

## **Dorset South & West Circuit Written Service Sunday 18 June 2023 - An Invitation by Revd David Cuckson**

Let Psalm 100 become the voice for our opening prayers:

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures for ever, and his faithfulness to all generations.”

In your faithfulness, God of life and hope, hear our confession we pray.

We confess the words spoken and things done which have harmed us and hurt others this week; hasty words perhaps, unkind thoughts, acts of frustration. We confess words never spoken and things undone which have laid guilt upon us and left possibility incomplete; words of kindness or challenge left unsaid, acts of justice or generosity thought about but never acted upon.

We look beyond ourselves, and confess that your good creation and your beautiful human family all too often are broken by sin and wrecked by evil. Lord, forgive us. Forgive the things we know and the things we haven't noticed. Lift from us the guilt we carry. Set us free to serve you with joy and passion. Renew, restore, begin again your good news within us. Amen.

### *Assurance of Pardon*

Jesus, you have come to save us. Help us to hold, deep within our hearts, the truth that all can be saved, the most lost can be found, the most broken can be mended. We lay hold of this wonder, and let the wonder of your forgiveness renew us now. Through the power of your Spirit at work within each one of us. Amen

### **HYMN STF 137** (*John Keble*)

1. New every morning is the love  
our waking and uprising prove;  
through sleep and darkness safely brought,  
restored to life, and power, and thought.

2. New mercies, each returning day  
hover around us while we pray;  
new perils past, new sins forgiven,  
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

3. If on our daily course our mind  
be set to hallow all we find,  
new treasures still, of countless price,  
God will provide for sacrifice.

4. Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,  
as more of heaven in each we see;  
some softening gleam of love and prayer  
shall dawn on every cross and care.

5. The trivial round, the common task,  
will furnish all we ought to ask;  
room to deny ourselves, a road  
to bring us daily nearer God.

6. Prepare us, Lord, in your dear love  
for perfect rest with you above;  
and help us, this and every day,  
to live more nearly as we pray.

### **Readings:**

Exodus 19:2-8a

They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him

from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.' So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. The people all answered as one: 'Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.'

Matthew 9:35 – 10:8

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment, give without payment.'

## **Reflection**

Invitations come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, and different types. There are the formal ones, perhaps to a wedding, or some kind of public event. Some of them can be quite 'posh' and elaborate, like those sent to those who were selected as being eligible to attend the recent coronation of King Charles III. Others can be more simple, a card inviting you to a party, or perhaps really informal, a phone call to see if you would like to come round for a meal or just tea or coffee.

There can also be the commercial invitations – come and see the latest development of retirement accommodation is one sort that we receive from time to time. Even more frequent are the holiday brochures – once you have booked with one company, they seem to keep on inviting you to join them year after year.

Another type of invitation is to join a team. This could be something sporting, perhaps merely at a social level – 'come and join us to have some fun together' – or it might be more competitive, where selection is more of an honour, a recognition that you have attained a certain level of proficiency. This latter kind tends to involve a degree of commitment on your part; you may be expected to turn up not just for the matches or competitions but also for training sessions.

Many of the invitations we read about in the Bible fall into this last category. God, or Jesus as in our Gospel reading for today, is looking for a total commitment on the part of those who respond to his invitation. The Old Testament reading for today, from the Book of Exodus, is one of many significant references to the existence of a covenant between God and the people of Israel. Having been enabled to escape from slavery in Egypt the Israelites come to Mount Sinai, where they

receive the Ten Commandments as part of a new relationship with God. God's invitation to the people challenges them to keep these commandments and the people respond, 'Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.' As the rest of the Old Testament records, the people keep failing, falling short or even betraying God, but still the invitation stands and the people's repentance and commitment to renewal enables the covenant to continue.

And then we move from the Old Testament / 'old covenant' to the New Testament / 'new covenant', the one made, as we remind ourselves frequently at the end of a prayer, 'through Jesus Christ our Lord'. This is not with the people as a whole. Rather, it is an invitation to individuals. It is a case of: 'Please come and join my team'. The reading from Matthew's Gospel begins with Jesus being really busy, fully occupied with teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness. And the crowds came, harassed and helpless, and it was clear that there was far more in need than anyone, even Jesus, could deal with on his own. More helpers were needed. At harvest time more labourers were wanted in the fields. Now Jesus needed more followers to join him in his great work, and who in due time would be able to carry on where he left off.

Matthew then goes on to list the names of these first 'labourers' for Jesus. And this emphasises that each one is personally called and added to the team. This is the beginning of what will become the Great Mission, to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and passing on the teaching they have been given. It is a small enough start, starting with their own communities. There will be enough time later to embrace the Samaritans and the Gentiles. Pass on the message that Jesus has been proclaiming, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near'. Jesus has been challenging his audiences to respond by letting the whole of their lives be transformed. Now the disciples must take up the cry in their turn. But it is not just words – there must also be actions. For the first disciples the list is daunting – 'cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons'. For us the list will need to be updated, but with the same emphasis on practical steps that we can take, ways in which we might be able to help the folk of today whom we come across in our lives today.

The invitation from Jesus continues to be issued today, the call to join his team – to care for the world through our witness, through our lives in and through our church communities, through our contacts with folk in our everyday lives outside the church. The words of Jesus to his disciples still remain true: 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.' Whatever each labourer can do for God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, will help reap God's harvest, to his glory. Amen

## **Prayer**

The world unfolded its sadness as much as its joy as you walked your way with us. You saw and felt the need. You cared. In our prayers, we join with you in your unending compassion and care.

We pray for all those trapped in situations that destroy them:

- those caught up in war and the violence of abuse;
- those trapped in addiction and cursed by poverty;
- those lost in depression and crushed by sadness;
- those broken by anger and torn by loneliness.

We pray for those burdened by situations that snatch at life:

- those who are sick and those who care for them;
- those who are dying and those who mourn;
- those who face unemployment and those without homes;
- those facing hard choices and those longing for guidance.

We pray for the Church and all of its witness:

for the congregations we know that have been home to us;  
for those in leadership across denominations and for their wisdom;  
for those whose work is often unnoticed but who build the Church;  
for those sharing faith and those seeking it.

We pray for ourselves:

for the gifts and joys that bless us;  
for the longings and hopes that beckon us;  
for the sadness and pain that touch us;  
for the calling and gifting that inspire us.

Jesus, in your compassion, hear us. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

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 us 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, for ever and ever. Amen

### **HYMN STF 410** (*Hugh Sherlock*)

1. Lord, your Church on earth is seeking  
your renewal from above;  
teach us all the art of speaking  
with the accent of your love.  
We would heed your great commission;  
sending us to every place -  
preach, baptise, fulfil my mission,  
serve with love and share my grace.

3. In the streets of every city  
where the bruised and lonely dwell,  
let us show the Saviour's pity,  
let us of his mercy tell.  
In all lands and with all races  
let us serve, and seek to bring  
all the world to render praises,  
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.

2. Freedom give to those in bondage,  
lift the burdens caused by sin.  
Give new hope, new strength and courage,  
grant release from fears within;  
light for darkness; joy for sorrow;  
love for hatred; peace for strife.  
These and countless blessings follow  
as the Spirit gives new life.

### **The Blessing**

Lord, in your compassion and mercy, bless us this day.  
Lord, in your authority and power, send us this day.  
Lord, in your love and strength, sustain us this day.  
Amen.