

Stokesley Methodist Church



9.00am The Filling Station

10.00am Morning Worship led by Elaine Wilson

11.45am AGM – All Welcome

6.00pm Evening Worship at
Town Close led by Helen Weighell

A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources

Make a joyful noise to the Lord!

Let us celebrate his name together, acknowledging God's love and faithfulness.

Let all creation praise our God!

As we gather here today, O God our King, show us more of your marvellous ways.

May we learn more of you in our time together, and be equipped to serve as the body of Christ in our community.

God of glory, we come to you with our hope and our despair, our joy and our sadness, and all the things we carry.

You know these things better than we do and we trust you with them. We want to draw near to you, and to know your presence in our lives.

Amen

Lectionary Readings:

Malachi 4 v1-2a The Day of the Lord

Psalms 98 Sing to the Lord a new song

2 Thessalonians 3 v6-13 Warning Against Idleness

Luke 21 v5-19 Signs of the End of the Age

Pull Your Weight

This week our focus is on the power of positive example & playing your part in the community of faith.

Some of the assembly at Thessalonica have given up working for their living and have become 'busybodies'. Paul says all should follow his example of being self-supporting, and those who refuse to work should not be admitted to the shared meals of the community.

Malachi, which means 'my messenger' (see 3 v1), may be the title rather than the author of this 'word of the Lord' (1 v1). In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Book of Malachi concludes 'the Prophets' and is followed by 'the Writings' (11 books, beginning with the Psalms). The Christian canon, however, changes the order, concluding with 'the Latter Prophets', from Isaiah to Malachi. Thus Malachi's postscripts (the final three verses), urging remembrance of Moses' teaching and announcing Elijah's reconciling return, are immediately followed by Matthew's Gospel. And Matthew identifies the Baptist as the coming Elijah (Matthew 11 v14) and Jesus as a new Moses, fulfilling the law and the prophets (Matthew 5 v17-20). In this week's reading, we hear that God's refining fire will leave those who say evil is good without hope of regeneration, without root or branch. But the prophet says that God will rise to restore those who offer true worship.

In today's New Testament reading we hear Paul censuring those in this community of believers who chose not to work. It is clear from this letter that these individuals were not physically incapable of working (eg due to age or disability), but preferred to live off the generosity of others. And to compound matters, they used their 'free' time to gossip

and be indolent. Paul urged them to follow his example and use their 'hands to earn an honest crust'!

This particular passage of Scripture has been open to much interpretation, and for many years it was quoted by those of a certain political persuasion to reproach the unemployed. Those without employment were denounced as 'work-shy' or 'shiftless' – people who preferred to avail themselves of state benefits rather than find a job. Using the passage in this way, they were building on an existing narrative of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving poor' where the latter were regarded as idle people not worthy of our sympathy or financial support.

Although there is an impending General Election, it is interesting that no mainstream British political party has resorted to using this rhetoric. It can be argued that this language tends to be deployed by politicians when there is high unemployment, and rather than accept that they need to do more to help those without work, they argue that there are jobs aplenty and that the unemployed should work harder to find them!

Interestingly, although we invariably regard work as an antidote to poverty, often there is no correlation between the two. For instance, Britain is currently experiencing record levels of employment but there is still a great deal of (financial) need. The Trussell Trust, an anti-poverty charity founded on Christian principles, recently released a report that highlighted increased levels of foodbank usage, and noted that many of its clients were people in work.

There were no 'state benefits' in Paul's time, but we do read about the help Christians gave their brothers and sisters in need in Acts 4 v24, Acts 6 v1-4 and Acts 20 v35. Paul's writings offer us a challenge: should our attitude toward those 'in need' be guided by compassion and a genuine interest in their welfare, rather than moving quickly to criticism borne out of a desire *not* to engage with the real reasons why some people are poor?

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem and the coming of the Son of Man is set at the conclusion of his ministry and as an introduction to his Passion. It is a climax to his teaching about the kingdom, and provides the context for understanding his death and resurrection. It draws on the tradition of apocalyptic writings that disclose what would otherwise remain hidden, exploring the contrasts between earthly appearances and heavenly reality. From verses 7-8 it seems that Luke sees the destruction of the Temple (in AD 70 – before his 'orderly account' was written) as a significant event that is not necessarily a sign of the end – which is not immediate. The close connection between Jesus and his followers is strongly emphasised in verses 12-19. For example, as the authorities are seeking to lay hands on Jesus (20 v19), so Jesus tells his disciples that rulers will lay hands on them (21 v12). Endurance of persecution is an important part of their present relationship with him. Malachi is clear that the spoils of the wicked are shallow and temporary, and he urges reverence. While they too wait for 'the day of the Lord', the Thessalonians are encouraged to do what is right and not grow weary, despite persecution. Also looking to the future, to the coming of the Son of Man, Luke sees such tribulation as an opportunity to testify to the truth.

A Sending Out Prayer:

O God, sometimes our days feel so unproductive – tasks can feel repetitive and uninspiring.

Refresh us in our daily work, in the things we do for you and for others. Make us strong in love and compassion, that we may reflect your glory, even in the smallest pieces of our lives.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.