

Dorset South & West Circuit
Written Service for Sept 27th 2020 by Rev David Reep
(based on the Lectionary readings for today)

”PRIMED FOR ACTION”

Call to Worship

(Psalm 78 verses 1-4)

Listen, my people to my teaching, and pay attention to what I say. I am going to use wise sayings and explain mysteries from the past, things we have heard and known, things that our fathers told us. We will not keep them from our children; we will tell the next generation about the Lord’s power and his great deeds and the wonderful things he has done.

Hymn (StF) 322

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| 1. How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

in a believer’s ear!
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
and drives away our fear. | 4. Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend,

my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring. |
| 2. It makes the wounded spirit whole
and calms the troubled breast;
‘tis manna to the hungry soul
and to the weary, rest. | 5. Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought
but when I see thee as thou art,
I’ll praise thee as I ought. |
| 3. Dear name – the rock on which I build
my shield and hiding-place,
my never- failing treasury filled
with boundless stores of grace. | 6. Till then I would my love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy name
Refresh my soul in death. |

Contemplative Prayer

Lord,

Why do we find it easier to grumble than to count our blessings? Easier to doubt than to trust?

Easier to dwell on our own feelings than seeking to understand how others are faring.

Easier to stay silent than to speak of our Christian faith?

Lord, forgive us.

Save us from cynicism and despair and fill our hearts with courage, faith, hope and love. Amen

Lesson: Matt 21. 28 32 (GNB) Jesus said “Now, what do you think? There was once a man who had two sons. He went to the older one and said, Son, go and work in the vineyard today”. ‘I don’t want to’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. “Yes, sir” he answered, but he did not go. Which one of the two did what his father wanted?

“The older one” they answered.

So Jesus said to them, “I tell you: the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going in to the Kingdom of God ahead of you. For John the Baptist came to you showing you the right path to take, and you

would not believe him; but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. Even when you saw this, you did not later change your minds and believe him.

Sermon

When our children were very young it was fascinating to see their personalities develop. In particular we noticed a difference between two of them. When asked to do a little task one would usually say “Yes, OK” but you’d have to wait a considerable time before any sign of anything getting done. The other would often say “No, I don’t want to do that” but before you realised it the job was done. Both responses could be exasperating, but both produced the desired result. I remember at the time thinking how much it reminded me of one of the parables of Jesus – the one which is in the Gospel reading for today

A father had two sons. (No – this is not the story of the Prodigal son!) In this story the presumably grown-up sons are asked to go and work in the vineyard. One says he will, but doesn’t and the other says he won’t but - “afterwards changed his mind and went”. “Which of these two did as his father wished?” asks Jesus. Well, at the outset neither shows up well. Their word could not be trusted. But in the end I suppose you have to hand it to the one who changed his mind and went.

This parable comes at the beginning of Holy Week. Palm Sunday saw crowds greeting Jesus, to the dismay of the religious leaders. Jesus is saying to them – “John the Baptist came and you did not believe him but tax collectors and prostitutes did – and even after seeing that, you did not repent and believe”. The Christian faith is all-embracing and inclusive. Don’t limit who can come and don’t be surprised at who does come.

One such huge surprise a few years later was Paul who strikes me as a sturdy and forceful character. You won’t find him sitting on the fence. He is willing to put his head above the parapet, and stand up and be counted. We see this when we first encounter him in the Bible.. As Saul of Tarsus he is proud of his Jewish faith and rises to defend it against those who are claiming to follow a travelling preacher from Galilee. Many fellow Jews, I guess, would have noticed what was going on but just shrugged their shoulders. “Whatever will be will be”. Not Saul. He gets official permission to hunt out “followers of the Way” and bring them bound to Jerusalem to face justice. “Breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” is the vivid phrase in the King James Bible. Then the last thing in the world he expected or wanted, happened. On that very mission to stamp out all the Christians he could find he had his Damascus road conversion experience.

He became a fearless ambassador for Christ. Over the years he endured much suffering for his faith. Many a person would have jacked it all in long since, but he persevered. He gives a catalogue of what he went through, which included imprisonments, floggings by Jews and Romans.... “ *In my many travels I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger from fellow Jews and from Gentiles, there have been danger in the cities, dangers in the wilds, dangers on the high seas and dangers from friends. There has been work and toil, often I have gone without sleep, I have been hungry and thirsty. I have often been without enough food, shelter or clothing. And not to mention other things, every day I am under the pressure of my concern for all the churches...* (2 Cor 11:26-28 GNB)

Our Matthew parable merges into another. After the euphoric excitement of Palm Sunday Jesus is preparing his disciples for the grim reality of what is about to happen. I wonder if the stories can be seen as one longer narrative.

