

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 24th January 2021

Sunday Worship

with Revd Neil Coulson

Hello, I hope you are well. May I just share a couple of notices with you - you may have already picked these up but just in case not: Following the review at the Deacon's meeting last week, we agreed that we are not able to reopen the church buildings yet. This is in keeping with the advice of both denominations and we will continue to regularly review the situation. It is time to be thinking about our contributions for Comment which should be with Julie by Tuesday 26th January. Chikondi has decided for personal reasons that she should stand down from the Diaconate. We wish her well and say thank you for her service to the church during a very difficult year. Jayne has asked if we could set aside a time in the week to pray for NHS staff. Prayers could also be offered for other key workers such as teachers, carers and emergency service personnel, and for all who are suffering during this pandemic. The deacons supported this idea and encourage you to take part between 7 and 8 every Thursday evening. This doesn't mean an hour of prayer (unless you want to) but to spend some time in prayer during this time slot. Lastly, this year we are hoping to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in May, rather than this week which is when it would usually happen. Hopefully, at least some of us from each of the town centre churches might be able to gather together then for a shared service.

Today, our Gospel Reading is Mark 1:14-20 and our Old Testament reading is Jonah 3:1-5, 10.

Let us worship God together:

Call to worship

Let us come from our everyday and our routine
and meet with God – the one who made us,
and who gave us our daily bread
through the week just gone.

A gathering prayer

Loving Lord, thank you that you meet us where we are, in the middle and muddle of our daily tasks.
Help us to hear your call, to recognise your voice, and to respond to your invitation to be with you now.
Amen.

A prayer of approach

The Lord called the disciples to be fishers of men.
He calls us to follow him, to trust in, rely on and have confidence in him.
Come, let us cast our nets into his waters and offer ourselves in worship and praise.
Amen.

Hymn Alleluia! sing to Jesus

Alleluia! sing to Jesus,
his the sceptre, his the throne;
alleluia! his the triumph,
his the victory alone.
Hark! the songs of peaceful Zion
thunder like a mighty flood;
Jesus out of every nation
hath redeemed us by His blood.

Alleluia! bread of heaven!
 Thou on earth our food, our stay;
 Alleluia! here the sinful
 flee to Thee from day to day.
 Intercessor, friend of sinners,
 earth's Redeemer, plead for me,
 where the songs of all the sinless
 sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia! Alleluia!
 Glory be to God on high;
 to the Father, and the Saviour,
 who has gained the victory;
 glory to the Holy Spirit,
 fount of love and sanctity.
 Alleluia! Alleluia!
 to the triune Majesty.

William Chatterton Dix (1837–98) altd.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

We thank you, Lord, for all these blessings caught in your net of good news.
 Thank you for the changes you have brought about in our lives,
 and the difference you continue to make as we follow and learn from you.
 Thank you that you never ask us to go beyond our capabilities.
 Thank you for the many blessings we receive when we follow through on what you ask of us.
 May we be a blessing to others in your name, by spreading the good news.

Amen.

Old Testament Reading Jonah 3:1-5, 10 (NRSV)

Conversion of Nineveh

3 The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²‘Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.’ ³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Gospel Reading Mark 1:14-20 (NRSV)

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;^[a] repent, and believe in the good news.’

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

¹⁶As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Reflection

The opening verses of today's reading are actually part of Mark's introductory material but verses 14-15 relate specifically to the coming first major section of his Gospel, 1:14 – 10:52. These two verses are different to the preceding thirteen verses of the prologue, which introduced the reader to the whole story of Mark. Mark's first main section will include material about the healings, controversies and teaching of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and the surrounding area. Mark introduces these actions of Jesus in verses 14-15 as we hear the first words spoken by Jesus in this Gospel: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news." In these words, we hear a summary of the whole first section. But first, Mark makes us aware of an arrest...

We will, no doubt, recall how a couple of weeks ago we read about and reflected upon Jesus' baptism. Now, although Mark tells us that Jesus was one of the many baptised by John, we do not hear in this Gospel of any direct engagement between Jesus and John. This is in contrast to the other Gospel writers who offer more details about their encounters with one another (Matthew 3:14-15, 11:2-6, Luke 7:18-23 and John 1:29-36). Also, in Mark's Gospel, as we just mentioned, Jesus begins his ministry only 'after John was arrested', whereas in John's Gospel, we find that Jesus and his disciples are baptising at the same time as John (John 3:22 - 4:2). This is because for Mark, John the Baptist, the forerunner, has now prepared the way of the Lord, and Jesus' own work now begins. The one who came 'proclaiming a baptism of repentance' (1:4) has now been literally 'given over' or 'handed over' (1:14); Mark uses the same Greek words of the proclamation and the fate, not only of Jesus at other points within his Gospel (1:14, 3:19, 9:31) but he also uses the very same words of the disciples (13:9-10). I think it is really interesting to reflect upon Mark's probable interpretation of a motif employed by Isaiah here; according to Isaiah such 'proclaiming' and being 'handed over' is the calling of God's servant in Isaiah 52:7–53:12.

