed because he was the king, and he could send orders to his general which he obeyed if he knew what was good for him.

So when the Lord sends Nathan to confront David with what he has done, Nathan is not faced with any ordinary job of preacherly denunciation. He has to tell the king where he has gone wrong, a king who has already shown that he has no compunction about killing when he thinks he needs to. Nathan needs the courage of a lion and the boldness of a Luther. He can do it because God has commanded him and God gives him strength.

But what God asks of Nathan he also asks of his Church from time to time. One of the reasons why the Church exists in the world is to challenge wrongdoing in high places—and it can be dangerous. The Quakers have a word for it: they call it 'speaking truth to power'. The phrase has been taken up by others in course of time. Speaking truth to power. And some church leaders have ended up like Uriah for doing it.

When Oscar Romero was made Archbishop of San Salvador he was thought to be a sound conservative who wouldn't rock the boat. But when he realised how the government and the powerful families were treating El Salvador's poor, making them live in misery so that they themselves could live in comfort, and how that had led to the revolt and the guerrilla campaign, and all the suffering that that had caused, he could not keep silent. He had to speak out, as Nathan had to speak out, because he had a word from God, because he had a truth which he had to speak to power. And the death squads lay in wait for him and gunned him down in his own cathedral. Speaking truth to power is not comfortable and is sometimes dangerous. But it is always necessary.

Perhaps you are thinking that that is not something that you will ever be called on to do. You don't have access to powerful people, you're not able to speak to them. The fact is that nowadays, if you have access to the internet, speaking truth to power is a shade too easy. If a so-called 'petition' from one of a dozen campaigning organisations lands in my inbox, a click on a button, or at most writing in my name and email address, sends my heartfelt plea

about a scandal I've only just heard of winging its way to some minister, or probably only their secretary.

But that doesn't mean that elsewhere in the world there may not be people seriously risking their lives to speak truth to power. Think only of the unarmed protesters shot in Harare the other day. They may not have known what the truth was, but they were gunned down simply for

protesting. (While in China hundreds of people critical of the official line have been arrested, disappeared or prevented from communicating.)

Speaking truth to power is my first point—I have another three.

Now let's look at how Nathan carries out his commission. He starts by telling a story. It's such a good story that David thinks it's true, and bursts out in anger, condemning himself, as he shortly realises. Nathan traps him into condemning himself by putting what he has to say in a way which makes utter sense, a simple story which even a child could understand, but which conceals the bleak truth just under the surface. And this is how Jesus also taught. When he says 'My Father gives you the true bread from heaven', it is a strange picture, but one which captures the imagination. And just under the surface of this strange picture is the truth of Jesus himself, who keeps us going spiritually as bread keeps us going physically.

It is important whenever we talk about serious things, about God, about Christ, about the false acts of power, that we should speak in a way which people can catch on to. They don't necessarily have to understand straight away. David thought he understood what Nathan was saying, but he didn't, not until Nathan said 'You are the man!' What matters is that they should have something to think about, even if they can't at once grasp the full meaning. Some of the speakers on Thought for the Day on Radio 4 in the morning are able to do this, but most can't. If you are a regular listener, you will be able to sort out which is which.

So there is the second point: speaking to catch the imagination.

Now, for our third point we need to move on to see how Nathan follows through on his dramatic denunciation, 'You are the man!' 'Why have you despised the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight?... Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house.' What David has to learn is that he cannot commit adultery and murder and get away with it. In fact, to a remarkable extent he does get away with it, considering that the normal penalty for murder (and adultery) was death. But he might have found a straightforward death sentence easier to bear than what actually happens. The son Bathsheba has borne him dies. His eldest son rapes David's daughter, his half-sister, and he is then murdered in revenge by the daughter's full brother. This son Absalom then rebels against David, drives him out of Jerusalem, and seizes his palace, including his concubines. When David rallies his forces Absalom is defeated and killed, to David's deep grief.

David himself is spared, but there is no cheap grace. The judgment of God is a reality. It applies to individuals; it applies also to peoples. We can't go on running society in a way which defies God's intention for us without any consequences. If we allow managers of big companies to earn 300 times what their average worker earns, there will be a price to pay, in hatred and envy and strife, in the tearing apart of our social fabric. If we go on pouring greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to satisfy our short-sighted desires, the world may literally become too hot to

hold us. Why do we think we alone of all generations of humankind are immune to the natural law which the Bible spells out so implacably and which we have seen working so often?

The 'amazing grace' of which the hymn writer speaks is not amazing because it means no punishment. It is amazing because it means sinful men and women are reconciled to the holy God. But the reconciliation doesn't mean we can necessarily escape the natural consequences of what we have done. We may have to bear them to the end of our days.

So our third point is that judgement is necessary. But the fourth point is the other side of that. David hears Nathan out, and then he responds simply and sincerely, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' He simply recognises that he has done wrong. Nothing more than that. But that is enough. Enough to transform the situation: for Nathan's response is: 'Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.' David's sin led to death, not just Uriah's but many people's. His repentance opens the way to life.

Of course, it is not David himself who gives life by repenting. He is a rank sinner, who deals in death, and however repentant he is he is never going to deal in life. It is God who gives life, it is God who is merciful, and it is his mercy that gives life. It is 'the bread which comes down from heaven' which gives life to the world, not any bread that we bake. But because David recognises that he has sinned, he is simply able to receive God's mercy. And that makes all the difference.

Everyone knows that the one word politicians can't bring themselves to say is sorry, unless it's in a sentence like 'I'm sorry that what I said may have been misconstrued', or 'I'm sorry for any offence that may have been caused.' But it's not only politicians. If you are ever involved in a car accident, you will find, even if you think you were to blame, that your insurance company will tell you not to admit it. Their bottom line is more important than common decency. Of course saying sorry can be hard. We all have our pride, and admitting we were wrong is a severe blow to our pride. It makes us open and vulnerable. But just for that reason it can be immensely creative. It can end a moral logjam. If two people are at loggerheads and neither will admit they were wrong, nothing can happen. It is stalemate, it is moral death. Once one of them admits it, life can start again. It's so simple, and so difficult.

The truth of this was shown in a remarkable way in South Africa by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which Archbishop Desmond Tutu presided over. For forty years or more the races had been in bitter conflict, the whites under the National Party government excluding all other races from political

power and repressing all attempts to resist, often with violence and murder and torture. And there had been atrocities on the other side too. There could have been endless trials and reprisals. (I have been reading a history of the Balkans over the last 200 years. In that sorry history, every time there is a massacre, sooner or later there is a massacre in revenge.) Under

the brave and generous leadership of Nelson Mandela, something different was tried. People were invited to give evidence to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and if they were open and honest about their own crimes they could go free. Now I'm not saying that it was a great thing that people accepted that invitation, because there was a very big incentive to do so: if they didn't, they could be arrested and tried and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. The point is that because they admitted their crimes, they gave a kind of life back to their victims. The victims didn't have to forgive them, but because they had admitted it, it made it possible for them to forgive. And so life could begin again.

And if that is true between human beings, how much more is it true between us and God! For God is always ready to forgive. And as we say sorry to God, he comes to meet us and gives us the bread of life, the bread which is Christ, and in him we find life.

So let's look back over the lessons this encounter of king and prophet has taught us:

that we need to speak truth to power;

that we must speak in a way which people can catch on to;

that we must accept the judgment of God;

that repentance and forgiveness lead to reconciliation and to life.

Pulpit Elder: Jean Dickson Crèche: Isabel Sandland

Order of Service

12th August, 2018

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

This morning's service is led by Mrs Jenny Carpenter

Organist: Douglas Jones Flowers: Jean and John Price

Order of Service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices.

Notices

The Call to Worship: Minister: The Lord be with you

All: And also with you

Introduction

Hymn: R&S 360 – Come, thou fount of every blessing

Prayers of Adoration and Confession interspersed with "Kyrie Eleison" R&S 5 (c)

Declaration of Forgiveness

Very young children leave for the crèche

The Old Testament reading: Exodus 16: 2-4 and 9-15 Hymn: R&S 685 - Through all the changing scenes of life Epistle : Ephesians 4: 25 - 5: 2, reading from "Good as New" Hymn:

R&S 529 Light of the minds that know thee

The Gospel reading : John 6: 35 and 41-51

Anthem: O taste and see how gracious the Lord is (Vaughan Williams)

The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 554 - Thou art the Way

Prayers of Thanksgiving, Intercession and Petition

The Lord's prayer

Offertory and Doxology (R&S 21)

Hymn: R&S 623 - Eternal Ruler of the ceaseless round Blessing

Three-fold Amen

Our Organist Douglas Jones will play a voluntary

Notices

Next Sunday's service, 19th August, will be led by the

Revd. Canon Adrian Alker

There will be a FairTrade Stall in the Hall after the Service

Monday 13th August 2pm

A visit to the Muslim Welfare Centre of the Mosque, 10 -12 Severn Road. Please inform Elizabeth if you plan to attend.

ST.ANDREW'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH SUNDAY 12 AUGUST 2018 at 10.45am

Welcome by Elder

Call to Worship : The Lord be with you/ And also with you Introduction

Rejoice & Sing 360 Come, thou fount of every blessing

Prayers of Adoration & Confession interspersed with "Kyrie Eleison R&S 5(c) Declaration of Forgiveness

OT Lesson : Exodus 16 v.2-4 and 9-15 reader, please

Rejoice and Sing 685 Through all the changing scenes of life

Epistle : Ephesians 4 v. 25 to 5 v. 2 Jenny C to read from "Good as New" Rejoice and Sing 529

Light of the minds that know thee

Gospel : John 6 v. 35 and 41-51 reader, please

Anthem : O Taste and See (Vaughan Williams)

Sermon

Rejoice and Sing 554 Thou art the Way

Prayers of Thanksgiving, Intercession and Petition

The Lord's Prayer (traditional version)

Offering and Dedication

Rejoice and Sing 623 Eternal Ruler of the ceaseless round

Blessing

SERMON

"O taste and see that the Lord is good"

"Taster sessions" for all kinds of activities to see whether this is something you want to delve into further. Freshers'Week all the societies make their pitch. Various classes free session before you have to commit yourselves. Children will say they don't like a food they've never tried – taste and see. Some things are "an acquired taste" – we use that phrase not just of foods e.g. olives; dark chocolate but perhaps of some kinds of modern art or classical music or even certain styles of worship!

Favourite passage John 1 where J the B points out Jesus – Look - the Lamb of God 2 disciples follow Jesus. Aware of being tailed Jesus says "What do you want?" "Rabbi, where are you staying?" "Come and see". They spent the rest of the day with him – it was about the tenth hour – 4 o'clock in the afternoon. So probably only a couple of hours, but enough to want to become his disciples. Enough to make Andrew full of excitement go straight to find his brother saying "We have found the Messiah". They both join up for the full-time course as companions of Jesus.

Companion = literally one who shares bread with another'

OT lesson : After a time of what seems like aimless wandering in the desert, the Hebrews (rabble) start grumbling. It is hard going, both food and water are in short supply. "We were better off in Egypt: at least there we had food to eat." Moses appeals to God and he sends a flock of quails and then daily manna. But they soon got fed up with that, too.

Parallel passage in Numbers 11 says " We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost – also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite : we never see anything but this manna!"

Manna literally "What is it?" Strange, but adequate to keep them going. NB daily provision, it couldn't be stored overnight it went bad. Truth about daily reliance on God. Enough for the family or enough for one. "To each according to his need".

"Bread that came down from heaven". Recent announcement of £2m from Department for Education budget for provision of food and activities for school age children during the holidays. Free school lunches (and often breakfast as well) vital for many poor families, so harder in the holidays. e.g. 10-12 activities for younger children then lunch for all then 1-3 activities for older children.

