

# Stokesley Methodist Church



**Sunday 8th October, 2017**

*Welcome to Worship*

10.30am Morning Worship led by Rev Trevor Haigh

Including the Sacrament of Holy Communion

6.00pm Town Close with Rev Andrew Robinson

## **A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources**

Let us come and wait for our Saviour.

Let us come and wait for his transforming power.

Let us come and experience his abiding love.

Let us come and worship him.

Lord, we cannot earn your love.

You lived and died and rose for us.

All that we do is as nothing in comparison.

We draw near in faith, for we would know you.

We offer our righteousness, for we would love you.

We enter your holiness, for we would become like you.

**Amen.**

## **Lectionary Readings:**

**Exodus 20 v1-4, 7-9, 12-20** The Ten Commandments

*“Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.’”*

**Psalm 19**

*“The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring for ever.”*

**Philippians 3 v4b-14** No Confidence in the Flesh/Pressing on Towards the Goal

*“But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead. I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.”*

**Matthew 21 v33-46** The Parable of the Tenants

*“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”*

## *Are You Sitting Comfortably?*

In this week's reading from Matthew we hear Jesus telling a story about Israel and God using the familiar image of a vineyard.

But Jesus' version leaves his listeners feeling uncomfortable.

With their certainties challenged, the religious authorities are fearful for themselves.

In the New Testament reading from Philippians, Paul uses his own life story to make a point about his own changing relationship with God. In the past Paul was confident that his hard-line Hebrew identity was the true mark of his special relationship with God. But now, in the present, his experience of Jesus has changed his self-understanding in relation to God. The result is that he sees a

whole new future that is about trusting God for what lies ahead and being himself, always, a work in progress.

In the Gospel reading Jesus begins his parable: 'There was a landowner who planted a vineyard'. Some Bible commentators suggest that Matthew is simply following Mark, but the key connection that Matthew's audience would have made is with Isaiah 5 v1-7, the Song of the Vineyard. They know the vineyard tradition. They know what Isaiah did with it. They probably feel comfortable that they know where Jesus is going with his parable. That he is, in effect, telling them of a dark event of the past, one that everyone knows about, but he is going to end by telling them, 'but it's all right, things are different now'. Except, Jesus doesn't do that. Instead, the ending in which the tenants are driven out and new tenants brought in is deeply disturbing: more disturbing than Isaiah's changed ending was in his day.

In Jesus' parable, Israel is the vineyard, her rulers the vineyard keepers; the prophets are the messengers, Jesus is the son; Israel's God, the creator, is himself the owner and father. In Jesus' retelling and refocusing of Isaiah's parable, now is the time of crisis. God cannot be blackmailed by the supposed terms of his own covenant. Israel exists for the will of God, not vice versa. It is an urgent summons to action for the priests and Pharisees to whom Jesus is speaking. It demands openness to a renewed covenant, and taking the risk of setting aside cherished ideas. Imagine the history of any developed nation retold, not as the rise of a great nation, but of national ambition, self-righteousness and ambiguous power. Jesus says not only that nothing has changed (since Isaiah), but that it is going to get even worse. And he invites his hearers to respond. Not for the first time, they either do not hear, or they become defensive, and their compromised response comes to nothing.

One of my favourite things to do is to go to the market and look at all the beautiful fruits and vegetables. It is like looking at a lovely work of art; the yellows, purples, oranges, reds, and the many different shades of green.

Many of our fruits and vegetables are grown on nearby farms. Have you ever visited a farm? What did you see there? Pumpkins? Cherries? Corn? Apples? Blueberries? Pears? Tomatoes? Certain types of fruits and vegetables, that don't grow where we live, are shipped to us from other parts of the world. Pineapples, bananas, grapes, asparagus, strawberries, cantaloupe, watermelon, and oranges are a few examples.

We are blessed to have farmers who work the soil, plant and tend the crops, harvest fruits and vegetables and ship beautiful produce to our markets for our health and enjoyment.

Jesus tells a story in the Bible about a landowner who planted a vineyard and asked the tenants to take care of the plants. The landowner **expected** that at harvest time he would receive produce, in this case grapes, from the tenants. The tenants grew grapes, but they did not want to share what they had grown. Jesus uses this story to teach us that when we hear about the miracle of God's love he **expects** that our lives will bloom and grow, bearing beautiful fruits of the spirit such as kindness, love, and joy. It is **expected** that we will want to share the fruits of God's love so that others can enjoy and benefit from that love.

### **A Sending Out Prayer**

May we live in faith, act in righteousness, always be loved and make Jesus, the Christ, the cornerstone of our lives.

**Amen.**