

Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 16th September, 2018

Welcome to Worship

10.30am Morning Worship led by Ron Kirk

6.00pm Town Close with Kate Harvie

A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources

Gather us, O God,
from all our disparate places.
Gather us, O God,
and shine your light among us.
Gather us, O God,
and may our hearts and mouths speak of your glory.
As we set aside this time,
we also set aside the clutter we have accumulated in our hearts.
Where we have hoarded hate,
or worried ourselves into weariness;
where we have deified distraction,
and forgotten our true Lord –
we put these things aside to focus on our mighty God of love,
who clears away the rubbish as no one else can.

Amen.

Lectionary Readings:

Proverbs 1 v20-33 Warning Against Rejecting Wisdom

“For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.”

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.”

James 3 v1-12 Taming the Tongue

“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.”

Mark 8 v27-38 Peter’s Confession of Christ/Jesus Predicts His Death

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the Gospel will save it.”

What Do You Say?

In this week’s reading from Mark we hear how Peter acclaim Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus explains that he must suffer and die, and be raised again. Peter protests, but is rebuked by Jesus – who also says that anyone who follows him must first deny themselves and take up their cross.

This week we are exploring the power of words.

The reading from James opens with a warning: it is one thing to make mistakes – we all do that – but those who become religious teachers should beware that their mistakes do not lead others

into error, and those who do so will face the sternest judgement. The writer justifies this by pointing out that the tongue may be small in comparison to the body, but it is also immeasurably powerful, and capable of doing incalculable damage when misused. Those who can control their tongues, he says, should have no problem controlling the rest of their bodies.

James' teaching here is in stark contrast with the popular acclaim given at the time, both inside and outside the Church, to spontaneous outbursts of religious fervour (such as 'speaking in tongues'), but very much in keeping with James' own theme, that verbal expressions of faith are empty and dead unless accompanied by faithful actions. He repeatedly condemns intemperate speech, and is appalled by people's capacity for contradictory utterances – 'blessing and cursing'. Inconsistency should be as unnatural to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as a spring that produces both fresh and salty water, or trees bearing the wrong kind of fruit.

The reading from Mark's Gospel is set in Caesarea Philippi, the northernmost point of Jesus' travels within Israel/Palestine – only his visit to Sidon took him further north. His question concerns popular opinion about his identity. According to the disciples, the public at large recognise Jesus as a prophet – it is at least a step in the right direction! The disciples, however, have had plenty of opportunity to hear Jesus' teaching and witness his actions, and Peter declares that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. Here, Mark's theme of a 'messianic secret' makes sense, because what follows shows that Peter is still a long way from a full understanding of Jesus' role as Messiah. That this might require Jesus to take on also the role of the suffering servant appals Peter. A natural human reaction, surely? And this is what Jesus means when he accuses Peter of setting his mind 'not on divine things

but on human things' (v33). His use of 'Satan' is unquestionably shocking; but with hindsight we know that far from condemning Peter utterly, Jesus later entrusts him with a key role in the continuing Christian community.

Jesus then addresses his wider followers, and we may see here Mark addressing his own community – and us. What Jesus says is disturbing because he says that they, too, must suffer. Like his own suffering, however, theirs will be purposeful, and a path to finding their true lives.

So, we have James who warns against saying anything that is not right and true and Mark's story which illustrates this point: the importance of keeping quiet about Jesus until we understand the nature of his Messiahship and the good news that suffering for the sake of the Word of God will be vindicated by God.

The power of words!

Sending Out Prayer

God, may we go with your praise on our lips,
and your love in our hearts.

May we be prepared to give our whole lives to you,
whatever that means, wherever it leads.

Help us to follow you, Jesus.

Amen.