**Dorset South and West Circuit**

**Service for 28 June 2020 by Revd Gwyneth Owen**

Please centre yourself in God’s presence in whatever way works best for you – a lit

candle, a time of silence or, maybe, breathing in “be” and out “still”.

When you’re ready, I invite you to say the following service out loud and slowly, letting the words sink deep into your being. Don’t rush from one section to the other – take time

**Hymn**

Great God, your love has called us here as we, by love, for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear, though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed.
We come, with all our heart and mind your call to hear, your love to find.

We come with self-inflicted pains of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains, by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined, yet seeking hope for humankind.

Great God, in Christ you call our name and then receive us as your own,
not through some merit, right or claim, but by your gracious love alone.
We strain to glimpse your mercy seat and find you kneeling at our feet.

Then take the towel, and break the bread, and humble us, and call us friends.
Suffer and serve till all are fed, and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings, to fill all worlds, to crown all things.

Great God, in Christ you set us free your life to live, your joy to share.
Give us your Spirit's liberty to turn from guilt and dull despair
and offer all that faith can do while love is making all things new

Brian Wren ©1975, 1995 Stainer and Bell Ltd

**Prayer**

Gracious God, we thank you for the encouragement in the words of the hymn we have just sung. Thank you that you have called us in your love and that we matter to you. Thank you that you understand our vulnerabilities, our disappointments, our fears and anxieties. Thank you that you understand our sense of regret, guilt and shame and offer us your forgiveness and renewal. Thank you for Jesus Christ who invites us to be servants following his pattern of ministry. Thank you for the tender ministry of your Spirit who is able to lift us from the many darknesses that threaten our peace of mind, and take us into the light of your hope and joy.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we praise and thank you in the name of Christ. Amen.

**Reflective song**

Jesus, be the centre
Be my source, be my light, Jesus

Jesus, be the centre
Be my hope, be my song, Jesus

Be the fire in my heart
Be the wind in these sails
Be the reason that I live
Jesus, Jesus

Jesus, be my vision
Be my path, be my guide, Jesus

Be the fire in my heart
Be the wind in these sails
Be the reason that I live
Jesus, Jesus

Michael Frye ©1999 Vineyard Songs UK

**Matthew 10:40-42**

40“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; 42and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

**Reflection**

Well, what a brief gospel passage we have before us today. However, it comes at the end of a corker of a chapter for would-be disciples of Christ. If you have a Bible to hand, please take time to read the whole of chapter 10. If you haven’t got a Bible to hand, let me summarise the chapter for you. It begins with Jesus gathering his disciples around him and sending them out on mission with no luggage! As we read through the chapter, the precarious nature of this mission becomes more and more apparent – the disciples are in danger of their lives, sent out, “like sheep into the midst of wolves” (v16). Jesus warns them they will be handed over to the authorities who will deal with them harshly; family members will betray each other; persecution and death are prowling around the corner. Good grief, it doesn’t sound like a mission we would sign up for today, not with all our risk assessments in place!

Faced with all this, Jesus tells them 3x in a few verses not to be frightened but to speak the truth and be transparent in all their actions. Why? Because they are valued by God (v31). The chapter goes on to describe how allegiance to Jesus will separate families and will lead to his followers bearing the cross of many descriptions – maybe a literal cross, too. Immediately before today’s passage Jesus gives his disciples a conundrum: find your life and you’ll lose it; lose your life for my sake, and you’ll find it (v39).

So, now pause. It’s all pretty breathless stuff, isn’t it? Demanding, frightening, divisive and uncomfortable in the extreme. As you sit in your lounge or at your kitchen table reading this service you may wonder where your discipleship fits into all this stuff. Remember last week’s sermon - Matthew is writing at a time when followers of Jesus, especially Jewish followers, were being persecuted for putting their trust in Jesus Christ. This was a live issue for Matthew’s readers –they, some 55 years after Jesus’ death, were vulnerable and subject to persecution – to the kind of unjust treatment that has filled our newspapers and news programmes over the past couple of weeks.

In the verses before us today, Jesus reminds these beleaguered followers that they are not just representing Christ when they are on mission – they ARE as Christ to others, with his fullest authority. So, when they **are** welcomed they are welcomed as prophets and as those who are righteous . They are elevated to high places because of their relationship with God in Christ. Furthermore, in verse 42, the followers are referred to as “little ones”, and those who welcome them even with a cup of cold water will have their reward.

In its context, this passage is giving courage and encouragement to followers of Christ, starting with the first disciples but continuing to Matthew’s readers and to every generation who face persecution for Christ’s sake. More generally, it has two golden nuggets for us, I think:

Firstly, v31 reminds us that we are valued by God. Do you believe that? Sitting in your lounge or at your kitchen table, drink that truth in – you….are…. valued …by…God. By the God who is love. It might not sometimes feel like it, but it’s true nevertheless. Enjoy that thought.

Secondly, verses 40-42 are asking us how we will welcome the good news of Christ from prophets, from the righteous and from the little ones. How does God’s word today settle in your life? We live in unsettled times and there are a number of prophetic voices clamouring for our attention –voices proclaiming against: police brutality; racial and economic inequality; ecological blindness; educational bias and the increasing gap between rich and poor. Is this anything to do with us- do we welcome the prophetic voices where they chime with the good news of the kingdom of God? Are we willing to continue to support kingdom of God activities within and outside the walls of the church – the equivalent of giving a cup of water to these little ones (v 42)?

We all have a part to play in helping to create fairer, more welcoming and understanding communities wherever we live. We can only start from where we have influence, so let’s continue to make our mark in those places. Yes, we will be met with cynicism and rejection from some- it’s to be expected. But, some will welcome us and their reward will change their lives. And we are invited to welcome others –the prophets, righteous and little ones, and our reward is that our lives will be changed, too. Plenty to ponder I think. Amen.

**Prayers of Intercession**

We hold in God’s presence

* all who are being persecuted because of their colour, status, sexuality, religion or gender. Give to the voiceless a voice and to the powerful a sense of justice
* all who offer peaceful support to those who are persecuted and risk their own lives in doing so
* all who feel undervalued and of no worth. May the, previously, invisible key workers who have born the brunt of the Covid-19 world remind of us of the many more we are yet to recognise
* all who have an accepting spirit of welcome and hospitality
* those for whom we have a special concern
* ourselves. Remind us that we are valued by the living God and called to be servants of others, imitating Christ himself and with his authority.

We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Hymn**

 Brother, sister, let me serve you,
 Let me be as Christ to you;
 Pray that I may have the grace to
 Let you be my servant, too.

 We are pilgrims on a journey,
 And companions on the road;
 We are here to help each other
 Walk the mile and bear the load.

 I will hold the Christ-light for you
 In the night-time of your fear;
 I will hold my hand out to you,
 Speak the peace you long to hear.

 I will weep when you are weeping,
 When you laugh I'll laugh with you;
 I will share your joy and sorrow
 Till we've seen this journey through.

 When we sing to God in heaven
 We shall find such harmony
 Born of all we've known together
 Of Christ's love and agony.

 Brother, sister, let me serve you,
 Let me be as Christ to you;
 Pray that I may have the grace to
 Let you be my servant, too.

 Richard A M Gillard ©Scripture in Song 1977

Now may you know God’s richest blessing,

the blessing of Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen