

Dorset South and West Circuit

Service for Sunday 9 May 2021 by Tim Wells, Local Preacher .

As you begin to focus on and in God's presence, you might like to breathe in and out slowly, or simply keep silent - or to prepare in whichever way seems best for you.

I suggest that you then read the following service slowly - there is no need to rush! And so, firstly ...

Psalm 98 v 1

O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvellous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.

Hymn (STF503)

Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of Heaven to Earth come down
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling, All Thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, Thou art all compassion, Pure, unbounded love Thou art
Visit us with Thy salvation, Enter every trembling heart.

Come almighty to deliver, Let us all Thy life receive:
Suddenly return and never, Never more Thy temples leave
Thee we would be always blessing, Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray, and praise Thee without ceasing, Glory in Thy perfect love

Finish then Thy new creation, Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation, Perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory, 'Til in Heaven we take our place;
'Til we cast our crowns before Thee, Lost in wonder, love and praise.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

A prayer of approach

My Lord and my God, take me from all that keeps me from thee.
My Lord and my God, grant me all that leads me to thee.
My Lord and my God, take me from myself and give me completely to thee.

Nicholas of Flue (1417-1487)

Gospel reading.

John 15 v 9-17 Jesus said:

15:9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

15:10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

15:11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

15:13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

15:14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

15:15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

15:16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

15:17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Epistle Reading.

1 John 5:1-6

5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child.

5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

5:3 For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome,

5:4 for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith.

5:5 Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

5:6 This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

Reflection

1. Our second New Testament reading this morning was from the first letter sent by the apostle John to many of the early followers of Jesus - it was a general letter, not intended for any group of Christians in particular.

And it was written by John, brother of James, one of the two pairs of brothers whom we know were among those first called by Jesus to be his disciples.

2. And we can assume that James and John, when they were called by Jesus, weren't that easy to get on with, because Jesus apparently gave them the nickname 'Boanerges' or the 'sons of thunder'.

Perhaps they got on people's nerves – and yet remember, Jesus chose these awkward customers to be His followers.

They didn't choose Him (perhaps they wouldn't have chosen to follow Him) but when He did call them, they saw something in Jesus that made them agree to follow Him.

And he also had seen something in them.

Jesus knew what He could do with them if they were willing to learn from Him – if they were willing to move on with Him.

3. Here, many years after being called by Jesus, John writes things like:

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God” and “For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome”.

This fisherman with the calloused hands, who years before had no doubt had little time for any 'softies' he met was now so besotted with the idea of love and obedience to God that he couldn't stop writing about it.

4. Love and obedience though are easy in theory, but not always so easy in everyday living.

Remember, Jesus said that “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love”.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that John became so obsessed with the twin themes of Love and Obedience.

5. Those who had known John a long time must have noticed the change in him – probably a gradual change, but a change nonetheless.

Perhaps eventually they didn't have to edge away when they met him in the street any more.

Perhaps they didn't have to worry so much about what they said to him.

I wonder if we are allowing God to do something similar in our lives?

Are we allowing God to change us – and to make those changes obvious to those around us?

Usually changes are not immediate, as I'm sure they weren't with John – the great news is that God sticks with us if we are willing to work with Him. God wants us to live our lives in His Love

6. I once read a biography of John Newton, who, among many other things he did in his life, wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace”.

Newton had an incredible life containing a series of amazing experiences, mainly during his life at sea.

One time he was abandoned on a small desert island for misbehaving on board ship; at other times, he captained ships transporting slaves to the Americas.

He started out as a Christian believer, lost his faith, refound it through his experiences of life, and finally became a minister of the gospel, and a hymn writer.

God stuck with him.

God has the time to do that if we want Him to expand our faith, improve our prayer life, and increase our love for Him and for other people.

7. As Jesus said in our Gospel verses: “As the father has loved me, so I have loved you. Dwell in my love. If you heed my commands, you will dwell in my love, as I have heeded my Father's commands, and dwell in His love”.

What a marvellous verse – Jesus uses the phrase ‘Dwell in Love’ three times.

He says that God's love is not something to move in and out of - we need to live in God's love in order to receive what He wants to give us.

It's only by wanting to live in the love of God that we can really learn from Him.

John the ‘son of thunder’ proved how much he had learned from Jesus by the things he wrote towards the end of his life.

How much do we want to learn from God? How much do we want to live in God's love?

8. Let me finish with some words of the former Archbishop of York (Rev John Sentamu):

“The ones that Jesus chose for His followers were an extraordinary collection: every one had a ‘history’

and none became a saint overnight. They offered Him their willingness to change and in return He persevered with them, guiding, forgiving, encouraging – and sometimes reprimanding too. It's the same now. Modern-day disciples, exactly like them, carry invisible 'L-plates': we continue to be learners and never actually graduate this side of Heaven. You could be one".

Prayers of Intercession

Father, we bring to you in prayer the hopes and the needs of the world. Each person you have made bears your image: but in each, that image is assaulted by many enemies. Hunger and homelessness, violence and the fear of violence, greed, jealousy, boredom - all these threaten the humanity of men and women which is your breath within them.

May your church everywhere be a force for peace with justice. May the gospel of Jesus awaken everywhere such a vision of our real destiny that evil may be overcome, not with other evil but with good. And upon all who strive for the fulfilment of your reign on earth, may there come such a spirit of trust and hope that nothing may seem too hard to do in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Caryl Micklem

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn (H&P687)

1 When we walk with the Lord, in the light of his word, what a glory he sheds on our way! While we do his good will, he abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey.

Refrain: Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

2 Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share, but our toil he doth richly repay;
not a grief nor a loss, not a frown nor a cross, but is blest if we trust and obey. [Refrain]

3 But we never can prove the delights of his love until all on the altar we lay;
for the favour he shows, and the joy he bestows, are for them who will trust and obey. [Refrain]

4 Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at his feet, or we'll walk by his side in the way;
what he says we will do, where he sends we will go; never fear, only trust and obey. [Refrain]

John Henry Sammis (1846-1919)

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.