Jesus in this amazing John 6 chapter speaks of himself as the bread that came down from heaven or the bread of life. Like the manna, but not like the manna. It comes after the feeding of the five thousand with ACTUAL bread and fish. But he doesn't send bread he IS bread. John's gospel does not include a detailed account of the Last Supper in which Jesus offers bread and wine saying "this is my body, broken for you" and "this is my blood, shed for you." Rather he tells of Jesus washing the disciples' feet and then giving bread dipped in wine to Judas – special titbit.

Gospel of John with its seven "I AM" claims is emphatically showing the divinity of Jesus. " I am for you" "I am for all the world". If God is for us, who can be against us.

Identification with Jesus in his death most poignant in Holy Communion.

Not just remembering the Passover meal with his disciples, but re-remembering the community of the Church. Individual and corporate. We feed on the body of Christ to become more completely the Body of Christ, his Church.

We share in the suffering and death of Jesus (my body broken for you) and also his risen life (the blood poured out – life blood) – think of it as a blood transfusion.

We give thanks "Eucharist" = Greek for Thanksgiving, for what God has done for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and for the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, in the Church and in the world. Not just survival from day to day. Not just food for the journey. But a foretaste of the heavenly banquet prepared for all people.

30 hymns in The Lord's Supper section of Rejoice & Sing.

441 Be known to us in breaking bread, but do not then depart,
Saviour, abide with us, and spread your table in our heart.

There sup with us in love divine;
your body and your blood,
that living bread, that heavenly wine, be our immortal food.

448 Here, Lord, we take the broken bread and drink the wine, believing that by your life our souls are fed, your parting gifts receiving. As you have given, so we would give ourselves for others' healing; and as you lived, so we would live the Father's love revealing.

C. V. Pilcher

James Montgomery

Order of Service

19th August, 2018 Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

This morning's service is led by The Revd. Canon Adrian Alker

Pulpit Elder: Ian Cooke Organist: Douglas Jones Crèche: Isabel Sandland Flowers: Ann Cathels

Order of Service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices.

Notices

The Call to Worship: Minister: The Lord be with you

All: And also with you

Hymn: R&S 260 – Christ is alive! Let Christians sing

Prayers of Adoration and Confession: Assurance of Pardon

The Old Testament reading: 1 Kings 2: 10-12 and 3: 3-14 Psalm 111 (see R&S 719) said responsively

Hymn: R&S 104 - Praise, my soul, the King of heaven Very young children leave for the crèche

New Testament reading : Ephesians 5: 15-20

Hymn: R&S 538 - Teach me, my God and King The Gospel reading : John 6: 51-58

Anthem: Lead me Lord (S.S.Wesley)

The Sermon

Hymn: R&S 217 - When I survey the wondrous Cross Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Lord's prayer

The Offering followed by the Doxology (R&S 21)

Hymn: R&S 432 - Now is eternal life (tune R&S 546 Christchurch) Benediction

Three-fold Amen

Our Organist Douglas Jones will play a voluntary

Notices

Next Sunday's service, 26th August, will be led by Mrs Pauline Johnson

August 19th 2018 Sermon by Revd Adrian Alker

The virtue of wisdom presents itself in three of our readings today. The Old Testament passage from 1 Kings recalls how, in a dream, a common biblical device through which God communicated with people, wise King Solomon at the outset of his reign asked God for an understanding mind to govern and to discern good from evil. The psalmist in Psalm 111 echoes the refrain heard throughout the bible: "The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". And in the New Testament extract from the letter to the Ephesians the writer implores his listeners, "Do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is".

Wisdom, how we wish that we employed this virtue at all times and in all places, that we always make the right call, that we consider carefully every action, every utterance, every tweet and email, every decision. I am supposing that there is no-one in church this morning who doesn't feel that they made an unwise decision at some point in their lives. There are occasions when I ask members of the congregation to turn to their neighbours and share one such memory but fear not, I am not asking that of us today since the revealing of unwise comments or actions might well be too embarrassing all round. I will however cite one example where I played it all wrong. When I was living in West Cumbria, an old university friend living in London invited me to his wedding and I made an excuse not to attend, simply because I couldn't be bothered travelling all the way on that weekend at a time when I was too busy. A very bad and unwise decision, which graciously John my friend eventually passed over for the sake of friendship.

So we all make mistakes but we are not all in positions of high office or public figures serving our country. Which brings me to cite two examples of men who have been very unwise, to say the least.

Boris Johnson's comments on the dress of Muslim women were not only unwise but dangerously inflammatory and unbelievably degrading. Whatever the truth of the affair, England cricketer Ben Stokes might now soberly reflect upon the wisdom of his actions outside a nightclub when he too is such a public figure. All those in public life, be it in parliament, government or celebrity sport, might well take heed of Solomon's humble plea for an understanding mind, as they bear great responsibility

But neither Johnson nor Stokes nor indeed most people will today be in a church, reflecting upon this 1 Kings passage or the psalm or the letter to the Ephesians. Yet like Solomon, our own monarch indeed is crowned not by her secular government but by the Archbishop of

Canterbury; she is anointed as were the kings of Israel with holy oil and swears her loyalty to God. "In God We Trust" is the official motto of the United States, replacing, only in 1956, the previous unofficial motto 'E Pluribus unum' ('from the many one'). So another holder of high office, the President of the USA is bound by an allegiance to a higher authority, namely God. Does then the wisdom of Solomon fill the tweets of President Trump?

And across the world in other countries and cultures rulers may affirm their allegiance to Allah and be guided by his prophet Mohammed and yet actions on the world stage may not always seem congruent with the prophet of peace.

How vital then is wisdom, a heart of understanding leading to actions, which can be seen in themselves to be both virtuous and beneficial. But if these biblical passages today cut no mustard with contemporary society, simply because we are no longer a religious or church attending nation, the larger question might be on what moral and ethical grounds do people, not least in high office, make decisions?

We know that we live in very fractious times in a country divided bitterly about Brexit, against a background of social and economic inequality, poverty for many, which drives the fear of and prejudice against immigrants. The world seems so less stable and patterns of daily living so different from a generation ago. But if we stand back a little and think about our own history in religious and secular terms has not turbulence and faction always been with us? Victorian workhouses, child labour, debauchery and drunkenness, hostility toward those of different race and religion?

Recently Christine and I spent two hours in the magnificent St Georges Hall in Liverpool, where they revealed the splendid floor of Minton tiling in the Great Hall. Not so great was a visit to the holding cells of countless prisoners awaiting trial and then execution for all manner of offences; not so great were the pictures of those declared to be drunkards and banned from the city's public houses. Not so great were the many reminders of the wealth of the city built upon the slave trade. And yet and yet, back in that Great Hall were statues of the great and the good, politicians and philanthropists, men and women like William Gladstone, Robert Peel, George Stephenson and Kitty Wilkinson who worked tirelessly in the cause of public health and the fight against uncleanness and squalor inflicted upon the poorer classes because of a lack of proper bathing facilities. We have always needed and benefited from those in office who show wisdom in public life.

Perhaps nations have always faced complex social, political and economic challenges. Wisdom has always been needed and we can look, thankfully, to those men and women, whom like Solomon have had a heart of understanding and the wherewithal to discern good from evil.

More than ever the great religions of the world need to remind people of their trust in the goodness of a divine Creator and the example of all of God's prophets in promoting peace,

justice and righteousness. Perhaps there is no more urgent call to the churches than to hold before a fractious nation and some of our errant politicians and public figures the image of the Son of Man, the Good Shepherd, the One who is indeed Bread for the World, on whom we feed and who feeds us with the wisdom and love of God.

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: those who act accordingly have a good understanding: his praise endures for ever.' (Psalm 111)

Amen to that.

26th August, 2018 Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

This morning's service is led by Mrs Pauline Johnson

Pulpit Elder: Sheila Cooke Organist: Douglas Jones

Crèche: Shelagh Beach Flowers: Sheila Cooke

Order of Service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices.

Notices

The Call to Worship:

Minister: The Lord be with you

All: And also with you

We come from scattered lives to meet with God, Let us recognise his presence with us.
As God's people we have gathered,

All: Let us worship Him together

Hymn: R&S 32 – God is in his temple

Prayers of Confession and Absolution

The Old Testament reading: Joshua 24: 1-2 and 14-18 Comment

Hymn: R&S 703 - (Psalm 84) How lovely is thy dwelling place

Very young children leave for the crèche

Psalm 34: 15-22 said responsively

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous

and his ears are attentive to their cry;

the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

The righteous cry out and the Lord hears them;

he delivers them from all their troubles.

The Lord is close to the broken- hearted

and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

A righteous man may have many troubles,

but the Lord delivers him from them all;

he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken. Evil will slay the wicked;

the foes of the righteous will be condemned.

The Lord redeems his servants;

no-one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.

New Testament reading : Ephesians 6: 10-20 Hymn: R&S 550 - Put thou thy trust in God The

Gospel reading : John 6: 56-69

Anthem: Fairest Lord Jesus (arr. Douglas Jones) The Sermon Hymn: R&S 528 - Jesus, good above all other

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Lord's prayer

The Offering followed by the Doxology (R&S 21)

Hymn: R&S 543 - Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us Benediction Three-fold Amen

Our Organist, Douglas Jones will play a voluntary

Notices

Next Sunday's service, 2nd September, will be led by the Revd. Dr Walter Houston

Dates for your diary:

September 3rd Elders' Meeting 6-9 p.m.

September 11th Community Choir restarts (10 a.m.- 12noon) September 16th Harvest and Invitation Service.

Hunger lunch (Bread, cheese & water), retiring collection for Water Aid September 27th "Music in the Round" Lunch time Concert in

the Church 12.45-1.40p.m. Please see Sheila Cooke for tickets. September 28th Paul Blomfield MP will hold a Drop-in Cafe

with afternoon tea, in St Andrew's from 2-3 p.m.

2nd September, 2018

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

This morning's service is led by the Revd. Dr Walter Houston

Pulpit Elder: Linda Callear Organist: Douglas Jones Crèche: Barbara Macmillan Flowers: Isabel Sandland

Order of Service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices.

The Call to Worship: Minister: The Lord be with you

All: And also with you

Hymn: R&S 285 – O for a thousand tongues to sing Prayer of approach and adoration

Introduction to the theme

Psalm 15 (translation by Walter Houston) said responsively

LORD, who is allowed into your tent?

Who can live on your holy hill?

Everyone who lives honestly,
and does what is right.

Everyone who means the truth when they speak,
and never tells lies about other people.

They don't harm anyone else,

or spread stories about their neighbours.

They turn up their noses at mean people,
but they respect those who honour God.

When they make a promise which costs them,
they don't try to get out of it.

They don't lend in order to make money,

and they won't take money to condemn an innocent person.

Whoever lives like this is safe for ever.

The children leave for their own activities or crèche

The Old Testament reading: Deuteronomy 4: 1-2 and 5-8 The New Testament reading: James 1:
19-27

Hymn: R&S 361 Come, Lord, to our souls come down Gospel reading: Mark 7: 1-2, 5-15 and
21-23

Notices

The Sermon : What does it mean to obey God

Hymn: R&S 374 - O Christ, our Lord, we meet here as your people This hymn functions as a
prayer of confession

Declaration of forgiveness, with the response: Thanks be to God Prayers of thanksgiving and
intercession,

"Lord hear our prayer And let our cry come to you."

The Lord's Prayer

Anthem: Fairest Lord Jesus (arr. Douglas Jones)

The Offering followed by the Doxology (R&S 21)

Hymn: R&S 521 -Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go

Dismissal and blessing

Our organist Douglas Jones will play a voluntary

Notices

Next Sunday's service, 9th September, will be led by

Mr James Greig Dates for your diary:

September 3rd Elders' Meeting 6-9 p.m.

September 11th Community Choir restarts (10 a.m.- 12noon) September 16th Harvest and Invitation Service.

Hunger lunch (Bread, cheese & water), retiring collection for Water Aid September 27th Music in the Round's "Ensemble 360"

Lunch time Concert in the Church 12.45-1.40p.m.