In Mark's Gospel, we discover Jesus announcing the time of fulfilment of Isaiah's promise of salvation from God, 'the King of Israel and his Redeemer' (Isaiah 40:6). We discover Jesus preaching 'the good news of God' – here is a message about the imminence of God's rule and a calling for a change of heart and a personal commitment. Mark has already told us that Jesus not only proclaimed but also is himself God's good news in Mark 1:1: 'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' and we could also read Mark 14:9 when Jesus speaks following his anointing by the women at Bethany: 'truly I tell you, wherever the good news^[a] is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.' Mark wants his readers to recognise that God's reign is very near and very personal. The unveiling of God's rule has begun and genuinely, something new, something of God is happening right before them. Mark wants his readers to understand that God's reign is already being recognised as Jesus' first disciples respond to his summons to 'follow me and I will make you fish for people' (1:17): we read that 'immediately, they left their nets and followed him' (1:18), 'immediately... they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him' (1:20). These first disciples enact their repenting and believing by following him immediately, and it is quite shocking that they even made Jesus' call a higher priority than the commandment to 'honour your father and your mother' (Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16).

As we hear once again of the response of the fishermen to the call of Jesus, we are reminded of how discipleship always has a cost. We are reminded that we too are to be willing to give up something in order to bring the good news of God to others. May I invite you to take a few moments today to consider what God may be saying to you, what might he be calling you to do to share the 'good news' and what is it that might hold you back from being ready to follow Jesus, today, without hesitation, immediately? Let us each bring this prayer before God:

Loving Lord,
 I cannot imagine leaving everything behind to follow you:
 my family, my friends, and my work.
 But I know there are things in my life that I need to let go of.
 Please show me how to leave behind destructive behaviour, critical thoughts or unhelpful habits,
 and call me afresh to serve you as only I can.
 Lord, I come willingly, knowing you will never let go of my hand.
 Amen.

Hymn Take my life, and let it be (R&S 371)

Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King;
take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold,
not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine;
take my heart, it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure-store;
take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-79)

Our prayers of intercession

God of the past and of the future,
we bring to you in prayer those people and places on our hearts today:
We remember the parts of the world
where people are being killed, oppressed and displaced.
We pray especially for the people of Tigray in Ethiopia,
for the people of Dafur in the Sudan,
for the Uighur peoples in China.
May those in power leave behind violence and follow your call to peace. **Amen.**

Lord Jesus, you called fisherman as they worked,
so we pray for fisherman today as they struggle to make a living.
We pray for all those who work to bring food to our table
as they struggle with the complexities of legislation and the challenges of extreme weather.
And may those who exploit or abuse leave behind cruelty and follow your call to compassion. **Amen.**

We pray for all young people caught up in and trapped by gang violence,
for those who have been stabbed or shot and for their families,
for those who live in fear of being attacked,
for those who have been imprisoned, who have committed murder – and for their families,
for all those who carry weapons.
Help them to leave behind despair and to follow your call to hope. **Amen.**

We pray for the people of America as Joe Biden begins his term as President, and for Kamala Harris and all those entrusted with the responsibility of re-shaping and re-uniting the states that make up that vast nation, so divided by race and politics and so ravaged by Covid. Help them to leave behind ambition and to follow your call to serve. **Amen.**

We pray for your blessing upon all the churches in Ipswich, we think of those that we are especially close to; may they know your goodness and grace, and help us all to continue to worship and serve you together whenever and wherever we can. We pray also for one another, for our church families, our communities, and our loved ones, for those who feel overwhelmed by the challenges of each day, for those adapting to new ways of living, for those who are ill, for those who are grieving. We think of Kathy and her family following the loss of her dear mother-in-law, Jessie. We think also of Adrian and Stephanie and the family. We pray for those who are unwell, thinking especially of Irene who is currently in Colchester Hospital awaiting the results of tests; we pray also for Joan, Chikondi, Phyllis Davies, and for Re-Anette's mother, and all her family in South Africa. May they all know your love, peace and healing presence in their time of need. Help us all to leave behind all that separates us from you and from one another and to follow your call to trust and to love – in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn Go forth and tell! O Church of God, awake! (R&S 574)

Go forth and tell! O Church of God, awake!
God's saving news to all the nations take:
proclaim Christ Jesus, Saviour, Lord and King,
that all the world His glorious praise may sing.

Go forth and tell! God's love embraces all;
he will in grace respond to all who call:
how shall they call if they have never heard
the gracious invitation of His word?

Go forth and tell! The doors are open wide:
share God's good gifts – let no one be denied;
live out your life as Christ your Lord shall choose,
your ransomed powers for his sole glory use.

Go forth and tell! O church of God, arise!
Go in the strength which Christ your Lord supplies;
go till all nations His great name adore
and serve him, Lord and King forever more.

James E. Seddon. (1915-83)
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A sending out prayer

Loving Lord,
thank you that you meet us where we are,
in the middle and muddle of our daily lives.
Help us to hear your call,
to recognise your voice,
and to respond to your invitation
to follow you whatever we might be doing.

Amen.

The Blessing

May the blessing of almighty God,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
be upon you and those you love, this day and always.

Amen.

The Grace

Holding each other in our prayers, we say together:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all,
for evermore. Amen.**

May God bless you richly,
with our love and best wishes to you and your families,

Neil

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