

Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 9th September, 2018

Welcome to Worship

10.30am Morning Worship led by Arthur Noble
6.00pm Town Close with Revd Lisa Quarmby
Including the Sacrament of Holy Communion

A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources

O God, as we gather, may we never place our own needs above those of the other, seeking our own comfort rather than consoling those in need.

We come together today, to celebrate the value you have given to all of us.

Hold us in your love, as we gather, O God.

We come to the God who frees us, to the maker of all, in whom all hope is found.

Together, we come to you.

We come to Jesus, who is the image of God to our world.

Together, we come to you.

We come, thirsty for the Holy Spirit to be at work in our lives.

Together, we come to you.

Amen.

Lectionary Readings:

Proverbs 22 v1-2, 8-9, 22-23 Sayings of the Wise

“Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy ...”

Psalm 125 A Song of Ascents

“Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart.”

James 2 v1-10 (11-13), 14-17 Favouritism Forbidden/Faith and Deeds

“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? ... Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?”

Mark 7 v24-37 The Faith of the Syro-Phoenician Woman/The Healing of a Deaf and Mute Man

“‘Yes Lord,’ she replied, ‘but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’”

Taking Notice

In this week’s reading from Mark we read about how, in Tyre, a Gentile woman begs Jesus to heal her daughter. At first Jesus rebuffs the woman, but she argues back and the child is healed. Travelling on to Sidon, Jesus heals a deaf man, and his reputation as a healer spreads.

This week we are exploring how to honour the marginalised and focussing on the power of faith.

James pursues his theme that the true signs of faith lie in actions rather than merely in words. He challenges the social customs of his time, and ours, by insisting that those who truly believe in the

Lord Jesus Christ will pay as much honour to the destitute as to the wealthy. Riches should be no indicator of status to real Christians, and to favour those who are rich is simultaneously to dishonour those who are poor. Moreover, it is those who enjoy the trappings of wealth who also abuse the name of Jesus by using their influence to exploit the justice system against the poor. There is an implicit warning against the dangers of wealth here. If one is rich, it is too easy to fall into the trap of using one's wealth to buy advantage at the expense of those less wealthy. To transgress God's law in any point is to transgress the whole law. While human justice may be susceptible to perversion by those who have power, God's justice will be merciless against those who transgress God's law. The faith of those who claim to be believers but fail to use their wealth to benefit others is, quite simply, dead.

This is the first time, according to Mark, that Jesus and his disciples have travelled out of Jewish territory and into Gentile lands. It may be that Jesus wanted to avoid further conflict with the Pharisees, and/or that he sought an opportunity to teach the disciples privately. But his reputation as a healer and exorcist had preceded him, even into the region of Tyre.

The woman who approaches him is a Syro-Phoenician: that is, a Syrian living in Phoenicia. It was the land of the Canaanites, ancestors of the Phoenicians and old enemies of Israel. This unnamed woman begs Jesus to cast an unclean spirit out of her 'little daughter'. The Greek word (*thugatrimon*) is a diminutive often used to indicate affection. In English translation, Jesus' response seems brusque to the point of rudeness, but he too uses an affectionate diminutive. The word translated 'dog' (*kunaron*) denotes a small dog kept as a pet, rather than a working or wild dog. His injunction, 'Let the children [the Israelites] be fed first'

implies that there will come a time when the Gentiles will also be saved. But it also gives the woman a loophole, and she points out that pet dogs are permitted to eat the crumbs that fall from the table while children are eating. In other words, she concedes Jesus' point while simultaneously asserting her right to receive a share of his power – even before he completes his mission to the Jews. Acknowledging her faith, Jesus gives her the assurance she seeks: that her daughter has been healed.

Jesus then continues his journey, avoiding the territory of King Herod, and stops somewhere in the hills above the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The man who is brought to him there has lost his hearing and has a speech impediment. Jesus takes him aside privately before indicating by signs his intention to heal him, and speaking the healing word, *Ephphatha*, 'Be opened'. With his speech and hearing restored, the man, and others present, completely ignore Jesus' strict instruction to keep this cure secret. James puts an incarnational spin on this: belief in the Lord Jesus Christ leads true Christians to use their resources to assist those who need practical help. Mark's Gospel shows that the presence of Jesus brings practical help to the people who come to him, and extends God's faithfulness towards Israel out into the Gentile world.

Sending Out Prayer

Living Saviour, lead us and guide us.

Help us in our lives this week

to reflect our faith to all we meet.

In your name we pray,

and in your name we go.

Amen.