Please see Sheila Cooke for tickets.

September 28th Paul Blomfield MP will hold a Drop-in Cafe with afternoon tea, in St Andrew's from 2-3 p.m.

St Andrew's URC, 2 September, 2018.

Readings

Psalm 15 read responsively (translation by Walter Houston)

LORD, who is allowed into your tent? Who can live on your holy hill?

Everyone who lives honestly, and does what is right.

Everyone who means the truth when they speak, and never tells lies about other people.

They don't harm anyone else,
or spread stories about their neighbours.

They turn up their noses at mean people, but they respect those who honour God.

When they make a promise which costs them, they don't try to get out of it.

They don't lend in order to make money,
and they won't take money to condemn an innocent person.

Whoever lives like this is safe for ever.

SERMON

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-8 James 1:19-27

Mark 7:1-2, 5-15, 21-23

'Just do what you're told!' Our ears at the tenderest age were assailed with these words, or ones very like them. 'Why won't you do what you're told?' Good little children are obedient, and obedience means doing what you're told. Our parents, so we were reliably informed, knew what was best for us. And anyway, even if they didn't, we ought to obey them.

That's all very well for children—though even children deserve to be told why they should do something. But when we grow up, we don't expect to be ordered around. At least, we shouldn't need it in our personal lives. In the workplace all too many people end up in jobs where someone has the right to tell them what to do, no questions allowed. But if we have grown up healthily, we have gained a sense of responsibility. We know what we ought to do and not do to be responsible to our family and our neighbours and society in general. But society as a whole needs laws, because some people have not grown up properly and behave as if they didn't have any responsibility to others around them.

So what do we make of the fact that the Bible, and not only the Bible but many other religious writings as well, often picture being good or religious as obeying God? And that obeying God means doing what God tells you. And the Bible, or parts of the Bible, claim to tell us what God tells us. So the first five books of the Bible, what Jews call the Torah, and Christians sometimes call the Pentateuch, consists to a large extent of laws or commands, given by God himself in the first four books and by Moses speaking in God's name in Deuteronomy.

In these commandments God tells his people what to do, or to put it better, he tells them how to order their life together. Jewish scholars count 613 commandments in these books, and in the short passage we heard from Deut Moses tells his hearers not to add to them or subtract anything from them. Yet no more than twelve of them, or even only two, are well known to most Christians, the commandments to love God and love our neighbour, picked out by Jesus as the greatest commandments, and for a dwindling number of us the so-called Ten Commandments. I expect most people in this church could repeat all ten, but I'm not sure that would be true of everyone in every church in the land.

They might be more interested in Jesus' teaching in the Gospels, and much of that also consists of commands. He speaks with the authority of God. 'The people of old were told... but I tell you' he says in the Sermon on the Mount. 'This is my commandment', he says in the Gospel of John, 'You shall love one another.' But he also criticises the Pharisees for adding to the biblical commandments, and at the same time getting round commandments which are in the Bible, such as commandment no. 5 in the Ten Commandments, 'You shall honour your father and your mother.' In his view, they were nullifying the commands of God and obeying human commands.

So it seems all we have to do is look in the Bible to see what God has told us to do, and do it. But it's not quite as simple as that, and I don't think any Christian has ever thought it was, even though some people would like it to be as simple as that.

The commandments in the Torah sometimes contradict each other. Jews can't observe many of them, because so many are linked to Temple worship and the Temple was destroyed shortly after Jesus' time. And Christians never have observed most of them. Paul tells Christians they are free of the Law, which will not bring them salvation. But the most important reason is that a morality which is based on 'doing what you're told' is simply not appropriate for grown-up people. Yes, we can do with guidance, but not orders, and orders rigidly obeyed in the wrong situation can be terribly destructive, especially when they are imposed by human beings on other human beings.

Fleur and I saw a film the other day that is a splendid—and a terrible— illustration of this. It is called *Apostasy*. Do go and see it if you get the chance. It takes place in a Jehovah's Witnesses community in Oldham. A mother has two daughters. The younger one, Alex, is the ideal Jehovah's Witness, who has completely accepted the sect's theology. She suffers from a severe form of anaemia, and the only thing that can save her in a crisis, when she collapses and is taken to hospital, is a blood transfusion, which in line with JW teaching she refuses and dies. She is 16 years old and is honoured as the community's heroine. The elder one, Louise, gets herself pregnant by a boy who is not a JW, and so is not under the community's control. She is excommunicated from the fellowship for fornication. No one in the fellowship is allowed to communicate with her except for necessary purposes, one of which is regular meetings with the elders to get her to repent and come to a better frame of mind. She leaves home, but her mother keeps visiting her, for

necessary purposes of course. But the experience of her sister as well as her own makes her eventually refuse the chance to be reconciled, and she leaves the community altogether, which means her mother can never speak to her again. In a few short weeks she has lost both of her daughters and her baby grandchild as well.

We may say, Well, that's the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the rule against blood transfusion is an unwarranted interpretation of a commandment in the Bible, against eating blood, that other Christians don't observe anyway. (I'm sure a few of you like black puddings.) It's like the Pharisees' washing their hands, a human invention added to God's commands. But there are more orthodox Christian groups that have created as much havoc by equal rigidity, especially over sexual matters. The treatment of unmarried mothers in the Catholic Church in Ireland in the 50s and earlier was crueller than the treatment of Louise in the film, if only because the JWs don't have the power to immure them in a laundry and prevent them communicating with anyone outside the walls.

We don't need orders but we do need guidance, and there is tons of guidance in the Bible. Let's have a look at two of our readings to see what help they give.

When James tells his readers to be doers and not just hearers of 'the word', what is the 'word' he is talking about? The examples he picks are not taken from the Torah. 'Be quick to hear, slow

to speak, slow to anger'. You can find that teaching in the book of Proverbs, but Proverbs doesn't claim to be God's commands. 'Pure and incorrupt religion means taking care of widows and fatherless children in their distress, and keeping oneself clear of the world's taint.' The Torah forbids people to take advantage of widows and their children, but you have to go elsewhere in the OT to find teaching on the positive virtue of helping them. Of course, James is only using widows and their children as one example of what we ought to be doing, because they were the traditional example of vulnerable people. He means we should be helping anyone who is poor or vulnerable and needs help. James calls all this 'the perfect law of freedom', which we should be doing and not just listening to. But it doesn't consist of commandments which you have to observe literally. It is the loving guidance which comes with the Gospel, and because we know God loves us, that sets us free to act, under his guidance, in the way that we see as best in the circumstances.

So, if you do that, will you be obeying God? Of course you will, because that is what God wants.

What Deut in our first reading says about the other nations is very interesting. Moses says, 'The peoples, when they hear all these laws, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!"' In other words, the other nations, who have no idea of the divine source of Israel's laws, can see that they are wise and good and just, even though their own laws are not nearly as good. 'What other great nation has statutes and ordinances that are as just as this entire law that I am setting before you?' So that means that the laws

Moses is going to set forth are not arbitrary. Everybody can see, just by the light of nature, that they make sense and are just. We have consciences, and we can think, and assess the biblical commandments. It is not a question of an arbitrary, unquestionable voice from on high telling us what to do, like a naughty child, but rather guidance helping our own reason and conscience to decide what is the right thing to do. And that is probably rather nearer than you might think to the way the writers of Deut, who put their teaching into the mouth of Moses, thought about it. There's a lot of evidence that laws in the ancient Near East, which includes Israel, were intended as examples and guidance for judges rather than as absolute rules to be obeyed literally. Viewed in that light, the biblical law is a rich heritage of moral thinking that can help us, especially in our social and political life, rather than a millstone that we must either drag or drop (and most of us drop it, of course).

From that point of view we might be more sympathetic to the Pharisees than the Gospel account is. For one thing, they didn't impose their rules on ordinary people: their handwashing and so on were a discipline for the religious elite. They are surprised to find disciples of a rabbi being so lax about it, but they are not in a position to insist that they do the same.

But what about the 'Korban' permission? What Jesus is criticising is that they are apparently permitting a man to leave his parents without support in their old age—there were no pensions—provided he dedicates the portion of his income that would have gone to them to God, which

effectively means to the temple. And that would be outrageous. But suppose a Pharisee said, 'All we mean is that provided your parents are well provided for anyway, by another son or other secure income, then you can decide whether to use the income that you might have used for them to support the Temple'? You can imagine Jesus and the Pharisees having a debate about it.

His overarching point, though, is something different. True obedience to God is not a matter of outward obedience, it's precisely not a matter of observing rules, or what today we would call a box-ticking exercise, which the Pharisees might have tended towards; it's a matter of the heart, of our inward disposition, because it is from the heart, from what we are really like inside, that all the wicked acts come that Jesus lists at the end of the passage: murder, adultery, stealing and so on. And likewise it is from our inward disposition that goodness comes: love and kindness and humility and self-control. But these must be disciplined by the guidance of God, and that is where the commandments and the guidance come in.

There is one more thing, one more aspect of obedience. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray 'Your kingdom come, your will be done', and if we are not to be hypocrites, praying that prayer means committing ourselves to accepting God's will for us as Jesus did in Gethsemane, 'Your will, not mine be done'. Jesus obeyed God by letting himself be arrested, tried and crucified.

Most of us won't have to offer that extremity of obedience, but more than a few have had to in the history of Christianity, the latest perhaps being the 24 Egyptian Coptic Christians murdered by ISIS in Libya on the seashore, the

event which inspired a modern icon featured in this month's Reform magazine. The Coptic Church has recognised them as martyrs, rightly, for the only reason why they were killed was because they were Christians, and you may be sure that each of them was given the chance to embrace Islam, and refused. That's why later in the same prayer we say, 'Lead us not into temptation', or, better translated, 'Do not put us to the test'—which doesn't mean just any test, but the ultimate test. We might not be able to pass it, for God's answer to that prayer may not be 'No, I won't' for everyone, but we still pray like Jesus, 'Your will, not mine, be done.'

So to sum it up, obeying God means: taking our God-given conscience seriously; taking the commandments in the Bible seriously as guidance but not slavishly; and being open to the leading of the Spirit through prayer in every situation. In the words of Psalm 15 (not my translation this time, but the nrsv's): 'Those who do these things shall never be moved.' That's to say, they will stand fast.

But the fact is that in the end we are never going to get it right every time. There will be plenty of occasions when we don't 'do these things', when we do what we know is wrong, or don't do what we know or believe is right. And we don't stand fast, we slip and fall over in disgrace. Because this happens to us all, it is so important that we shouldn't judge others. Because we

fail, we need every day the forgiving and restoring grace of Christ to wipe the slate clean and start again. And that is what we shall pray for in our next hymn.

Rev. Dr Walter Houston

Sunday 9th. September 2018 Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

**This morning's Service is led by Mrs. Helen Walton, Community Development Manager
The Leprosy Mission England and Wales.**

Pulpit Elder: Elizabeth Draper Organist: Douglas Jones

Crèche: Jean Dickson

Flowers: Jean Dickson

Order of service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices

Call to Worship John 10.10 The Lord be with you

And also with you

Hymn: R&S 447 I come with joy to meet my Lord (2nd. tune)

The Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 58. 6 - 11

Theme introduction: Breaking the Chains of Leprosy in Niger

The Leprosy Mission Prayers

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

Hymn: R&S 734 I'll praise my maker while I've breath (Psalm 146) New Testament Reading:

Luke 6. 17 – 23

Hymn: R&S 285 O for a thousand tongues to sing

Sermon: In the face of suffering

Anthem : A prayer of St. Richard of Chichester (L. J .White) Hymn: R&S 653 We cannot
measure how you heal

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Lord's Prayer: R&S – inside back cover The Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

Hymn: R&S 332 Jesus, lover of my soul The Blessing and Three-fold Amen

Notices

Next Sunday's service is a service of Harvest Thanksgiving and our Invitation Service. It will be led by Mrs. Jenny Carpenter. Please bring your donations of items for the Broomhall Breakfast (quality cereals, tins of beans or tomatoes, fruit juice, teabags) or for the Food Bank. As well as the usual food items the Food Bank appreciates donations of sanitary products.

