

Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 4th March, 2018

Welcome to Worship

10.30am Morning Worship led by Rev Andrew Robinson
including the Sacrament of Holy Communion

6.00pm Town Close with Ken Hudson

A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources

The heavens tell of your glory and creation speaks of your goodness, O Lord.

As day passes into night and night passes into day,
we enter into the tent of your presence to join in the chorus of praise.

You are the Lord our God: you rescue us from ourselves.

We have no other gods but you: you alone do we worship.

You are steadfast in your love for us: we honour you by keeping your commandments.

This day is our Sabbath: a day set aside to worship you,
O Lord, our God.

Amen.

Lectionary Readings:

Exodus 20 v1-17 The Ten Commandments

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy."

Psalm 19

"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."

1 Corinthians 1 v18-25 Christ the Wisdom and Power of God

"For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

John 2 v13-22 Jesus Clears the Temple

"The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the Temple he had spoken of was his body."

Clearing The Way

The reading from Exodus is possibly the most famous text in the Old Testament. The Ten Commandments embody the moral law that God gives to the Hebrew slaves after he has rescued them from Egypt.

It is given at the birth of a nation, to be the means by which it will order its affairs. So, while these words can offer a potent personal moral code, their original intent was to be the template for a well-ordered society, one in which God is worshipped (not kings, cash, prestige or power), where everyone gets a day to worship and rest, and where property and relationships are respected and honoured. In such a society, human flourishing is possible. It is good to reflect on this as God's wisdom for the sound ordering of communities. It is wisdom that enables people to live in peace and harmony.

John's pithy account of the cleansing of the Temple is pretty much the same as the one we have in the Synoptic Gospels – except that it comes at the start of John's story, rather than during the final week of Jesus' life. What do we make of this? Has John put it where it belongs historically, or has he moved it to show that a key part of the reason why Jesus came was to replace the Temple as the place of atonement? However we answer that question, we must not be distracted from the power and wry humour of John's narrative.

It is Passover, and the Temple is busy with people selling the animals required for sacrifices, and changing ordinary everyday coinage into the currency needed to buy anything in the Temple. Nothing wrong with any of that. But Jesus makes a whip, turns over the tables and drives the animals out of the precincts. He objects to the crass commercialism, and his disciples see this as evidence of a zeal for the house of God. Naturally, the Temple authorities take umbrage and want an explanation. But Jesus cryptically says that if they were to 'destroy this temple', he will raise it in three days. His interrogators miss his point – but then his point is obscure (John has to tell us what he was talking about!).

But perhaps Jesus' answer explains why this episode begins John's story: Jesus has come to die, and his death has something to do with what happens in this place. Furthermore, after three days he will rise again. John notes that his disciples remembered this incident after the resurrection. In this story, we see the passion of Jesus – his anger leading to dramatic and controversial action – and we get a foretaste of his Passion, the offering of his life for the sins of the world, a temple-replacing once-and-for-all act of redemption. This is appropriately prefigured during the feast of

Passover, when Jews are remembering the redemption of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt.

Writing to a community in a city that treats philosophers like modern-day rock stars, Paul reminds his hearers that true wisdom is found in the cross of Christ. It is a message of foolishness to sophisticated Greek ears and a scandalous stumbling block to sensitive Jewish ones. How can a crucified carpenter be the wisdom of God? Paul's answer is that God has always thwarted the 'humans know best' analysis of the world and where the good life is to be found. Corinth was awash with such thinking: theories about everything, a lifestyle to suit every temperament and wallet. Paul says that God shows such 'wisdom' to be nonsense when compared to the wisdom of the self-sacrifice of Jesus. This is because in the cross, God has demonstrated his power to disarm all that holds humans in thrall to their folly, freeing them to know God's wisdom and love. It is the crucified Jesus who unlocks both the power of God to change us and the wisdom of God to lead us in the way he wants us to go.

Everyone is looking for the good life and the wisdom that will provide the key to it. All of the readings deal with that quest in some way. The Ten Commandments are perennially seen as wisdom for living, a moral code for an ethical life. Paul says that wisdom is to be found in the cross of Christ. And John agrees with Paul – Temple religion is not going to cut it: wisdom is found in the self-giving love of Jesus.

Sending Out Prayer

May our words and thoughts be always acceptable to you, may our deeds and actions be always worthy of you, and may our lives show forth your love in the world.

Amen.