**Dorset South and West Circuit**

Service for Sunday 21 June 2020 by Tony Boyden, Local Preacher .

**A prayer of approach**

Lord, we know, that when it comes to it, it’s not our words but what we do and why we do it that count It’s not how we worship that matters but how we carry out your will as the body of Christ We ask that you acknowledge what we’re trying to do and our desire to be your people. Make your presence known to us and help us overcome any lack of self-confidence or confusion we might experience for we seek to be your faithful disciples. Amen

Our first hymn calls on to obey Jesus’ call to reach out to the lost.

**Hymn: Hear the call of the Kingdom**

1. Hear the call of the kingdom, lift your eyes to the King:

let his song rise within you as a fragrant offering of how God, rich in mercy, came in Christ to redeem all who trust in his unfailing grace.

1. Hear the call of the kingdom to be children of light with the mercy of heaven, the humility of Christ; walking justly before him, loving all that is right, that the light of life may shine through us.

*King of heaven, we will answer your call. We will follow, bringing hope to the world, filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim salvation in Jesus’ name*

3. Hear the call of the kingdom to reach out to the lost with the Father’s compassion in the wonder of the Cross, bringing peace and forgiveness, and a hope yet to come: let the nations put their trust in him,.

*King of heaven, we will answer your call…….*

Keith Getty (b 1974) Kristyn Getty (b 1980) Stuart Townend (b 1963)

**A prayer of adoration and thanksgiving.** Lord, we come before you with gladness and thanksgiving. You have trusted us with the privilege of being one of your disciples and we trust that you will empower us to serve others that you will give us the wisdom the insight and the vision to work towards your Kingdom that you will give us courage when we are fearful that you will give us strength when we are vulnerable. Thank you for knowing us, loving us, enhancing our lives. Amen

**A prayer of confession** Faithful God, we are sorry for the times when we get our priorities wrong- when we do not put you first; when we fail to see the needs of our neighbours; when we hold back from doing your work because it feels more comfortable and safe to stay where we are. when we shrink from mission because of our fear of the unknown and possible conflict Lord forgive us when our faith falters help us to serve you as you desire and to play our part in establishing your kingdom. Amen

*(Moment of reflection)*

We rejoice to hear the forgiving words of Christ: “Your sins are forgiven”. Amen. Thanks be to God.

**Gospel reading. Matthew 10: 24-39 (NRSV).** Here we see Jesus preparing his disciples for their mission. He warns them of the threats and challenges they are likely to face. They are called to go out and take on their mission completely reliant on God, in order that they might build up trust and relationship with him

**24** “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master;**25** it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household **26**“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.**27** What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.**28**Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.[ **29**Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father **30**And even the hairs of your head are all counted.**31**So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. **32**“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven;**33**but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. **34**“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword

**Reflection**

Phew, what a passage we have from Matthew this week!

Not bringing peace to this world, but rather division and a violent sword? Where does this harsh message fit with the one which commands us to love our neighbours as ourselves, to welcome the stranger, to feed the hungry, to welcome the marginalised and provide for the sick?

Matthew’s Gospel was originally written for a small group of Jewish Christians who must have felt they were in between a rock and a hard place. They felt threatened on the one hand by the new Gentile Christians who seemed to have no knowledge of nor interest in the Jewish traditions, and on the other by the majority of Jews, who considered Christianity of any kind to be a dangerous heresy. They felt weak, small and vulnerable

**So this is the context in which Matthew’s message was first heard. Jesus told his followers about what it actually means to** be **a disciple: one who will bring the good news out from the dark and into the light, not whispering it to the converted but proclaiming it from the housetops for** all to **hear whatever the response might be.**

Prior to this passage we read how Jesus warned the Twelve that they were being sent out like sheep amongst the wolves. And he continued to talk of how they might well be dragged before the civil or religious authorities, hated for their message, even betrayed by their nearest and dearest and put to death for what they said. And that’s because his good news is subversive and divisive. It challenges those entrenched in power, whether political or religious, because it says that there can be no real peace without justice and equality.

How appropriate in the recent events precipitated by the death of George Floyd and the demand for racial justice worldwide! What a bizarre parody to see the Bible brandished (upside down!) by someone who commanded the dispersal of peaceful demonstrators by tear gas and batons; people he called ‘losers’ and ‘scum’.

But whilst warning us about sacrifice and suffering Jesus reassures us of God’s love and protection; a God who values each one of us, who knows how many hairs we have on our heads. “Have no fear,” Jesus urges us for in the end the truth will out so never despair of your mission.

And it the verses which follow our extract Jesus calls on his disciples to “take up the cross and follow me. Those who will find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” But here Jesus is not saying that his followers must stop taking care of themselves or must give up their creativity, their unique identity, or deny who God created them to be. Just the opposite. Rather those unique gifts should be put to serving others; reflecting the love of God in Christ towards all we meet. Jesus’ message was about abandoning our own selfish needs, sublimating our egos and entering a new life.

Taking up the cross means that we proclaim peace and justice for all God’s children. It means that we should speak out against all forms of hate on social media, in our workplaces and schools, with our families and friends, and in our communities and our country. It means listening to the stories of all those who suffer any kind of injustice or bullying- racial, homophobic, gender based and so on- and standing alongside them even when it means we will face resistance.

So often our faith is under fire. The so-called ‘New Atheism’ with its specious claims and ill-informed attacks on religion is perhaps less fashionable now; but a much bigger challenge lies in the indifference of those who are content to seek personal fulfilment only through materialist possessions and status.

In the face of such criticism it seems that the Church has too often found itself on the back foot, almost apologetic in its concern to appear ‘non-political’. We certainly need to sharpen our sword- to be confident and clear in replying to those who criticise our faith for whatever reason. But our most effective response will lie in how authentic we are in living out our faith, in the practical service we give to others and in the obvious joy and fulfilment we find in following Christ.

Sure, discipleship can be demanding, even uncomfortable., but the challenge is exhilarating too. We are called to be “a partner in Christ’s sacrifice, and clothed in Christ’s humanity*”.* What better incentive could there be than that? Amen.

**Prayers of Intercession**

We pray for all who are involved in mission:

For those who proclaim your gospel- -for those who speak your truth -for those who care for the poor and sick (and may we particularly remember all those on the ‘front line’ at this difficult time) -for those who speak freedom in places of oppression (and may we stress Jesus’ love for all people regardless of ethnicity, gender or social status and stand firmly against any kind of injustice) - for those who keep the faith in war-torn countries.

We remember those, too, who are nearer to home, reaching out to the communities around them. And we pray that we might be churches of mission in our neighbourhoods.

Lord you know each of us, and we are precious in your sight. Remember us as we do your work in the world. Lord keep us in your love. Amen

**Lords Prayer**

Our final hymn calls on us all as members of the church to serve as a loving partner in Christ’s mission and spread his liberating word

**Hymn: The Church of Christ in every age**

4. For he alone, whose blood was shed can cure the fever in our blood, and teach us how to share our bread and feed the starving multitude.

5. We have no mission but to serve in full obedience to our Lord: to care for all, without reserve, and spread his liberating Word.

Fred Pratt Green 1903-2000

1. The Church of Christ in every age beset by change but Spirit-led, must claim and test its heritage and keep on rising from the dead
2. Across the world, across the street, the victims of injustice cry for shelter and for bread to eat, and never live until they die
3. Then let the servant Church arise, a caring Church that longs to be a partner in Christ’s sacrifice, and clothed in Christ’s humanity

**Final prayer**

Let us go to serve; go to love; go to bring healing; go to bring peace; go in the strength of the Father; go in the power of Jesus; go united by the Spirit. Amen.