

# Stokesley Methodist Church



**Sunday 3rd November 2019**

FOOD BANK SUNDAY

9.00am The Filling Station

10.30am Morning Worship led by Rev Andrew Robinson

6.00pm Evening Worship at Town Close  
led by Rev Andrew Robinson

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

Come, let us worship God our maker, our strength, our shield, our hiding place: the one whose love sustains us in our need.

Let us seek God's face today.

Loving God, we gather together in our weakness and in our strength, celebrating each other's faith and sharing our struggles.

We long to hear what you have to say; give us ears to listen, we pray.

Life-giving Lord, we offer you the medley and the muddle of our lives, coming to you with our mixed-up motives, our secret regrets, our confused ambitions.

We lift it all to you, O God,  
celebrating the fact that, through Jesus,  
we can come to you just as we are.

**Amen**

## **Lectionary Readings:**

**Habakkuk 1 v1-4; 2 v1-4** Habakkuk's Complaint/The Lord's Answer

**Psalm 119 v137-144** Righteous are you, O Lord ...

**2 Thessalonians 1 v1-4, 11-12** Thanksgiving and Prayer

**Luke 19 v1-10** Zacchaeus the Tax Collector

## Something To Boast About

This week our focus is on faith and love worth boasting about & about enduring difficult times.

The authors tell the Christians in Thessalonica that their love for each other and their faithfulness to God is something to boast about, and pray that God's power will enable them to remain faithful to their calling.

The beginning of both 1 and 2 Thessalonians is typical of letters of that time and place. Senders and recipients are named and a brief greeting offered. The authors are 'Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy', who worked together, travelling from Lystra in central Turkey to Thessalonica and Berea in northern Greece. The letters are rooted in the conversations these men had about the congregations they founded, and since the letters were to be read aloud at meetings, the recipients could continue the conversation. The addressees are described as the *ekklesia*, which at this stage probably means simply 'assembly' rather than any formal kind of church. 'Of the Thessalonians' (v.1) – rather than 'in Thessalonica' – is unusual. A contemporary coin had Julius Caesar's head and 'God' on one side and Augustus' head and 'of the Thessalonians' on the other. But our Thessalonians owe their existence not to Roman patronage and power but to the grace and peace of 'God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. It is remarkable that this, the earliest Christian writing, from only 20 years after the crucifixion, names Jesus as Lord and God as Father, and shows that they belong intimately together.

The reference to 'the kingdom of God' suggests that persecution is the consequence of loyalty to God not Rome, as reflected in Acts 17 v6-7 where believers are accused in Thessalonica of disobeying the emperor by naming Jesus as King. Paul not only gives thanks for their faithfulness in affliction but also says their faith in God and love for one another is something that he shares as he encourages other Christian assemblies. Indeed, in 1 Thessalonians 3 v6 he has spoken of 'the good news of your faith and love', recognising that they have become part of 'the good news of God'. The triad of faith, hope and love, famous from 1 Corinthians 13 v13, appears in 1 Thessalonians 5 v8, and two of them here in 1 v3. 'Hope' is missing, but Paul reminds them of what was first preached to them – a message of hope – that they are to wait for God's Son from heaven who rescues us from the wrath that is coming (1 Thessalonians 1 v6-10). When he comes, wrongs will be righted, but as they wait they are reassured that Paul is praying for them, just as he is preaching about them. The power of God is at work in them from beginning to end. As they obey God's will for them, they anticipate the coming day on which the Lord Jesus will be glorified and already they experience his deliverance from evil.

In the passage from Luke's Gospel, we read how Jesus was 'passing through' Jericho, and Zacchaeus climbed the tree to see him 'pass that way'. From his rejection at Nazareth, Jesus made his way to Jerusalem, saying, 'I must be on my way' to die there. Zacchaeus' name means 'righteous', and in encountering Jesus and following his way of generosity, Zacchaeus realises his true self as one of Abraham's children. 'Today' (v9) engages readers with the particular responses they too must make. We know from the Book of Acts that Luke's first readers included Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, all seeking to follow together 'the Way of the Lord' (Acts 18 v25).

What links these two readings?

First, Paul gives thanks for those whose growth in faith is confirmed by their increasing love for one another. Zacchaeus, on the other hand,

whose name means 'righteous', learns from Jesus how to live up to his name.

Dandelions are those bright yellow flowers that pop up in lawns and fields in the spring. They received their name because of sharp, pointy leaves which look a bit like lions' teeth.

Some people think of dandelions as weeds, but others use them to make tea. Some people use the leaves in salads or on sandwiches. Some types of medicines are made from various parts of a dandelion. After a dandelion is done blooming a lovely seed head forms on the top of the plant. Children, and some adults, like to make a wish and try to blow all the seeds away at one time.

More than 2,000 seeds can be produced by a single plant in one year's time. That means one plant can start hundreds and hundreds of new plants.

In our reading from 2 Thessalonians, we learn about something that we might call "the seeds of faith." When the apostle Paul writes about a group of new Christians, he gives thanks to God for these new Christians - because their faith grew "exceedingly" and their love for each other flourished.

Your faith is what you believe about God. It is important to remember that we are rich in God's love and when we show that love to one another, faith and love flourish and grow. Like the dandelion, many seeds of faith and love are produced.

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

We give thanks to God for each one of you and pray that your love and faith will grow and flourish. Spread and scatter your seeds of love and faith everywhere!

Send us out, amazing God, to do amazing things.

May we continue to abound in love and steadfast faith, sharing your glory with our world.

**Amen.**