

Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 20th August, 2017

Welcome to Worship

10.30am Songs of Praise

6.00pm Town Close with Rev Andrew Robinson

A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources

'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.'

So gather us in, Lord, friend and stranger alike.

Bring us to your holy mountain, that place of worship
where you receive what we have to offer:

our praise, our prayer and our lives given in service to you.

Be gracious, O God, and make your face shine upon us.

Make yourself known as we approach you in prayer.

Speak to us through the reading of Scripture.

Move us as we sing your praise in hymn and song.

Challenge us as we listen to the preaching of the Word.

Stir us into action as we offer ourselves again to you.

Be gracious to us, O God, and bless us.

Amen.

Lectionary Readings:

Isaiah 56 v1, 6-8 Salvation for Others

"... all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer."

Psalms 67

"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us."

Romans 11 v1-2a, 29-32 The Remnant of Israel/All Israel will be Saved
"... for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."

Matthew 15 (v10-20), v21-28 Clean and Unclean/The Faith of the Canaanite Woman

"He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.' 'Yes Lord,' she said, 'but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.'"

For All People

In this week's reading from Matthew we hear how the disciples try to stop a Canaanite woman who asks Jesus to heal her daughter. The woman pleads her case, saying, 'Even dogs eat the crumbs from their master's table'. Jesus commends the woman's faith and says her daughter is healed.

The Book of Isaiah is in three distinct parts, each from a different period: the eighth, middle sixth and later sixth centuries BC. There was evidently a school of prophets founded by the original Isaiah. This week's reading comes from the beginning of the third part, written in Jerusalem after the return from exile in Babylon (538 BC) when, after a time of social disintegration, the city and Temple were being rebuilt. Following a long period of persecution at the hands of foreigners, this remarkable prophecy sees the new Temple as 'a house of prayer for all nations' (v7). Isaiah, who speaks for God, sees those foreigners who keep the basic practices of the covenant (the so-called covenant of

Noah) coming to 'my holy mountain' (v7), Mount Zion on which the Temple was built. For this is the vocation of Israel: to present God to the world.

In view of the Isaiah tradition, it is surprising that Jesus says, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel' (v24). He may have said that to enable the clever response of the woman, but his actions show that he was more in tune with the theology of Isaiah. There are very few narrative details in this story, and Matthew leaves the reader to fill in the blanks imaginatively. The woman is a Canaanite, though the action takes place in Tyre, on the coast north of Galilee. As a Canaanite she was descended from the original people of that land, who were dispossessed by the Israelites. She is the equivalent of a present-day Palestinian. Some Jews had a particularly grim view of Canaanites. The woman approaches Jesus shouting, and the disciples want Jesus to get rid of this mad woman. But he responds to her initiative, and provokes a daring but humble response: God's elect people are given bread, but even (we) dogs get some crumbs. Jesus sees this as an expression of faith – trusting that the power of God works through Jesus, and that her daughter can be healed. How can he refuse her? However, in our worship context, the stress is not on the miracle so much as on the identity of the patient and her mother. God cares even for Canaanites! On this occasion, the reading from Romans is relevant too, and provides helpful commentary. Paul was writing to a small Christian community in Rome in the 60s, and the context for Paul has shifted from that of the Gospel. There the question is whether God accepts non-Jews. For Paul it is whether God now rejects the Jews, and as a Christ-believing Jew himself his answer is unequivocal. 'By no means! God did not reject his people whom he foreknew...for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable'. The Jews, he says, have been disobedient so that they can now receive God's mercy. 'For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all'. Before God all nations, all people, are in the same position. All that is required is the faith of the Canaanite woman.

Isaiah foresees a time when all nations will worship in Jerusalem, and that finds an echo in Psalm 67. In the Gospel reading, Jesus reaches out to a Canaanite woman who believes that he can cure her daughter. Paul also recognises that God wishes to save all people, and the Jews have not lost their covenant with God.

Did you know that your heart is really a muscle? It pumps blood to every part of your body to keep you healthy so you can run, jump, climb, and play. If you press your first two fingers of your right hand on your left wrist, just below your thumb, you can feel your heart beating. Many people think the heart is on the left side of the chest, but it actually lies almost in the centre. Your heart is about as big as your fist and in your lifetime will beat approximately two and one-half billion times! What important, hard work it does!

Because the heart is so important, we often talk of the heart as being the source of our feelings such as anger, sadness, love, joy, or fear. You may have noticed that when you are frightened or angry you can feel your heart beating a bit faster.

Jesus says, "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart..." This verse teaches us that the words we say come from our feelings. We have a choice to use good words that bring love, joy, and encouragement to others or use angry words that are hurtful. Choosing good words is a sign of respect for others. Let the words you use come from the love you feel in your heart.

A Sending Out Prayer

Lord, be gracious to us and bless us, look upon us with kindness, that we might make your salvation known throughout the world, to your praise and glory.

Amen.