

Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 18th March, 2018

Welcome to Worship

10.30am Morning Worship led by David Sills

6.00pm Town Close with Robert Johnson

A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources

The hour has come to let go of the cares and worries of the week that has passed, and to set aside the hopes and expectations we have for the week to come.

The hour has come to stop in the midst of the everyday, and to focus on this day and this moment, a time to consider life beyond ourselves.

Let us give this hour back to God.

God of awe and wonder, as your Son turned his face towards Jerusalem, and prepared himself for trials and agony, crucifixion and death, help us in this season of Lent, on this the first day of Passiontide, to turn our hearts towards you, that we may become part of his story of change and transformation, forever mindful of his sacrifice, forever grateful for your love.

Amen.

Lectionary Readings:

Jeremiah 31 v31-34 Restoration of Israel

“The time is coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.’”

Psalm 119 v9-16

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.”

Hebrews 5 v5-10 Jesus the Great High Priest

“Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ...”

John 12 v20-33 Jesus Predicts His Death

“Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.’”

Staying The Course

This week we are exploring how God works through our struggles. Some Greeks wish to see Jesus – a reminder that Jesus is for all people. Seeing what lies ahead, Jesus is unsettled; but when God speaks, Jesus says that the voice is for his disciples’ benefit, not his.

In the dark days of the exile, when the Judeans were languishing in Babylon, Jeremiah kept alive the hope that God had not yet finished with his people. In a series of utterances, he spoke of a future that would be more glorious than the past. In today’s passage, God promises to renew the covenant in a startling way. Whereas the former covenant was written in a single place and on

tablets of stone, the new covenant will be written in each Judean heart by the Spirit of God. The renewal of their life and faith will be so complete that they will no longer have to teach one another, because they will know for themselves that God is theirs and they are God's. And the sin that resulted in them being exiled will be remembered no more; the slate will be wiped clean.

In the New Testament readings we see how the renewal of the covenant was achieved through the coming and cross of Christ. In the letter to the Hebrews, a Jewish-Christian writer reflects on what that meant for Jesus. Rooting his understanding of Jesus in the Old Testament, this unknown author speaks of him being the fulfilment of Psalms 2 and 110, and thus being a glorious and exalted figure. But he also recognises the humanity of Christ, his anguish and tears. Perhaps reflecting on the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, he speaks of Jesus' prayer that he be delivered from the hour he had come to. Audaciously, this author says that prayer was answered in the resurrection. But the experience of suffering and death equipped Jesus to be the saviour of the world, the renewer of the covenant and the source of eternal life to all who look to him.

The story in the Gospel reading is unique to John. It concerns foreigners in Jerusalem at Passover who want to see Jesus, probably to talk to him about his message. They come to Philip, who tells Andrew (the one who brought his brother Peter to Jesus, and who found the boy with the five loaves and two fish). They go to Jesus and his answer is not what they expect. Jesus speaks about his hour having come. The Greeks will see him, all right, but he will be hanging and dying on a cross. He speaks of being like a seed that must fall into the ground and die if it is to be fruitful. And then in words reminiscent of the Synoptic Passion predictions, Jesus says that if anyone wants to see him, they must

follow him, and be prepared to die for or with him. But it seems this overwhelms him, because suddenly he is praying in words reminiscent of the Synoptic account of Gethsemane and this week's reading from Hebrews. Jesus confesses to his soul being troubled, so should he ask to be delivered from what is to come? No, he will ask God to glorify his name in this hour. And God responds, which the crowd hears as thunder or an angel speaking to Jesus. Jesus says the voice is not for him but for them.

Then he recalls what was said when he met Nicodemus, that he must be lifted up and draw people to him. And the Greeks who wanted to see him? Where are they at the end of this story? It's probably fair to say that they represent the reader of the Gospel; they are you and me, looking on from a distance, drawn to Jesus and wanting to see him more clearly. Do we? Will we be drawn to him as he is lifted up this Easter?

There is a strong theme of the cost to God of rescuing humanity running through these texts. In Jeremiah, it is hinted at in the fact that God chooses to forgive his wayward people, so that they will have a chance to know him afresh. In both Hebrews and John, the cost is personal and borne by Jesus. In both texts there is a strong focus on his anguish and suffering. Both John and Hebrews allow us behind the curtain into the psyche of Jesus, to get a hint of the pain he endured to rescue us from the darkness of death.

Sending Out Prayer

God be with us in the coming week,
as we think about Jesus making his way to Jerusalem
to die upon the cross and rise again on Easter Day.

Amen.