

# Stokesley Methodist Church



**Sunday 14th July 2019**

*Sea Sunday*

10.30am Morning Worship led by Peter Jackson  
Followed by a special Sea Sunday Lunch at 12noon  
6.00pm Evening Worship at Town Close  
led by Elaine Wilson

## **A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, have you heard how the Lord delights in us?

Come! Delight in the Lord as he delights in you.

As citizens of your kingdom of light, we come with thankful, joyful hearts to share in worshipping you, our loving, faithful God.

With hearts full of hope,  
minds open to receive  
and ears tuned to hear,  
we draw near, Lord God, to learn  
and to share your all-powerful, guiding truth.

**Amen**

## **Lectionary Readings:**

**Deuteronomy 30 v9-14** Prosperity After Turning to the Lord/The Offer of Life or Death

**Psalms 25 v1-10** To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul

**Colossians 1 v1-14** Thanksgiving and Prayer

**Luke 10 v25-37** The Parable of the Good Samaritan

## Have You Heard?

This week our focus is on giving thanks for one another; sharing stories of faith, love and hope.

The reading from Colossians begins by giving thanks for the faith, love and hope that characterise the church at Colossae. Paul delights in the fruit that they are bearing already in their Christian life, and prays for the resources they need to continue growing as kingdom people.

This week's passage from the Old Testament could be seen as reflecting a theological perspective that is common in Deuteronomy: obey God, and you will prosper. This is problematic. If people don't prosper, are they disobedient? If people obey God, is it in order to prosper rather than because they love God?

It becomes easier to make sense of the text if we focus on the relationship between obedience and delight. God is delighted when we are ready to do his will, to turn to him and love him, and blessing flows from the joy God takes in us. And God has not made this hard for us; we don't need to be Superman to access God's will. It is readily available, communicated in words and in the way we live. So why would we choose to do anything else? These verses are near the end of the long speech in which Moses has summed up his teaching for the people of Israel. It is also near

the end of Moses' life – the invitation to 'choose life' carries great weight as his final plea to the people of God.

In Colossians, Paul is writing to a congregation founded by Epaphras and it is unlikely that he has met them himself. Nevertheless, he is delighted by the good news he hears of their commitment to the Lord, and he emphasises his own identity as an apostle of Christ Jesus – this is something they have in common. Therefore he is able to give thanks for them because the gospel is bearing fruit among them. The image of fruitfulness is important in the Old Testament as a mark of God's favour (eg Psalm 128 v3), and the Roman Empire also used it as a metaphor for the blessing of the gods. Paul is using language that makes sense to both Jewish and Gentile audiences.

Paul moves on to describe the prayers that he offers. Perhaps he has deliberately chosen to give words of encouragement first and then to identify areas where the community needs to grow further. Once again, he borrows language from their context. In praying for 'knowledge' and 'wisdom', he is using concepts that are taken from the mystery religions that flourished around Colossae. The language of 'strength' and 'power' is drawn from the propaganda of the Romans. In both cases, Paul is using words that carry meaning for the Colossians, but redefining them in the light of the power and wisdom of God revealed in Christ.

It was tough being a member of a church in that society. Paul knows this from his own experience, and he knows that the Colossians also face a struggle. He backs up his prayer for strength and endurance by reminding the Colossians of what God has already done for them. He uses the language of rescue, which might well remind his audience of their baptism – rescued from death to life – and then emphasises that they belong to the

kingdom of God's beloved Son (and not the kingdom of the emperor).

Paul seeks to redefine the worldview of this community of Christians. The wisdom of the mystery religions and the brute power of the Empire are insignificant compared with the majesty of Jesus Christ.

This well-known story from Luke's Gospel begins as an academic game. There were many ways of asking the question 'What matters most in the law?' and rabbinic tradition provided a variety of answers, mostly consistent with the lawyer's response here. Jesus refuses to play the game and tells the story instead, moving from abstract debate to concrete application.

It's a story that challenges the lawyer profoundly. The hostility between Jews and Samaritans was very strong, so that the lawyer isn't even able to say 'the Samaritan' in response to Jesus' question. What if the Kingdom is radically different, that all barriers of race and faith are kicked away, and all that matters is whether we show mercy to one another?

The links between the readings:

Moses' final words encourage the hearers to love God and obey God's commands. Jesus' parable invites his audience to think about what it means to love a neighbour through offering practical help. These stories underpin the teaching highlighted in Colossians, where the gospel of faith, love and hope is changing the congregation's lives for good.

### **A Sending Out Prayer:**

Go with thankful, joyful hearts. Let us uphold one another in faith. Let God be our 'sat nav' in today's world, guiding us in words and actions as we share the faith, love and hope we have in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**