After the service there will be a Hunger Lunch in aid of Water Aid. Your donations are not simply to cover the cost of the simple food but to help provide clean water for communities.

September 27th. 12.45pm Music in the Round "Ensemble 360" concert in the Church. Please see Sheila Cooke for tickets.

September 28th. 2.00 – 3.00pm at St. Andrew's. Paul Blomfield MP will hold a Drop-in Café with afternoon tea

16th. September 2018 Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost,

Harvest Thanksgiving and Invitation Service

This morning's Service is led by Mrs. Jenny Carpenter

Pulpit Elder: Ian Cooke Organist: Douglas Jones Crèche: Isabel Sandland Flowers: Harvest display

Order of service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices

Call to Worship

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Hymn: R&S 48 Praise and Thanksgiving, Father, we offer

Hymn: R&S 713 Jubilate everybody (Psalm 100) As we sing the children will collect and bring forward the harvest gifts

Ethiopian prayer adapted from a prayer recorded in an Ethiopian church by Christian Aid.

God we bless you, show your grace upon us.

When God showed his greatness to Moses, the bush burned with fire and was not consumed

We praise you for your wonderful greatness, O God, show your grace and your greatness to us.

We pray for our church. We pray for others. We pray for all people.

We fight against evil. Christians do not fight with guns; our gun is prayer.

Send us your truth, O God. Get all the bad out of us. Let peace come to us.

Send us to-day's message. May your Holy Spirit teach us.

Come to us O God, come in the name of Jesus, come with your Holy Spirit, again and again.

Amen.

Choir of the St. Michael Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Gospel reading: Mark 2 vv 23 - 27

Hymn: R&S 523 Give me joy in my heart keep me praising

The Old Testament reading: Genesis 41 vv 14 – 40

Anthem: I am the vine (Norman Warren)

Harvest Reflection: "Co-operating with God"

Hymn: R&S 636 The Church of Christ in every age

Prayers of Thanksgiving, Intercession and Petition

The Lord's Prayer: Read together in French and led by members of the Jesus for All Nations Church

Notre Père, qui es aux cieux,

Que ton nom soit sanctifié,

Que ton règne vienne,

Que ta volonté soit faite sur la terre comme au ciel.

Donne-nous aujourd'hui notre pain de ce jour.

Pardonne-nous nos offenses

Comme nous pardonnons aussi à ceux qui nous ont offensés.

Et ne nous soumets pas à la tentation,

mais délivre-nous du mal,

car c'est à toi qu'appartiennent le règne,

la puissance et la gloire, aux siècles des siècles.

Amen.

The Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

Hymn: R&S 485 Almighty Father of all things that be

The Blessing and Three-fold Amen Notices

Next Sunday's service will be led by The Revd. Canon Adrian Alker.

Please note the Sheffield 10K road race takes place that day and there will be road closures including Hanover Way and Upper Hanover Street, Ecclesall Road, Brocco Bank, Riverdale Road, Charter Row and Furnival Gate.

Thursday 27th. September 12.45pm Ensemble 360 concert in the Church featuring Ruth Gibson, viola. Music by Kodaly and Dvorak. Please see Sheila Cooke for tickets.

Friday September 28th. 2.00 – 3.00pm Paul Blomfield MP is holding a Café Drop in here in the Church Hall. An opportunity to share your views, raise concerns and ask questions over a cup of tea.

30 September, 2018 Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn: R&S 727 I joy'd when to the house of God (Verses from Psalms 122 and 133)

This morning's Service on the theme of Peace is led by the Worship Group

Comment

The Anthem: A Gaelic blessing (John Rutter)

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Hymn: R&S 620 For the healing of the nations

Comment

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Order of service

Please stand when the Holy Bible is brought into Church, then sit for the Welcome and Notices

Hymn: R&S 629 Make me a channel of your peace The Gospel reading: John 14 v 1 and vv 21
– 27

Call to Worship

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

First New Testament reading: Ephesians 2 vv 13 – 22

The Lord's Prayer: R&S – inside back cover

The Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

Hymn: R&S 625 God of freedom, God of justice The Benediction and Three-fold Amen

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

Comment

Hymn: R&S 641 We pray for peace

Second New Testament reading: Colossians 3 vv 8 – 17

Organ voluntary

Achieving Peace

When I agreed to contribute a comment on Achieving Peace for today's service I knew I had set myself a challenge. If I had the answer to achieving peace I would be ruling the world by now and it would be a very different place – as I'm sure it would be if any of us had the answer to achieving peace. On a global scale peace would mean the absence of war, both civil war and war between nations. Imagine – no more bombs, no more invasions of towns and villages, no more terrorism and extreme ideologies, no more fear, no more displaced people fleeing for their lives.

Throughout history people have fought wars but have also sought to achieve peace through a number of means; political marriages; building walls; diplomacy and treaties. The League of Nations was established in 1919 to bring stability to the world and ensure that war never broke out again. Should a dispute arise between nations a resolution would be sought through discussion and if that failed, by economic sanctions would be imposed.

Some years after the end of WW1, 'the War to end all wars,' there was a growing concern that it would be followed by an even worse war. On Armistice Day 1933 white Poppies for Peace first appeared, the symbol of the Peace Pledge Union. I am aware that the Peace Pledge Union is controversial. The white poppy can be associated with those who refuse to fight for their country; and indeed some of the movement's literature has a particular and critical view of the nature and purpose of Remembrance services. But the movement also stands for something important; the vision of a world where conflict can be resolved without violence and with justice and the commitment to achieving that vision.

In 1945 the League of Nations was succeeded by the United Nations. One of its aims was and still is 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to develop friendly relations among countries.' In 1981 the United Nations resolved that each year, September 21st. would be observed around the world as The International Day of Peace. All groups and nations at war would cease hostilities for a day (but I have to agree with David Stec's observation that this is unlikely to happen just because the UN says 'stop fighting.')

More achievably, people all over the world would come together to commit to peace, to talk, play and eat together, to get to know and appreciate each other, creating understanding and tolerance.

Yet, despite all these aims and visions there is still war and conflict– but perhaps less than there would be without them those aims. What can we do? We as individuals can only work on a small scale but many small scale actions add up. By coming together as just described but not only on September 21st, can we give a clear message to leaders and politicians around the world that people do not want war? Can we use our voices, our votes, our campaigns, our charity donations to bring about a fairer sharing of wealth and resources? With peace go the concepts of wellbeing, justice and equity. There is a very real fear that future wars will be sparked by scarcity of or rather unequal access to water, food and fuel.

To my mind the hardest conflicts and wars to prevent and the terrible atrocities associated with them are those arising from mind-sets moulded by extreme ideologies and the lust for power. It is easy to feel helpless and powerless in the face of such evils. But we can, of course, pray; pray for peace; pray for those who negotiate peace; pray that the mind-sets of those who initiate war, conflict and terrorism may be changed. Samuel Kobia, a past general Secretary of the World Council of Churches, wrote 'when the world is at war in so many places and the forces of violence, war and oppression seem to be increasing, praying for peace may seem to be a futile exercise. But we Christians believe both in the power of peace and the power of prayer.'

What about peace closer to home, in our own circles and families? A recent documentary on Radio 4 revealed that there is conflict and estrangement in one in five families. Several people interviewed acknowledged that arguments and resentment over wills and inheritance and a sense of being unfairly treated were at the root of the problem; others, however, admitted that it had all started from a misunderstanding or offence taken at someone's words or behaviour. Sadly, some people had concluded that the rift was beyond repair and that the only way to get their own life back on track was to sever contact with the other party. No-one wants to be on the receiving end of hurtful words and it is all too easy to speak in haste. Words can't be unsaid despite the phrase 'I take back what I said.' What can we do? Can we think before we speak? Can we avoid taking offence so badly that we clam up instead of challenging what has been said in a way which enables a constructive conversation? Not easy, but surely it is possible. But then will come perhaps the hardest challenge of all – the willingness by both sides to draw a line and move on. This year I had the pleasure and privilege once again of singing at graduation

ceremonies in Lincoln. The ceremonies in the Cathedral were joyous celebrations, but later in the day the new graduates and their families were invited to attend a reflective service in the University Chapel. That service gave people attending much to think about – how the graduates had changed during their years at university; that the experience may not have been entirely positive; that the future would present challenges and difficulties as well as opportunities. But there was one line particularly in the final blessing which struck me as wise advice and a challenge:

Make peace with the past.

Judith Adam 30 September

WAR AND PEACE

Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife, Throughout the sensual world proclaim, One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name.

That was written by Thomas Osbert Mordaunt during the Seven Years' War in the middle of the 18th century - and it was quoted by Sir Walter Scott as a chapter heading in his novel 'Old Mortality'. The whole poem is an appeal to a young man to leave his wife and child and domestic comforts to do his duty as a soldier, and it depicts civilian life as dull, unheroic, soft, even shameful.

It may seem odd to begin a comment in a service about peace by speaking of war. But can the two be separated? And why is peace so difficult to achieve and to maintain?
What is peace?

Jesus tells us to be peace-makers - How do we do that?

You may have listened to this year's Reith lectures on Radio 4, by the Canadian historian Margaret Macmillan. She examined our complex relationship with war, and wondered whether war was an essential part of being human. Let's admit it: We often do admire the military virtues; we support conflict when we consider it to be justified; military action is exciting, especially to young people; in times of war, people may find a purpose and a role which may otherwise have been lacking in their lives

But peace is more than just the absence of conflict. Qualities such as courage, self-sacrifice, endurance of suffering - are all found in civilian life as well as on the battlefield - albeit in different spheres and responding to different challenges.

The challenges we face in peace, the problems, the issues to be addressed, are maybe less dramatic but just as troubling as those of wartime - and they are often deep-rooted and intractable. They are enemies of a different kind to be fought. Think of the Beveridge Report of

1942 - written in the throes of a world war, but looking forward to better times, when five "Giant Evils" in society would be remedied. Those five evils, or enemies, were thought at that time to be squalor, ignorance, want, idleness (i.e. unemployment), and disease. And the post-war social security system and the National Health Service were set up to tackle them. Peace in 1945 was a positive opportunity to reform, renew and repair - to make things better. And not just in our own country, but throughout the world.

Sadly, those same evils have not been completely conquered and eradicated, and others have arisen too. We might add now as a new enemy, destruction of the planet by climate change. So peace is not a time to be idle and self-indulgent, but a time to put talents and energy and creativity into new channels. Because there will always be evils to fight and conflicts to deal with - waiting for someone - waiting for us ? - to confront them.

What else can peace mean?

There are hundreds of references to peace in the Bible (one source says 429 in KJV) and they show that the Hebrew word shalom means not just absence of war or

conflict but much more. (I am indebted to David Stec for his entry in the Hebrew dictionary.) Shalom conveys an inward sense of wholeness or completeness; a sense of safety and security that brings tranquility of mind. Well-being - of an individual or of society. Harmony with others. Reconciliation that ends conflict. These meanings do not suggest a flat and empty kind of peace; they convey purpose and confidence, trust and effort.

(In Islam too, the word salaam, from the same root, means being in harmony, in a right relationship, with God and your fellow beings and the world.)

So we can experience this kind of peace even in times of trouble, conflict, distress. This is the meaning in the Aaronic blessing - which we know and love - "The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace". Israel at that point is about to go and conquer the Promised Land - so 'peace' in that blessing is not the absence of war. It means an inner peace based on knowing that whatever happened, they were under God's protection. And when people bravely endure long imprisonment, or torture, or pain, or disastrous life circumstances - this is the inner peace that sustains them and gives them courage.

