

# Stokesley Methodist Church



**Sunday 21st July 2019**

10.30am Morning Worship led by Vanessa Johnson

3.00pm Pet Blessing Service

6.00pm Evening Worship at Town Close

led by Christine Campy

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

Let us accept the hospitality of this place, find refreshment in the Lord Jesus Christ, and meet with our God.

Majestic Christ, creator of heaven and earth, we exalt you.

You were before all that is.

You are in all that is.

You are the sight, sound, smell, taste and touch.

You are the frame in which creation sits.

You are our beautiful, magnificent picture of God – each brush stroke lovingly defined, for us to see if we will but look.

We praise your wondrous, holy name.

Lord Jesus, as we come into your glorious presence, accept the offering of our lives and the true worship of our hearts.

**Amen**

## **Lectionary Readings:**

**Genesis 18 v1-10a** The Three Visitors

**Psalms 15** Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary?

**Colossians 1 v15-28** The Supremacy of God/Paul's Labour for the Church

**Luke 10 v38-42** At the Home of Martha and Mary

## **Who is Jesus?**

This week our focus is on how Jesus helps us to glimpse the invisible God.

God's strategy to redeem creation began with a promise to Abram (Genesis 12 v1-3). There would be land and descendants. But Abram and Sarai had no child of their own. They followed the call to leave home and go where God led, but still there was no son. In this passage (Genesis 18 v1-10a), Abraham meets the Lord in the presence of three men. The narrative begins gently, as Abraham's invitation to share 'a little bread' turns into a full-scale feast. But Abraham's hospitality is dwarfed by the generosity of his guests, who announce the fulfilment of God's promise of a son. The reading ends with a brief image of Sarah, eavesdropping in the tent – and tells how she laughed in disbelief, before bearing a son whose name – Isaac – means laughter.

The reading from Colossians begins with a poem celebrating who Christ is. In this lyrical text, Paul invites reflection on the glory of Jesus, revealed in creation, known in the church, reconciling everything to God. He writes of his dedication to a life of preaching this good news and helping people to be reconciled to God in Christ.

Like the prologue to John's Gospel (John 1 v1-3), this poem focuses first on Jesus' relationship to God, as God's firstborn,

God's image. Then it turns to his role as the channel and goal of creation – once again, the invisible mysteries of Colossian folk-religion and the rulers and powers of the Roman Empire are subordinate to Jesus.

The language of reconciliation reminds readers of the covenant tradition through which God heals the broken relationship with the people, making peace with them. There is sharp irony in these words. The Romans claimed to be peacemakers, but their peace arose from the destruction of opponents, often through crucifixion. A Roman might have described Jesus' execution as 'making peace' through the elimination of yet another opponent. Paul takes this language and gives it far deeper meaning as he helps his hearers see that Jesus' death reconciles them to God and so brings peace.

And into this mix of creation and covenant, Paul adds the church, where Jesus is acknowledged as head. He returns to this theme, helping the Colossians to understand that they have become insiders, part of this reconciled group for whom Jesus died. This is why it matters so much that they remain rooted in the firm foundations of gospel faith that they received from Epaphras, with the goal of maturity and the aim of revealing the glory of Christ and the hope of sharing that glory with him.

The story of Martha and Mary, as told in Luke 10 v38-42, is hard for the many people, women and men, who find themselves engaged in a ministry of service. Is service really second best? One response is to focus on the verbs that describe Martha's state of mind. She is 'distracted' and 'worried'. This contrasts with Mary's single-minded focus on Jesus.

Is the story then not about what these women are doing, but how they are doing it? Martha opts for service but does not follow it through wholeheartedly – perhaps influenced by the expectations

of her society about hospitality and the householder's role in offering it, or by contemporary gender stereotypes. In any case, her outburst expresses her resentment at Mary, and the stress Mary's decision is causing her. Her service, however, is not deficient in itself. The failure is her lack of acceptance of the choice she has made. Mary's 'good' choice is the choice to be single-minded in her relationship to Jesus.

The links between the readings:

The Colossians are held within the circle of Jesus' love because they have accepted the good news of hope and peace in him. Abraham and Sarah too have chosen to follow God's call in obedience and trust, and they are blessed by the promise of a son. Mary is also able to listen and learn, but Martha's position is more complex and highlights the stress and unhappiness that can arise when people experience conflict in their relationship with Jesus.

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

Lord Jesus, when our priorities are right everything else falls into place.

Having been refreshed in you, may we go and refresh others in your name.

Help us to serve with honour and grace, encouraging others to seek God's face.

**Amen.**