

Dorset South & West Circuit - Written Service for Sunday 22 January 2023 – 'A Light that Shines in the Darkness' - by Revd David Cuckson

Call to Worship

People who walk in darkness, come now to follow the great light of Christ. People oppressed by the yoke of the world, come now to follow the liberation of Christ. People walking the journey of faith, come now to follow in the life of Christ.

HYMN Singing the Faith 663 (Daniel L Schutte)

1. I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin,
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

2. I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?

3. I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

Prayer

God who calls, we open our hearts to hear your Word today. We have left many jobs behind, unfinished reading or writing, incomplete tasks in the kitchen or garden, and have followed into your presence. In this time with you, we come to hear your Word, to be inspired by your gospel and to be challenged by your Call as we come in adoration and praise. **Amen**

In our darkness, you show us light. In our daily lives, you call our names. In our community, you show us love. May we know your light and love as you speak to us now through your word. **Amen**

Matthew 4:12-23 (NRSVA)

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled; 'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in

the region and shadow of death light has dawned.’ From that time Jesus began to proclaim, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake – for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and sickness among the people.

Reflection

The news was depressing. The outlook for spiritual renewal had turned bleak. John the Baptist had been gathering crowds around him to hear his message of reform and many were baptised by him as a sign of their commitment to follow the standards of life that he set out before them and to make themselves ready to welcome the coming Messiah. But in challenging his hearers to adopt the life style proclaimed by him, he was also implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) criticising those in authority. And, like outspoken critics of authoritarian regimes today, he suffered the consequences. King Herod Antipas had him thrown into jail – to take him out of circulation and to discourage others from following his lead.

But for Jesus this is the trigger for action. John the Baptist may have been effectively muzzled, at least for the present, but for Jesus this was now the moment for him to begin his own active ministry. And he refuses to hide himself away in a corner or a foreign land. He bases himself in Galilee, another part of the territories of Herod Antipas from where John the Baptist had been seized, and his own message picks up that of the Baptist but updating and reinforcing it. ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’

This is not a ministry that Jesus can carry out on his own. This is a long term project, one that needs workers, supporters who will follow his lead and who will be prepared to do things on their own, pass on his message of the good news of the kingdom, even carry out acts of caring and healing among people in need. So, here in our reading we hear how Jesus recruited some of his close disciples and how they responded to his call, initially it appears without question. And from that first act of dropping everything to go with him, they were to go on and come to know Jesus as their teacher, model in life and mentor, and ultimately as their master, even their Lord and Saviour.

Another passage of Scripture set for today is 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 10-18, and if you read that you will find that the Christian story has moved on. We now have something like a church taking shape. Paul has played a significant role in establishing a church community in the city of Corinth, and others have played a part as well – notably Apollos, and there is also reference to influence, probably indirect, from Cephas, whom we know better as Peter. The person who lies at the heart of the teaching of these is the same, Jesus, now acknowledged as the Christ, and the fundamentals remain the same in the new life both taught and lived by him. But the members of the congregation are finding it difficult to speak the same message or to live together in harmony. And Paul in his letter pleads with

the folk there:- ‘There should be no divisions among you, but... you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose.’

Here we are in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – an opportunity to try to heal the divisions that exist today between elements of the greater Church and to generate and promote a unity which can further and enhance the Gospel message entrusted to all of us. Attempts at achieving a formal uniformity within the Church over the centuries have all failed to produce any great or lasting success. We need to recognise, too, that the Church has often reflected within its ranks divisions that are found in wider society, including class, gender, race etc. We are not all alike. This has never been the case. The disciples, even during their time with Jesus, had disagreements with each other. The key is to try constantly to live in harmony with each other, in our local fellowships, between our wider groupings, across borders.

We remember today how Jesus called disciples, to form the nucleus of the people of God, to become his people in the Church, following his way, preserving and proclaiming his teaching. Each of us called by him faces a challenge of faithful discipleship, which includes trying to live in a community of followers and within the wider community in which we live. We are called to live out freedom and liberation for all, including the oppressed, the weakest, the most disadvantaged, those weighed down by the oppression of the world. We are called to go to those who find themselves living in darkness. We are called above all to witness and to serve that the great light of Christ may shine in the lives of all those with whom we come into contact.

HYMN Singing the Faith 255 (Bryn Rees)

1. The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
for Jesus restores what sin would destroy;
God’s power and glory in Jesus we know,
and here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.

2. The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
the prisoners are freed, the sinners find place,
the outcast are welcomed God’s banquet to
share
and hope is awakened in place of despair.

3. The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners brought Christ to the cross
our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

4. God’s kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,
in Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;
the heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
and all things cry glory to God all in all!

Prayers

God of opportunity, in the darkness of the world, we do not always shine your light. We fail to live your gospel boldly, with the full commitment you ask of us. We do not always speak out for the oppressed and weak and we do not live your joy and liberation in the world. In response to your Word, and in silence, help us recognise the opportunities we have to better respond to you, as the followers you call us to be,

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:18) Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

As we bring our prayers of concern for all peoples, nations and languages, let us pray: In a land of deep darkness: **may your light shine**

We pray for all peoples of the world: for those like us and known to us and those who are unknown to us or from different backgrounds. Your world is a diverse and exciting place, full of cultures and peoples with so many backgrounds and traditions, a kaleidoscope of people with whom we share much or little. Yet we are called to love and share together in your kingdom.

We pray for those people who are treated as outsiders, refugees and asylum seekers, who come looking for love. We continue to pray not for uniformity but unity in our communities, where people can know love irrespective of race, gender, sexuality and sexual identity, age, disability, religion or belief.

In a land of deep darkness: **may your light shine**

We pray for all nations of the world, for those in our closest relationships and those furthest away. We pray for those in leadership of all types. We pray for those who lead Churches and faith groups, those who work together for unity in a world of disunity. We pray for those who feel lonely, perhaps cut out of communities or families, in need of support and caring love, and we especially remember in our prayers all those known to us whose concerns rest heavy in our hearts today.

In a land of deep darkness: **may your light shine**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Blessing

In a world of noise, may we hear our name called. In a world of light, may we see the way we are called to follow. In a world of opportunity to respond, may we be compelled to share the good news of the Cross. And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us and all those for whom we have prayed, this day and for evermore. **Amen.**

[Prayers taken and adapted from Worship Notes from the United Reformed Church]