Isaiah said, 'You (God) keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.' So our trust in God is an important factor. But we don't earn this peace - it is a gift, a blessing. Jesus said, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.' But then he goes on, 'Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.' This is the peace that is way beyond our human understanding. And it needs our trust in God's guidance to find it.

Jesus also said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers. Judith is going to speak later about peace-making.

Elizabeth Draper

Comment 30 September, 2018

John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

Jesus leaves us with a very special gift, the gift of peace. He expresses this emphatically, by putting the word "peace" first: "Peace I leave with you".

And it is not just any kind of peace, but specifically his peace, as he adds, "my peace I give to you"; and again in the Greek, the word for "peace" is the first word in the clause.

Jesus gives us his peace in his teaching, in which he always proclaimed a message of the importance of loving one's neighbour and showing respect to all.

He also gives us his peace in the example which he himself set throughout his life, practising the message which he preached, and never responding to hostility and opposition in like terms.

But his peace is also much more than this; it is a very special kind of peace, and indeed it is unique: "not as the world gives do I give to you".

It is a peace which only he can give, a peace which can be found only in him as the son of God.

It is a peace founded upon his victory over the sin and death in which all humans share.

John 14 is part of a long speech which Jesus gave to his disciples on the eve of Passover, just before his crucifixion.

He is about to depart in death, but will return as the risen and glorified Lord.

So he can repeat the words of comfort with which he opened Chapter 14: "Let not your hearts be troubled" and he can now add: "neither let them be afraid".

When we place our faith in him, because of his resurrection and exaltation, we obtain a peace which we can find nowhere else and in no other person.

He also puts it like this in John 16:33: "I have said this to you, that you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

David Stec

St Andrew's 07.10.18

SERMON

Prov 8:22-36 Heb 1:1-4; 2:5-12 John 1:1-14

Hebrews 1:1-3a “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.”

The question of what we believe about the person of Jesus has occupied the minds of theologians ever since NT times, and perhaps there are as many answers as there are Christian believers. Over the years the church has produced creeds and doctrinal statements in an attempt to set out precisely what it believes about the person of Christ.

When we turn to the opening of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find an account of the person of Christ written perhaps only 20–30 years after his crucifixion. This description of Jesus is by no means easy for us nowadays to understand, because it was written for people with a Jewish background and living in the Greek world of the 1st century. Nevertheless, even if some of the images used by the author are no longer intelligible, I believe that he is saying some worthwhile things about Jesus to the people of every age.

He opens the Epistle by saying that in times past God spoke in many and various ways by means of the prophets, but that in the last days he has spoken by means of a Son. Perhaps all of us would describe Jesus as the “Son of God”, and it would be all too easy to use this title without giving much thought to what it means or implies, and it might be used in all sorts of senses. However, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews leaves no ambiguity about his use of the term “son” in relation to Jesus, but goes on to explain exactly what he means.

1. The Son of God is the appointed heir of all things, through whom God also created the world. The fact that Jesus is described as a “heir” does not mean that he has been given something that he previously lacked, or that the ownership of anything has been transferred from father to son. Rather, this description of Jesus is an allusion to his exaltation. According to the understanding of the writer of Hebrews, Jesus during his lifetime was made inferior to the angels. But when he was later exalted to the highest honours of heaven, this did not involve a change of status for him.

On the contrary, he re-entered into what had always been rightfully his. For the writer of Hebrews tells us that it was through the Son that God created the world. We find a very similar understanding of Jesus in John chapter 1. John speaks about the Word, which in the beginning was with God, and was somehow identified with God. He says: “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” Later John says: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

What the writer of Hebrews says in the first three verses of his Epistle is more concise and less developed than what we find in John 1, but the idea is exactly the same. Both writers have been influenced by the thought of the 1st century Greek-Jewish world about the logos or Word (logos being the Greek word for “word”). The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, who lived at about the same time as Jesus, thought of the logos as an impersonal principle of mediation between the transcendent God and his universe, though he used personal terms to describe this impersonal principle. Philo’s thought was to some extent based on Proverbs 8, where Wisdom is spoken of in personal terms, is given an independent existence of its own, and is said to have been created by God at the beginning of his works.

Now, 1st century Jewish-Greek ideas about the logos are very difficult for the 21st century mind to understand. But under the influence of this thought, the writer of Hebrews does convey to us an important truth about Jesus. He says that it was through the Son that God created the world. This suggests that in everything God has been working towards the fulfilment of a purpose from the very beginning. Already when God created the universe, he planned the redemption of all things through his Son. God’s work of creation and his work of redemption are all part of the same activity by which he is working for the salvation of mankind, and towards the fulfilment of a wonderful purpose.

2. The writer of Hebrews says that the Son “is the reflection of God’s glory”. The Greek word can mean either “reflection” or “radiance”. But the two meanings are not mutually exclusive. For the son radiates the glory which is reflected from the father. Here we find the image of light used not only of God, but also of his Son. Again, the idea is very similar to what we find in John chapter 1. John says in verse 9: “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” And he adds in verse 14: “We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

What both of these passages are saying to us is that we see something of God’s glory and his divine nature in Jesus Christ. As St Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 4:6: “For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

3. According to the writer of Hebrews, the Son is the “the exact imprint of God’s very being”. The word used here suggests an engraving or a stamp used on a coin. In fact the Greek word is that from which the English word “character” is derived. Used metaphorically, the Greek word means a mark impressed upon a person or thing, a distinctive mark, a characteristic. In other words, the Son represents everything that the Father represents. As Jesus said in John 14:9: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” We come to know God and what he stands for, by knowing his son.

What the writer of Hebrews says about the son’s being present at the creation and being the imprint of God is very similar to what is said in Colossians 1:15-16: “He is the image of the

invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.”

4. The Son sustains all things by his powerful word. That is to say, God’s providential care of the universe is carried out through his Son. The world at the very beginning was created by the word of God. And the world continues to be sustained by the word of his Son. Again, there is a parallel in 1st century Greek-Jewish thought.

In (the apocryphal book) The Wisdom of Solomon 8:1 it is said of Wisdom, “She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well.” Here Wisdom, which is spoken of as a person, is considered to be the governor and sustainer of the universe, a function assigned in Hebrews 1:3 to the Son of God. Thus the writer of Hebrews gives us a great note of hope. For we live in times in which there is a great deal of anxiety about the future of the world.

In the modern age, humans have the capability of destroying life as never before, whether through the use of highly destructive weapons, as we saw in the wars of last century or through the harmful effects of so many aspects of human activity on the environment, of which we have become increasingly aware in the early years of the present century.

In the opening verses of Hebrews we are introduced to a God who has had a purpose for his creation from the very beginning. The sending of his Son into the world was an essential part of that purpose. Through the powerful word of his Son, God continues to uphold and sustain his universe. He continues to work towards the fulfilment of a purpose which he has had since the very beginning of creation.

And no human can possibly thwart that purpose.

14 October, 2018

COMMENT

Surprising words and actions...more questions than answers

The man in Matthew’s gospel was probably not just surprised but also shocked at Jesus’ reply to his question; he has honoured the commandments but more is being asked of him – sell your possessions and give the money to the poor. But saying and doing things which shocked and surprised was a key feature of Jesus’ ministry. He instructs a would-be disciple to follow him now and defy the Jewish tradition where a son gives his dead father a timely and honourable burial ‘let the dead bury their own dead.’ He orders another not to take the time to bid his family farewell before following Jesus. These sound harsh – I cannot believe that Jesus expects us to

totally ignore our family responsibilities - but is Jesus saying that there is a danger of being so obsessed with family matters that we ignore his call?

Jesus healed on the Sabbath – a day traditionally declared a day of rest. But Jesus declared that the Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath, and that to do good on the Sabbath is surely right. He challenged traditions which got in the way of compassion and healing.

Jesus challenged the idea that some foods are unclean – after all what goes into the body passes through the body. It is evil intentions which come from the heart which defile us. Again a challenge to traditions which gloss over the real root of 'uncleanliness,'

He ate with tax collectors, people despised because of their corrupt practices- and when challenged said 'Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick do. I desire mercy. I have come to call sinners to repent.' A message that no one is beyond the love and mercy of God?

There came a point in his life where Jesus knew that the Scribes and Pharisees were seeking to build a case against him and destroy him. They brought a woman before him who had committed adultery and asked Jesus to comment on the law which condemned the woman to be stoned. His response – 'let anyone who is without sin cast the first stone.' His message – are you so perfect and without sin that you can judge and condemn others?

Jesus was tested when asked whether it was lawful to pay taxes to the Emperor, challenging him to deny the authority of the Emperor. His answer – give to the Emperor that which is the Emperor's and to God the thing which are God's.' Jesus is not denying the status of the Emperor but makes it clear that there is a higher authority who must be acknowledged.

Some of the parables give a surprising message – the landowner who paid the full daily wage to all his labourers regardless of how many hours they had worked:

A lesson in generosity?

The father who celebrates the humble and contrite return of the son who has squandered his inheritance: a lesson in compassion and forgiveness to someone who has done wrong and repented?

When Jesus was dining with friends a woman washed Jesus' feet with a costly ointment. Others present criticised her, saying that the ointment could have been sold and the money used to help the poor. Given Jesus' concern for the poor you would reasonably expect him to agree, but Jesus said that the woman had performed a good service for him (he knew his death was close) but he reminded people present that the poor would always be with them and that there would be many opportunities to help them.

In one of his teachings Jesus describes the day when the blessed will be separated from the cursed; those who gave him food, drink, clothing and friendship will be blessed; those who did not will be cursed. When asked when he was treated in these ways his surprising answer was 'whenever you helped or ignored anyone you helped or ignored me.' He is saying I am in everyone. This brings us back to the question of how we can use our resources to help others.

Towards the end of his life, Jesus told his disciples of the fate ahead of him. Peter was horrified, begging that God should forbid it. Jesus' response must have shocked and even hurt Peter – 'get behind me, Satan, for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.' Jesus had accepted the path before him. And at his trial it is perhaps surprising that Jesus says nothing to defend himself. When asked 'Are you the King of the Jews?' He answered 'You say so.' When asked 'Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.' He remained silent. Again he has accepted the path before him.

On that Friday Jesus was crucified; and on the following Sunday came the greatest surprise of all.

Judith Adam

21 October, 2018 SERMON

Mark 10:35-45 and Isaiah 53:4-12

It's that time of year again. The trees are turning russet, days are shorter, nights are becoming decidedly chilly, and another series of *The Apprentice* has begun on television. Over the next few weeks, an assortment of men and women will try their hand at a given task. Their efforts are assessed by a business tycoon. Each episode ends with some people staying and others being sent home. And those who get through to the end secure an actual apprenticeship and bask in the tycoon's reflected glory.

Now this is of course reality television. It is entirely contrived. But we can't stop watching. And week after week it re-enforces a message: in order to succeed in this life we must model ourselves on the successful tycoon. To have a streak, we have to be ambitious, determined, and ruthless, and it doesn't matter too much if this is at the expense of other people.

I think you'll agree that the style of leadership that is modelled by Jesus couldn't be more different. It is spelt out clearly in the gospel of Mark, no- where more so than in the verses we just had read. So we had better have a look at what is going on. After a hard trek, Jesus and his disciples are on the threshold of Jerusalem. On the way Jesus has been teaching them. They are coming to the end of a long in depth training section on discipleship. It's time the disciples were assessed; it's time for them to show how far they have come to understand Jesus and themselves. There is one thing in particular which they have to understand: Jesus has just told

them for the third time how he will soon be betrayed, rejected, killed and how he will then, after three days, rise from the dead. He has told them that clearly in so many words.

But do the disciples take it on board? No they don't! They persistently fail to get the point of what he is saying.

