

Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 15th July, 2018

Welcome to Worship

10.30am Morning Worship led by Robert Johnson

6.00pm Town Close with Elaine Wilson

A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources

Lord God of all, when we allow ourselves the time and space to meet with you, we are blown away by the knowledge that, before the creation of the world, you had a plan for us – and even now you are working out that plan through us, gathered here.

Open our hearts, Lord, to receive all you have for us.

Lord of all creation,

we come humbly before you;

not puffed up with our own achievements or strength,

but ready to lay ourselves open

before the supreme planner,

ready to take our part in your world.

As the stars shine brightly in the sky,

we want to light up our world for you.

Amen.

Lectionary Readings:

2 Samuel 6 v1-5, 12b-19 The Ark Brought to Jerusalem

“David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals.”

Psalm 24

“Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart ...”

Ephesians 1 v3-14 Spiritual Blessings in Christ

“Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory.”

Mark 6 v14-29 John the Baptist Beheaded

“... for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying, ‘John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.’”

Gathered in Christ

In the passage from Ephesians, Paul writes of God’s plans for the whole of creation and, against that background, of the inheritance or destiny of those who have set their hope on Christ. They are the adopted children of God.

Paul opens this letter on the biggest canvas imaginable: the whole of creation. He is writing to a small gathering of Jesus’ followers in the back streets of Ephesus, but he wants to place them in the cosmic frame of God’s purposes. And so, at the heart of this section, the apostle spells out God’s plan: that everything in heaven and on earth will be brought to unity in Jesus Christ. Yes,

the same Jesus that these few followers hearing this letter have believed in; he is at the heart of God's plan for everything.

That is why Paul spends so much time in the opening part, the overture, of the letter talking about God's plans. God has always intended to do what he is doing now – God chose, destined, planned and purposed; it has always been God's will to do what he is doing now.

This means two things for his hearers. First, that human sin and rebellion didn't take God by surprise, and lead him to having to come up with a hastily cobbled together 'plan B'. And second, it means that although God's people are central to his purposes, they are not the centre of the universe; it doesn't all hang on us. What a comfort these two truths are!

And how will God bring his plans to fruition? Through the cross of Christ. But because God's plan is to unite all things in Christ, the reconciliation happening through the cross is for the community reading this letter, and lots of others like them across the world (and across time). All these personal outcomes are for 'us'. We are not isolated individuals but personal beneficiaries of a salvation for all who trust in Christ's cross. God has not left us to fathom this out on our own. He has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is the seal showing that through Jesus we belong to God. In the ancient world, you could tell if a letter was genuine because it bore the seal of the owner, an imprint in wax showing the hand from which the document had come. In a similar way, God marks each of us as genuine by filling us with his Spirit. In Mark's Gospel we see how those who are faithful in living and speaking for God risk a sticky end. John has been fearless in speaking for God's justice in the land of Herod, a king with little interest in any justice but his own. Herod was outraged by John's activities and so had him arrested. But his wife was even more

personally aggrieved. So, heady with wine and infatuation, Herod promises the moon to his daughter. But she wants only John's head. Upset though Herod was, because he did not want to lose face in front of his guests, he granted her wish.

Though God's plans are bigger than his people, his people have a crucial role in furthering them. And the cost of doing that is, in some cases, high indeed. But with the call comes the resources to carry it out.

So whatever the challenge, whatever the cost, whatever the difficulties we face, remember that we live in a world of miracles, that we are not alone, that we are God's children. Be grateful for God's blessings. Grateful people are happy people and happy people make others happy – it is as simple as that!!

Sending Out Prayer

Mighty God, we thank you for all we have heard about your great love for us:

how we have been included in your plan;

how you chose us before creation.

We choose now to go out to serve you in everything we do.

Amen.