

Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 17th March, 2019

10.30am Morning Worship led by Christine Campy

6.00pm Town Close with Christine Campy

A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources

O Lord, we gather in your light, seeking your peace.

You are our salvation, and we worship you.

Be strong for us and unite us,

that we may see your goodness all around us.

The Lord is our light;

we draw near to worship.

The Lord is our salvation;

we draw near to worship.

The Lord is our stronghold;

we draw near to worship.

Let us draw near to learn from God,

to be led by God, and to be strengthened by God.

We draw near to worship.

Amen.

Lectionary Readings:

Genesis 15 v1-12, 17-18 God's Covenant with Abram

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

Psalms 27 The Lord is my light and salvation

"The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid? ... Be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

Philippians 3 v17 - 4 v1 Pressing on Towards the Goal

"I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus."

Luke 13 v31-35 Jesus' Sorrow over Jerusalem

In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day ... I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Growing In Confidence

On the road to Jerusalem, Jesus again predicts his death and laments over the city that has killed so many prophets. Yet again, the people of Jerusalem will reject the one God has sent to them. The Old Testament readings during Lent highlight key moments in Israel's history. Here God makes a covenant with Abram, honouring the two promises made earlier in Genesis 12. First, Abram will be the father of innumerable descendants (the reason why he is renamed Abraham, 'the ancestor of a multitude'); and second, God will provide a land for them.

In response, Abram 'believed the Lord; and he credited it to him as righteousness' (v6). Paul later makes much of this verse (Galatians 3v6; Romans 4v3), arguing that salvation has always come through faith rather than works of the law, and is therefore

for Gentiles as well as Jews. Hebrews 11 v8-12 also praises Abraham's faith, though for a different reason. Not only did Abraham believe the promises of God, he acted on them by leaving his home and setting out into an unknown future. Is our faith reflected in our choices and actions?

Now to the New Testament - Like Jesus in today's Gospel reading, Paul laments over those who reject the ways of God, whose 'minds are set on earthly things'. In a compelling image he declares that Christians now hold a new citizenship, based in heaven rather than on earth. This is what defines our identity, and this is what should govern our behaviour. We may face difficult choices sometimes, in the clash between earthly and heavenly values, but Paul urges his readers to 'stand firm in the Lord' (4 v1), allowing the vision of our future life with Christ to shape our present reality. For the time being we are like expatriates living abroad; but we are on our way home, where Christ's transforming work in us will be completed.

In the Gospel reading we hear Jesus brushing off Herod's death threat, knowing that it is his destiny to die in Jerusalem, 'you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you' (v34). In a moving lament, he compares himself to a mother hen longing in vain to gather her chicks under her wings. It is a rare example in the Bible of a female image being used to describe God's love – but David made the same connection in Psalm 63 v7: 'I sing in the shadow of your wings'. The listening Pharisees may have been shocked to hear Jesus implicitly likening himself to God, but this only reinforces his point – that God's loving initiative will again be rejected in Jerusalem.

If the chicks will not go to the hen, they will be vulnerable to the foxes – to Herod, who has already put John the Baptist to death (9 v9), and perhaps also to his puppet-masters, the Romans. As Jesus

continues his lament, he foresees the day when 'your house is left to you desolate' – which is better translated 'left deserted' (v35). Luke was writing after the Romans had destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple in AD 70, so his readers would have understood the warning clearly. When Jesus finally approaches the city (19 v37-39), Luke says that it is only his disciples who utter the pilgrims' cry from Psalm 118 v26, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord'. Another lament follows in 19 v41-44, explicitly warning the people of Jerusalem that the city will be destroyed 'because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you'. Today's readings invite us to reflect on the choices we make. The example of Abraham invites us to trust in God's promises – and act on them – even when there is no evidence yet that the promises are being fulfilled. Paul challenges us to live by heavenly values rather than earthly ones, rejecting the materialism and egoism that cause so much damage when people reject God. In Luke, Jesus refuses to be intimidated by the threats of Herod and the Jerusalem authorities. He has a path to follow, and he will follow it all the way to the cross. The larger choice is ours. Will we recognise him for who he is, and accept the love he offers?

A Sending Out Prayer

Give us strength and give us courage;
give us patience that we may wait on you,
and know the wonders of your love.

Amen.