True, they have in many ways proved faithful. Take James and John. These two have been with Jesus from the very beginning of his ministry. They left their fishing nets, their home, their family – they left everything to follow Jesus. They have served their apprenticeship. In the time they had with Jesus, James and John were in the inner circle. They listened to his teaching. They had an opportunity to grasp Jesus' vision of the Kingdom, of discipleship, of leadership. But there is only one snag. They are imbued with a reality show mentality. Their minds are set on achieving personal glory above all else. When Jesus comes to glory, haven't they earned a share? when Jesus is acclaimed as the great Messiah, the saviour of the world, haven't they a right to be in his cabinet, sitting back in the front benches beside him, one to his right and one to his left, basking in his power and glory? In their own eyes, they have come to the end of a successful apprenticeship – time now for the rewards. They have earned a share of Jesus's glory, now they are ready to enjoy greatness and status.

James and John have clearly not understood anything that Jesus had been teaching them. Their request has to have been one of the most disappointing moments in Jesus's time with the disciples. Where have the twins been all this time? Hadn't they seen and heard what was happening? Hadn't they noticed the little child whom Jesus set in their midst, his blessing of a group of children whom they had tried to send away?

James and John have had every opportunity to catch Jesus' vision of God's intentions for the world, and what have they learnt? They want to be rewarded by personal power and glory, and they are trying to twist Jesus's arm to get what they want.

How does Jesus react? We might expect him to be angry, to rebuke them sharply at the very least. But if Jesus is exasperated with them, he doesn't show it; too much is at stake. He responds that they do not know what they are asking; he confronts them with a vision, not of earthly power and glory, but of martyrdom and death, his martyrdom and theirs. Like the servant in Isaiah 53, Jesus will be despised, rejected and finally executed. This is the cup he will drink, this is the baptism with which he is to be baptised. For him, the road to glory runs through the valley of suffering and death – if the disciples are faithful, the same will very probably happen to them.

If Jesus wasn't angry with James and John, the other disciples are. The brothers have jumped the gun; sought assurances on behalf of themselves at the expense of their colleagues. But haven't they as much right as the brothers to share in Jesus's glory? In their indignation, the other disciples are clearly missing the point every bit as much as the twins. The only categories

of leadership they have in mind are those they have seen in the Herods of this world, power-hungry, paranoid, control freaks. Jesus again resists rebuke. He cites the secular authorities of the day as an example of how not to exercise leadership. His disciples, his true champions, are to be different.

Not for them the prevailing wisdom of the day. Not for them the ruthless mind-set of a tyrant or a business tycoon, bent at whatever cost, on power and glory. They will not trample on other people to get to the top. Their primary criterion has to be service, service of God, service of one another, service of their neighbours, service for the common good. It will entail self-sacrifice, even suffering, but only that way will God's purposes for the world be fulfilled.

What does this look like in my life and yours? What does Jesus's teaching mean for us today?

We may see it symbolically writ large in the person of the Pope. At his inauguration in March 2013 Pope Francis defined his own leadership in terms of radical service with an option for the poor. Not for him the conventional trappings of the papacy, from the fleet of Mercedes cars to the purple shoes. In his ministry, Francis has modeled a focus on service; he takes every opportunity on his trips to visit 'places of pain' – prisons, drug addiction centers, homes for the disabled – and he spends a large part of his time in St. Peter's Square at the Wednesday general audiences with the elderly, the disabled and the homeless. So dramatic has been the impact of Francis's leadership of the Roman Catholic Church that *The Economist* believes the Pope should be studied in Harvard Business School as an example of good leadership. In 2014, *Fortune* magazine put the Pope in the top spot of its fifty greatest world leaders, for having "electrified the Church and attracted legions of non-Catholic admirers by energetically setting a new direction." As has been suggested, "these accolades from the high citadels of cultural and economic liberalism are all the more remarkable because they were being awarded to a man whose critiques of western elites, capitalism and individualism were as relentless as they were devastating".

Francis's actions, words, and gestures have awoken in western culture a dim, often unconscious, yet powerful memory of someone once loved but since lost. A recent head-line in the *Washington Post*, not known for its religious journalism, went like this: "Like Francis? You'll love Jesus!"

So how do we followers of our risen Lord behave in a way that reflects the mind of Christ? How do we follow the teaching of Jesus in our homes, in the church, in the classroom, in the boardroom, the doctor's surgery or the shop floor? They say that all work-places have their fair share of plots, vendettas, and backstabbers, people on the way up and those they've trampled on to get there. And I think we will most of us recognise an element of that in our experience. But this issue extends well beyond the working environment. It affects national and international politics. Indeed, it sometimes feels as if politics is office politics writ large. The way of life of entire communities is on the line. The stakes are high. But together we followers of Jesus can make a difference. We will not ride rough-shod over the needs of other people. We will ask

insistent questions about the numbers of homeless people on our streets, and the numbers of men, women and children who are compelled to use food banks – and we will do so with determination. We may like the disciples, rarely do or say the right thing, but we will create a community that keeps alive the memory of Jesus's ministry and in so doing we will testify to the power of God's redeeming love.

For we are marching in the light of God, following our risen Lord who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Fleur Houston

Summary of the sermon preached at St. Andrew's United Reformed Church, Sheffield on Sunday October 28th by The Very Revd. Peter Bradley, Dean of Sheffield.

Sometimes we need to be emphatic about what the scriptures mean. For example, in the Anglican Funeral Rite the service opens with the words 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.' People grieving the loss of a loved one need to hear that message. However, at other times it is not appropriate to say dogmatically 'this is what the scriptures say therefore I do.' The scriptures have evolved, often contradicting each other, and are like a conversation. The most useful bible for really understanding the scriptures is one which links references to the same story or topic in other gospels and in the Old Testament. Translations of the Hebrew have changed over time. The scriptures reflect a particular cultural norm – for example slavery was taken as the norm. It is not until Paul that we learn that there will no longer be the enslaved and the free. The scriptures are precious jewels in clay pots; our best friend and the spectacles through which we see the true God, his intention for our lives and His abundant love for us.

Judith Adam

Order of Service 4 November, 2018

Call to Worship

The Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Hymn: R & S 734: I'll praise my maker while I've breath

Hymn: R & S 603: Lord for the years Benediction and Three-fold Amen

Prayers of Adoration and Confession, the Lord's Prayer The Old Testament reading: Psalm 146

Something to Think About in preparation for the New Testament Reading.

Hymn: R & S 200 (tune R&S 47, Hanover) The kingdom of God is justice and joy

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

The New Testament reading Mark 10 vv. 17-52 (with an afterword on the Great Commandments)

The Anthem: Steal away to Jesus (arr Douglas Jones). The Sermon

Hymn: R & S 422 Lift high the cross

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

Hymn: R & S 603: Lord for the years

Benediction and Three-fold Amen

Order of Service 11 November, 2018

Call to Worship

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Hymn: R & S: Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King

of Creation

Prayers of Invocation and Confession

Hymn: R & S: O God, our help in ages past

Laying of wreaths

Reading of names on War Memorial

Words from For the Fallen, by Robert Laurence Binyon

Hymn: Lord of good life

Response: We will remember them

The Last Post

Two minute silence

Reveille

The National Anthem

The children leave for their own activities or crèche.

Lessons: 2 Samuel 1:17-27 Romans 8:31-39

Anthem: Never Weather-beaten Sail (Thomas Campian)

The Sermon

Hymn: Jesus, lover of my soul Lesson: John 15:9-17

The Offertory and Doxology: R&S 21

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession Hymn: Be still, my soul

Benediction and Three-fold Amen

SERMON

2 Sam 1:17-27 Rom 8:31-39 John 15:9-17

2 Sam 1:17-18 “And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son, and he said (The Song of) The Bow should be taught to the people of Judah.”

These words record what might well be regarded as the first institution of an act of remembrance. Of course, the ancient Israelites had nothing remotely corresponding to the formal act of remembrance which we are observing today, and which was indeed not established until after the First World War. But what the Israelites did have was lamentation, both as a form of literature and a part of their liturgy.

Our OT lesson from 2 Sam 1:17-27 is a particularly beautiful and moving lamentation composed by David to commemorate the tragedy of the Battle of Gilboa. Many years of conflict between the Israelites and the Philistines came to a head at this battle, in which many Israelites were

killed, including Jonathan and the two other sons of Saul, the Israelite king. Seeing how hopeless the situation was Saul committed suicide by falling on his sword (or according to another account, got someone to kill him). The Israelites were utterly routed, and the Philistines overran the land.

David's lamentation, apparently called "The Bow", is not really a lamentation over all who lost their lives in the battle, so much as a lamentation for his very close friend Jonathan and Jonathan's father, Saul.

But in as far as David expresses what the tragic loss of Jonathan and Saul meant to him, he also expresses something of the impact that the Battle of Gilboa must have had on the lives of countless others who had lost loved ones.

David's lament includes such memorable words as:

"Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places! How are the mighty fallen!

Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult ...

From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty.

Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions ...

How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!

Jonathan lies slain upon thy high places.

I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."

In this lament, David is very generous in his tribute to Saul, with whom he had had a rather troubled relationship. If you wanted to be a little cynical, you could suggest that David composed this lament to endear himself to those in the nation who had been loyal to Saul. After all, in due course, David was able to assume the kingship only after a short civil war with what remained of the House of Saul. But I am convinced that David's lament came from his heart, and was very sincere.

David gave instructions that it was to be taught to the people of Judah, which meant that each time it was uttered, the tragic deaths of Jonathan and Saul would be remembered.

Today we have a very special day of remembrance. For it is one hundred years since the First World War came to an end (at least on the western front), and in addition to that, Armistice Day coincides with Remembrance Sunday. One hundred years ago today at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918 the Armistice was signed, which brought to an end the Great

War, which had lasted over four years. [Though actually, there were places beyond the western front where hostilities between some of the combatants continued even into the 1920s].

The First World War was one of the deadliest of human conflicts ever, and was on a scale that is difficult to comprehend, involving the mobilisation of 70 million military personnel throughout the world, with the death of over nine million combatants, and millions of casualties, many with injuries that would maim them for life. The war also is also said to have led to the death of seven million civilians. It was characterised by the trench warfare of battles like the Somme and Passchendaele, in which the application of technology to high intensity individual man to man combat caused carnage on a scale never before seen, in appalling conditions which none of us alive today can even begin to appreciate. It led to the loss of a whole generation of young men, many of whom volunteered freely for military service, some of the younger ones even lying about their age, so that they could be enlisted.

There was hardly a community or a family who did not lose someone.

Earlier in the service the names of those from this church who gave their lives in that war were read out together with the names of those who died in the Second World War. It is likely that most of you have family members who were killed in the First World War. In my own family, my grandmother lost a brother as well as a fiancée, and my great grandmother also lost a brother. Last week I paid a visit to my home town and was able to go to see the names of the two family members on the local war memorials.

The British Legion website says, "Of the hundreds of thousands of cities, towns and villages in Britain, only 53 (in England and Wales) were fortunate enough not to have members of their communities die in the war. They were known as 'Thankful Villages', where all those who left to serve came home again. Not one Thankful Village exists in Scotland or Ireland, where every single community lost someone to the war."

The First World War also caused the map of Europe to be greatly changed, with old empires vanishing and new nation states emerging, and produced grievances which only 21 years later led to the Second World War.

The Second World War was more of a global war than the First, and was even more deadly. When one takes into account not only those who were killed in armed combat, but also the strategic bombing, the genocide of the Holocaust, various massacres, deaths from starvation and disease, and the use of nuclear weapons right at the end, it was a war with more than 50 million, and perhaps as many as 80 million fatalities.

Unlike the First World War, the events of the Second World War took place within the living memory of many still alive today, including some of you present at this service, and I know that some of you served in the armed forces during the war.

The Second World War was just a little before my time. I am part of the so-called post-war baby boom. And the world in which I grew up was one in which the war was still a very fresh memory in my parents' generation.

The youngsters growing up in today's world are much further removed from the events of the war than my generation was.

Those lucky enough to have great-grandparents still alive can even now hear first-hand accounts of experiences of military service, and what life was like during the years of the war. But the number of those still with us to describe their experiences is getting fewer as the years go by.