A landowner planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants. At harvest time he sent his servants to get his share of the harvest. The tenants grabbed the slaves, killing one, beating another and stoning another. The landlord sent yet others but they were ill-treated in the same way. In the end he sent his son. Surely they will respect him, but they grabbed him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Here are hints of a potted history of how God sent his prophets of old to the people of Israel. There were reluctant prophets in the Old Testament (Jonah comes to mind) and their message was not always heeded. In the end God sent his Son – and they rejected him too. Paul was certainly one who would have understood the meaning of that parable. Elsewhere Jesus likens his work to another harvest. The crops are ripe. “Pray the Lord of the harvest that he will send labourers into his harvest. Paul was one of the many who stepped up to the plate and responded to the call.

Have you ever seen a round tuit? I did once. It struck me as a good thing and not a bad idea that everybody should have one. I was surprised to find it now has its own web-site and you can go on line and see it in different designs and sizes. One of the descriptions there explains exactly what it is:

“This is a round tuit. Guard it with your life! Tuits are hard to come by, especially the round ones. It will help you become a much more efficient worker. For years you’ve heard people say “I’ll do that when I get a round tuit”. So now you have one you can accomplish all those things you put aside until you got a Round Tuit.”

So let this virtual gift become a spiritual reality. The Victorian hymn-writer Thomas Hornblower Gill put it well:

I would not with swift-winged zeal
On the world’s errands go,
And labour up the heavenly hill
With weary feet and slow’

Some public notices are cold and off-putting, others are warm and welcoming. I like the one that has appeared recently in our buses *“Please sit in a window seat where the views are better”* What a cheery way to encourage social distancing! As I sat by the window I thought it would be good to invite people to do this with Paul’s writings. His words (written even before the Gospels) were probably the first time any words anywhere were written explaining the Christian faith. He gives us a superb overview of what God has done and also with deep insight he shows how God’s spirit can work in and through us.

This Sunday’s epistle is from a letter Paul wrote while in prison to encourage the church at Philippi. It too can strengthen us in our faith today. *“Don’t do anything from selfish ambition, but be humble towards one another, always considering others better than yourselves. And look out for one another’s interests and not just your own. The attitude you should have is the one Christ Jesus had.....He always had the nature of GodHe became like man and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death - his death on the cross. For this reason God highly exalted him, and gave him a name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.* (Phil. 2 selected verses GNB and KJV)

With Isaac Watts we can say: “I’m not ashamed to own my Lord, Or to defend his cause
Maintain the honour of his word The glory of his cross”.

Go and work in God’s vineyard? Primed for action? We know what we ought to do, and we can discover what by God’s grace we are able to do - especially with that brand new present of our very own round tuit!

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for the world – for peace and reconciliation between all peoples and nations, that the only kind of wars we wage are against hunger and disease, injustice and poverty, racism and environmental pollution.

We pray for political and religious leaders across the world, that they may have wisdom to know and courage to do what is right.

For teachers and administrators in our schools, colleges and universities and for students at the outset of their careers

For all health professionals and carers and all who work to keep our communities safe

For all who maintain essential services, our power supplies and our daily food. Make us aware of our indebtedness to others.

Bless those near and dear to us, especially those whose needs are hidden from wider view.

And finally we pray for ourselves that we may continue our pilgrimage “to serve the present age”

We say **the Lord’s Prayer**

Hymn 691 What shall our greeting be:
 sign of our unity?
 ‘Jesus is Lord!’
 May we no more defend
 barriers he died to end:
 Give me your hand, my friend -
 one Church one Lord!

 What is our mission here?
 He makes his purpose clear:
 one world, one Lord!
 Spirit of truth descend;
 all our confusions end:
 give me your hand, my friend -
 ‘Jesus is Lord!’

 He comes to save us now:
 to serve him is to know
 life’s true reward.
 May he our lives amend,
 all our betrayals end:
 give me your hand, my friend -
 ‘Jesus is Lord!’

The Blessing