The events that we commemorate on Remembrance Sunday must never be forgotten. The Act of Remembrance brings together people of all ages, and its importance does not diminish as the years go by.

Sadly, mankind seems to have learned little from the catastrophe of the two world wars, and many have lost their lives in conflicts that have taken place since. It is a sobering experience to visit the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire and to see the names of those who have given their lives in military service since the Second World War displayed on the memorial. On Remembrance Sunday we honour their memory too.

As far as the Christian faith is concerned in the western world, the two world wars accelerated a process of decline in church attendance that had already begun in the 19th century. In part this was simply because of the disruptive effect of those wars. But it was also much more than that. Those who had had some horrific experiences, and those who had lost loved ones, found their Christian faith severely challenged. It was only natural, and very proper, to ask how the all-loving and all-powerful God of Christian teaching could possibly allow such evil to be unleashed and to permit so much suffering. These are questions to which every Christian believer needs to give some thought, and I do not claim to have the answers.

But I do believe that the Christian faith has something relevant and meaningful to say on Remembrance Sunday. Today we reflect upon the sacrifice made by so many, who were willing to give their lives so that we could enjoy the freedoms which we all too easily take for granted in today's world. At the centre of the teaching of the Church is a message that our redemption was achieved at a great cost.

Jesus put it like this in John 6:13: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." In Romans 8, St Paul asks the question: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

His answer is: “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This is a tremendous assurance at the very heart of the Gospel which we proclaim.

David Stec

Sermon for St Andrew's URC

Sunday 18th November 2018

1 Samuel 2.1-10 Hebrews 10.19-25 Psalm 16 Mark 13.1-8

Last Sunday, Remembrance Day, I was upstairs during the most of 10am service at St Mark's with a group of children aged 4 - 10 at Godly Play. The story being told was that of Jesus stilling the storm, told simply and with a few props, many of which are also used in the story of Jonah. At the end, the storyteller asked the children, as always, a series of wondering questions- to which there are no correct answers but which invite conversation and exploration together. One of the questions was, 'I wonder what was most important about this story?' An older child observed that this story was about Jesus bringing peace, 'And today we are thinking about peace and all the people who have died in wars'. After that they were off, and talked about Remembrance; they made the connections all by themselves, just as we had hoped that they would. But another question also prompted a profound response and it's that which has stayed with me. When asked, 'I wonder what you liked most about the story?', a child of about 4 said something that I'd never thought about before, answering, 'I liked it that Jesus was with his friends'. Simple, child centred, profound. For that child the most important part was that Jesus was not on his own - that he was with other people. Jesus could sleep on a cushion because he trusted his fishermen friends to sail the boat; and then, when they needed him, he could still the storm.

That was last Sunday - but I've carried that thought all week - the child's perspective of faithfulness and trust - which I think is a thread we can see running through today's readings too. I'll come back to Hannah's song later, but our Hebrews reading speaks of trust and confidence in the new relationship with God made possible through Jesus' death and resurrection. The psalm is one of gratitude and appreciation and in the gospel- one of Mark's more apocalyptic passages - as we are told to heed the warnings of the age, so we are also invited to listen to and (implicitly) to trust in Jesus.

A couple of East Anglian bishops from the Cof E can be found most weeks posting on Facebook talking about the lectionary readings, a kind of episcopal double act. They observed for this weekend how apt the gospel reading was - that we still live in a time of war and of rumours of wars... One suggested that this reading should prompt us to examine how we order our lives in

the present; ask ourselves what are the values we hold as most dear as the basis for our own lives, both private and public, individual and corporate.

I found this really helpful, for self examination should make a difference. We can hardly call others to account if we haven't looked at our own lives and practices first. But then we might well go on to ask what values do we see in our society, the culture around us?

Are they the same or different to our own - is there any sense of disconnect? Faithfulness and trust don't seem to figure too highly right now in many spheres of public life. And what can we do in response? We live in a world where, according to Christian Aid, 1/6th of all children are growing up in places where there is conflict. We live in a country where, according to a UN report published this week, 14 million people - 1/5th of the population live below the poverty line and 1.5 million are destitute... and where, recently, an advertisement for frozen food which highlighted the destruction of virgin rainforest (to clear room for the production of palm oil) was banned because it was deemed too political - much of it originated as a Greenpeace video. I find myself struggling to understand how anything be 'too' political, if it is to do with an issue which affects the whole planet.

We are all political – we live in a society with structures and systems that are ordered in a certain way and we're participants in that. As Christians our faith informs how we think the values of God's kingdom should work out in practice though we may not always agree exactly how. But we should be thinking about and acting on it which leads me back to Hannah.

As I said earlier, her words are echoed in Luke's gospel in Mary's song, the Magnificat. But whilst there are similarities in tone and content there are also significant differences in context. Mary speaks those words whilst still pregnant, unexpectedly, with the Christ child - and as a response to Elizabeth's greeting. They are spoken in anticipation as she waits for the birth.

Hannah's pregnancy only happened at all after a long wait – as the second wife in this biblical marriage she had been taunted cruelly about her infertility by wife number 1. It was only after she had vowed to God that if she had a male child she would give him into Gods service as a nazirite that she fell pregnant. The words that we have heard are spoken just after she has given up Samuel, her longed for son, her only child (at that time) - just weaned, so maybe aged 3 or so (?), into the care of Eli at the temple. Words spoken after the event, but still looking forward ...

Hannah's words could have been a lament, but they're not, far from it. These are words of gratitude, determination, trust and affirmation, praise and hope and perhaps even defiance as she leaves her son behind. Like those of Miriam before her and Mary after, they are poetry: a psalm, in effect, inserted into a prose text. As a psalm, these words are intended to be corporate, not private. There's speculation that this psalm was inserted into the narrative text to illuminate and help to make connections with other texts and identify with them.

So why does this matter to us today?

The story which unfolds in the opening chapters of 1 Samuel is one in which we are invited to sense God's guidance behind all that is going on, and God's purposes driving events in a certain direction; just as, also, in the opening chapters of Luke's gospel, God is seen at work in the world in and through people of faith and humility. As Hannah gives thanks, her prayer is not for herself but for the nation in which her son Samuel will play a major role as prophet and priest, as it develops and flourishes during the reign of David.

Perhaps we need to attend to something demonstrated in this story - what Katie Munnick* describes as 'faithful longing and the deeper work of a loving God who shapes all things'. Life may be challenging at times and the future may be uncertain, but if we can hold onto a vision of what the world, rightly and justly ordered would look like, and if we can sense that the divine is indeed at work among us, then there is always purpose and hope. So we can continue to participate together in the compassionate and transforming work of God, in small ways as well as large ones: and always in faithfulness and trust. Amen.

Sarah Colver

18.11.2018 * <http://www.presbyterianrecord.ca/2012/11/12/hannah-and-her-sisters/>

SERMON November 25, 2018

Mark 10:35-45 and Isa 53:4-12

It's that time of year again. The trees are turning russet, days are shorter, nights are becoming decidedly chilly, and another series of The Apprentice has begun on television. Over the next few weeks, an assortment of men and women will try their hand at a given task. Their efforts are assessed by a business tycoon. Each episode ends with some people staying and others being sent home. And those who get through to the end secure an actual apprenticeship and bask in the tycoon's reflected glory.

Now this is of course reality television. It is entirely contrived. But we can't stop watching. And week after week it re-enforces a message: in order to succeed in this life we must model ourselves on the successful tycoon. To have a winning streak, we have to be ambitious, determined, and ruthless, and it doesn't matter too much if this is at the expense of other people.

I think you'll agree that the style of leadership that is modelled by Jesus couldn't be more different. It is spelt out clearly in the gospel of Mark, no- where more so than in the verses we just had read. So we had better have a look at what is going on. After a hard trek, Jesus and his disciples are on the threshold of Jerusalem. On the way Jesus has been teaching them. They are coming to the end of a long in depth training section on discipleship. It's time the disciples

were assessed; it's time for them to show how far they have come to understand Jesus and themselves. There is one thing in particular which they have to understand: Jesus has just told them for the third time how he will soon be betrayed, rejected, killed and how he will then, after three days, rise from the dead. He has told them that clearly in so many words.

But do the disciples take it on board? No they don't! They persistently fail to get the point of what he is saying.

True, they have in many ways proved faithful. Take James and John. These two have been with Jesus from the very beginning of his ministry. They left their fishing nets, their home, their family – they left everything to follow Jesus. They have served their apprenticeship. In the time they had with Jesus, James and John were in the inner circle. They listened to his teaching. They had an opportunity to grasp Jesus' vision of the Kingdom, of discipleship, of leadership. But there is only one snag. They are imbued with a reality show mentality. Their minds are set on achieving personal glory above all else. When Jesus comes to glory, haven't they earned a share? when Jesus is acclaimed as the great Messiah, the saviour of the world, haven't they a right to be in his cabinet, sitting back in the front benches beside him, one to his right and one to his left, basking in his power and glory? In their own eyes, they have come to the end of a successful apprenticeship – time now for the rewards. They have earned a share of Jesus's glory, now they are ready to enjoy greatness and status.

James and John have clearly not understood anything that Jesus had been teaching them. Their request has to have been one of the most disappointing moments in Jesus's time with the disciples. Where have the twins been all this time? Hadn't they seen and heard what was happening? Hadn't they noticed the little child whom Jesus set in their midst, his blessing of a group of children whom they had tried to send away?

James and John have had every opportunity to catch Jesus' vision of God's intentions for the world, and what have they learnt? They want to be rewarded by personal power and glory, and they are trying to twist Jesus's arm to get what they want.

How does Jesus react? We might expect him to be angry, to rebuke them sharply at the very least. But if Jesus is exasperated with them, he doesn't show it; too much is at stake. He responds that they do not know what they are asking; he confronts them with a vision, not of earthly power and glory, but of martyrdom and death, his martyrdom and theirs. Like the servant in Isaiah 53, Jesus will be despised, rejected and finally executed. This is the cup he will drink, this is the baptism with which he is to be baptised. For him, the road to glory runs through the valley of suffering and death – if the disciples are faithful, the same will very probably happen to them.

If Jesus wasn't angry with James and John, the other disciples are. The brothers have jumped the gun; sought assurances on behalf of themselves at the expense of their colleagues. But

haven't they as much right as the brothers to share in Jesus's glory? In their indignation, the other disciples are clearly missing the point every bit as much as the twins. The only categories of leadership they have in mind are those they have seen in the Herods of this world, power-hungry, paranoid, control freaks. Jesus again resists rebuke. He cites the secular authorities of the day as an example of how not to exercise leadership. His disciples, his true champions, are to be different.

Not for them the prevailing wisdom of the day. Not for them the ruthless mind-set of a tyrant or a business tycoon, bent at whatever cost, on power and glory. They will not trample on other people to get to the top. Their primary criterion has to be service, service of God, service of one another, service of their neighbours, service for the common good. It will entail self-sacrifice, even suffering, but only that way will God's purposes for the world be fulfilled.

What does this look like in my life and yours? What does Jesus's teaching mean for us today?

We may see it symbolically writ large in the person of the Pope. At his inauguration in March 2013 Pope Francis defined his own leadership in terms of radical service with an option for the poor. Not for him the conventional trappings of the papacy, from the fleet of Mercedes cars to the purple shoes. In his ministry, Francis has modeled a focus on service; he takes every opportunity on his trips to visit 'places of pain' – prisons, drug addiction centers, homes for the disabled – and he spends a large part of his time in St. Peter's Square at the Wednesday general audiences with the elderly, the disabled and the homeless. So dramatic has been the impact of Francis's leadership of the Roman Catholic Church that *The Economist* believes the Pope should be studied in Harvard Business School as an example of good leadership. In 2014, *Fortune* magazine put the Pope in the top spot of its fifty greatest world leaders, for having "electrified the Church and attracted legions of non-Catholic admirers by energetically setting a new direction." As has been suggested, "these accolades from the high citadels of cultural and economic liberalism are all the more remarkable because they were being awarded to a man whose critiques of western elites, capitalism and individualism were as relentless as they were devastating".

Francis's actions, words, and gestures have awoken in western culture a dim, often unconscious, yet powerful memory of someone once loved but since lost. A recent head-line in the *Washington Post*, not known for its religious journalism, went like this: "Like Francis? You'll love Jesus!"

So how do we followers of our risen Lord behave in a way that reflects the mind of Christ? How do we follow the teaching of Jesus in our homes, in the church, in the classroom, in the boardroom, the doctor's surgery or the shop floor? They say that all work-places have their fair share of plots, vendettas, and backstabbers, people on the way up and those they've trampled on to get there. And I think we will most of us recognise an element of that in our experience. But this issue extends well beyond the working environment. It affects national and international politics. Indeed it sometimes feels as if politics is office politics writ large. The way of life of

entire communities is on the line. The stakes are high. But together we followers of Jesus can make a difference. We will not ride rough-shod over the needs of other people. We will ask insistent questions about the numbers of homeless people on our streets, and the numbers of men, women and children who are compelled to use food banks – and we will do so with determination. We may like the disciples, rarely do or say the right thing, but we will create a community that keeps alive the memory of Jesus's ministry and in so doing we will testify to the power of God's redeeming love.

For we are marching in the light of God, following our risen Lord who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Fleur Houston

SERMON St Andrew's 02.12.18

Jer 33:14-16 1Thes 3:9-13 Luke 21:20-36

Jer. 33:15 "In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."

The season of Advent is above all else a time of waiting, a time of hope and expectation, and a time of anticipation as we prepare to celebrate the festival of Christmas. Traditionally during Advent, Christians prepare to receive their saviour at his birth, and they also look forward to his future coming.

At first sight our OT and Gospel lessons may not seem to have very much in common, but what does bind them together is that both arise from a situation of impending crisis, and both offer hope for what lies beyond that crisis. Our OT lesson is a prophecy given by Jeremiah at a time when the Babylonians, the super power of the day, were besieging Jerusalem. This was an event that Jeremiah had long foreseen, and for some time he had taught that the only realistic course of action was for the city to submit to the Babylonians. He regarded it as the will of God that all the nations should serve the king of Babylon. But this was not a popular message, and it brought him into conflict with certain nationalistic prophets who were encouraging rebellion against Babylon.

The Judaeen king, Zedekiah, finally allowed himself to be persuaded into making just such a rebellion, and the Babylonians soon took decisive retribution, by besieging the city. Throughout the siege, Jeremiah still consistently urged the people to surrender, and this caused him to be regarded as a traitor, and to be put into prison. It was during his time in prison that he gave that prophecy in 33:14-16. It is really quite remarkable that at time when Judah and Jerusalem were facing an imminent and utter catastrophe, Jeremiah could give a message of hope.

In order to do this, he took an old prophecy that he had given some time ago and re-applied it to the present situation of crisis. You can find that earlier prophecy in 23:5-6. On this earlier

occasion, Jeremiah was condemning the political leaders of the day, whom he described as shepherds. They should have taken good care of the sheep of God's pasture, that is to say, God's people, but instead they scattered the flock and drove them away. Therefore God would gather the remnant of his flock from the countries where they had been driven, and bring them back to his fold. He would set shepherds over them, who would care for them, so that they would not need to fear, and none of them would go missing again. To this message Jeremiah added God's promise that he would "raise up for David a righteous Branch", who would reign as king and deal wisely, and execute justice and righteousness in the land."

Jeremiah lived in troubled times, and as the people of his day looked back at the earlier history of their nation, the reign of King David seemed like something of a golden age, when Judah together with Israel was prosperous and powerful, and was led by one who had been chosen by God. How different their present day leaders were! Jeremiah, therefore, looked forward to what he called a "righteous Branch", a future ruler of David's line, who would rule justly, and restore the fortunes of the nation. In Jeremiah's words: "In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'" This was the message which the prophet had given some years ago, and now as the nation was on the brink of disaster, and the situation was utterly desperate, he repeated that message (with only a few small changes) as a word of hope and encouragement.

As the years went by and the nation often went through hard times, with a future that seemed uncertain, Jeremiah's words were repeatedly taken up, and used to provide hope that a messianic leader would arise and restore the fortune of his people. Already, the prophet Zechariah, who ministered to the exiles who had returned from Babylon to the ruins of Jerusalem, used Jeremiah's prophesy as an assurance that what was destroyed would be rebuilt. Zechariah said of the high priest Joshua, "Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall grow up in his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD." (6:12) And in a later age still, the people who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls made use of the prophecies of Jeremiah as they looked forward to a messianic figure whom they called the Branch of David.

Our Gospel lesson from Luke 21 also arises from a situation of impending crisis. This is part of a long discourse given by Jesus to his disciples in Jerusalem during the last week of his life. You could say that this was a situation of immediate crisis for Jesus and the disciples, as indeed it was, since Jesus's crucifixion was only days away, and for a time the disciples would have their world utterly turned upside down. And as in the days of Jeremiah, a time of crisis for the city of Jerusalem and its people was drawing ever nearer.

All three of the synoptic Gospels give an account of Jesus's teaching on this occasion. But St Luke embellishes his account with some particular details of the what took place in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and with it the temple. It is a matter of debate among scholars as to whether the words in Luke 21 were written after AD 70 by someone who had knowledge of the actual course of events, or whether they represent a prophecy written before

the event. In any event, there seems little doubt that Jesus foretold the violent end to which Jerusalem was hastening.

St Luke's account of Jesus's prophecy includes the words: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it; for these are days of vengeance, to fulfil all that is written ... they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." This reference to "the times of the Gentiles" is an echo of the Book of Daniel, according to which, God has given over to a Gentile kingdom the authority to devastate Israel for a time, two times and half a time (Dan 12:7).

The events that lie ahead are then portrayed as taking on cosmic proportions, as we read: "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." The heavenly bodies were thought of by the Jews as angelic beings created by God and allowed by him to preside over the destinies of the nations in the Greco-Roman world. Thus the shaking of the powers of heaven is not so much about the ruin of the physical world as the overthrow of the imperial supremacy which held sway.

St Luke then includes the prediction in Mark and Matthew of the coming of a figure called the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven, which the early church took to refer to the glorious return of Christ. Jesus says that even though others may faint with fear because of what is happening, his disciples should stand firm, because these events mean that God's promised salvation is at hand. He tells them: "Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." St Luke ends this passage with an exhortation to the followers of Jesus to remain vigilant, lest the coming events take them by unawares.

Both Jeremiah and Jesus recognise that their nation is about to experience some traumatic events, and both of them offer a message of hope for the future beyond these events. The hope of salvation lies at the heart of our relationship with God.

We are only too aware of the pain and sorrow in the world of the here and now, and every time we say the Lord's prayer, we pray that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. The season of Advent reminds us that we live in God's world as it is now, not yet as God intends it to be. God has promised that the time will come when Christ's reign of righteousness will begin. The time is coming, God's salvation is at hand, his kingdom is near.

That time has not yet arrived, but in Advent we are called to wait patiently and to trust in God's promises.

David Stec

SERMON December 9, 2018

Commentaries – I have many – my bookshelves are weighed down with them but they are very useful. Whilst browsing through them – researching for my Sermon I was continually interrupted - not by a person – but a song that went around and round in my head – what a great hymn I thought – searching through both of the Hymnbooks used in Saint Andrew’s and failing to find it anywhere. Of course, it was ‘Oh! prepare ye the way of the Lord’ from the musical written by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber. Stirring and very difficult to ignore.

Advent is, of course, a time of preparation. Nothing focuses our minds and hearts more than the readings we heard read, so beautifully earlier. Preparations began last week; most folk will have opened the first window of their Advent Calendars. Probably finding a chocolate, which will certainly be a distraction from the real purpose of Advent.

In the Book of Malachi, we hear God saying to those who have ears to hear ‘I am sending a messenger of my Covenant – who you will be delighted to meet’.

There is a great BUT – will YOU be ready? A prophet foretells the coming of a Messiah to the people of the Lord. But who will be able to stand before Him? The phrase “Those with clean hands and clean hearts” comes to mind.

Another prophet – John – the cousin of Jesus, continues this tradition – calling all to prepare a way for the coming King. He quotes from the Book of Isaiah – “Prepare the way of the Lord – make his paths straight – every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low: the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see it together.’ And immediately I think of Handel’s “Messiah”. Think how often you have been able to remember the words of the Bible by humming a familiar hymn or Anthem when you could not hold a Bible.

Many things combine to help us to remember what we were taught by our Sunday School teachers, parents and preachers about the coming in of the Kingdom of God. And many things help us to remember what we were taught. We remember music and the words of songs and hymns when much else has been forgotten – this has been scientifically proven. But even more, the actions prompted by that teaching! Children learn more about sincerity, honesty, and unconditional love by what they see others do in their daily lives. Following in the footsteps of Christ. Learning from his example, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The command is to prepare the way of the Lord –
Where exactly?

In the midst of a world oppressed by war and terrorism.

In the midst of the people who have power over others.

In the midst of those who compromise for their own status and esteem. Or any who speak for an institution of exclusion. Or any Government which is corrupt.

This seems to be a tall order but, if we are to obey God's word, we must be brave enough to speak out; to stand up for the marginalised, terrorised; the violated – the excluded- and for those who live in poverty.

We may be afraid of many things – the opinion of others – of failing – of being lonely – of not having enough – of being hurt – and of being overwhelmed. Yet – though people may laugh at us, though we may not succeed - though we may stand alone - though we may suffer losses and may break down – if God is with us, we need not be afraid.

As James Montgomery said in his hymn "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire uttered or unexpressed" and it is through prayer, unspoken with all sincerity, that we will find God's help. So that firstly we clear the clutter from our lives to make space for God.

We sweep away the rubbish, cut loose to clinging sin, prepare the way – we build a highway for him. When we open a little window today – what do we see? Another chocolate? A whole new world? Glory?

In Paul's letter to the Philippians he uses a familiar form of greeting – firstly he gives thanks to God for the people he is addressing and this custom is followed by him in every letter except Galatians, where his passionate concern carries him into an immediate reprimand. In this letter, above all, he is moved by deepest affection for his readers; it is evident from the first sentence that the apostle feels a closer sympathy between himself and the Philippians than any other of his churches. He is so encouraging. It is a very moving, loving and passionate letter. He says "It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God."

On the second week in Advent – heeding Paul's advice and gaining courage from all who have gone before – the witnesses down the ages – in the power of the Holy Spirit- let us hold fast to the truth that God is with us. As we enter the season of longing and waiting let us hope that he will bear with us a little longer – for he has been with us from the beginning of our journey, even when we ignored him or forgot that he was there. We are blinded by the brashness and the commercialisation of this season. We need to open our eyes to glimpses of his glory. We need to open our minds to hints of the coming incarnation. When we are deafened by our own shouting, we need to open our ears to the whispers of his grace. We need to share with him in

longing for restoration and renewal: to be watchful for the light that breaks through in the darkness of our world.

God says “Be patient – watch and wait for the time is close at hand - know that you are loved, forgiven and healed.”

Open the next window on your Advent calendar. Do you see a chocolate? Do you see signs of an opportunity to serve your Lord? Do you see a whole new world of love and reconciliation? Where love is king and no one goes to bed hungry – where no one is homeless – or uneducated – and war has ceased – where there is peace for all humanity – the bereaved and lonely are gathered closely –where all children are cherished – where there is no class distinction – no abusive relationships – no slavery and all are free? Do you see a glimpse of the Glory of God? Preparation—is the name of the game—in prayerful anticipation – for the Joy of the world to be complete. Amen

Margaret Herbert

