

Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 26th January 2020

9.00am Communion Service led by Rev Andrew Robinson

10.30am Café Church led by Elaine Wilson

6.00pm Evening Worship at Town Close

led by Revd Lisa Quarmby (HC)

A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources

God of all,
we have come from different places,
we have brought different needs;
but we come in the name of Jesus:

loved, forgiven, cleansed.

We have different stories to tell,
different experiences to share;
but we come in the name of Jesus:

loved, forgiven, cleansed.

We face different challenges and have different gifts;
but we come in the name of Jesus:

loved, forgiven, cleansed.

Amen

Lectionary Readings:

Isaiah 9 v1-4 (p693) To Us a Child Is Born

Psalms 27 v1, 4-9 (p557) The Lord is my light and my salvation

1 Corinthians 1 v10-18 (p1144) Divisions in the Church

Matthew 4 v12-23 (p968) Jesus Begins to Preach/The Calling of the First Disciples

Cross Purposes

This week our focus is on what unites us in Christ.

Because the Corinthian Christians have broken into groups – identifying with different patrons: Paul, Apollos, Cephas and Christ – Paul appeals to them to be of one mind. At the centre should be the cross of Christ, which must not be emptied of its power but should unite all Christians. Have you ever seen a really long train?

I am always amazed to see just how long they can be. Did you know that the longest train ever, stretched almost 5 miles (7.83km)? It had 8 engines that pulled almost 700 cars. Now that's one big train!

The thing that's always fascinated me about watching those really long trains is how – sooner or later – all of the cars follow the same path as the first engine as it pulls them down the tracks. It's like follow the leader. If the front engine turns in one direction or another, all the rest of the cars will turn in just that same spot. In today's Gospel lesson Jesus says that "whoever serves me must follow me – and where I am, there my servant will be also."

It's sort of like our train, isn't it? Jesus is telling us that the way to lead lives that will be pleasing to God is to follow his example.

We can't always follow Jesus in the same way that the train cars do. He's not here with us to watch and copy every day, but we can still follow his example by leading our lives in ways that follow the examples he set for us in the Bible: by caring for those who need us, by being kind and generous, showing our love and sharing – when we do

those things we're letting Jesus be our leader, just like those big locomotives that pull the train down the tracks.

It's not always easy. But the good news is that we have chances to follow every day.

There are flight patterns around our world that certain birds follow to fly to warmer climates for the winter and back north in the summer.

These birds migrate (change location) to find better sources of food and a climate where they will be more comfortable.

Have you noticed that some birds are in your area at a certain time of year and are gone at other times of the year?

Wild geese are especially interesting to watch because they fly in a V formation. They fly in the shape of a V because there is less wind resistance and they can fly faster and with greater ease. The goose flying at the front point of the V receives the most wind and has the most difficult time flying. When that goose gets tired another goose comes and takes its place and other geese take turns as well.

When it is time to migrate the flock leaves all at once. No one knows exactly what tells them it is time to leave, but when the time is right, they go.

The passage from Matthew's Gospel tells us about four men who knew it was time to go. They were all fishermen and were working by the sea. They knew it was time to go because Jesus called to them and said, "Come after me" (4:19). Immediately these men, Peter and Andrew, and James and John left their nets and their boats and "followed him".

These men, who followed Jesus, became his disciples. A disciple is like a student and these men wanted to study and learn from Jesus so they could serve others. They didn't question if the time was right to go, they knew they had been called by God.

Even today we can listen for that voice inside of us that helps us learn the ways of Jesus so we are able to go out into the world and serve others.

In the reading from 1 Corinthians, Paul emphasises the importance of the cross. As a symbol it is certainly a unifying factor for Christians – most church buildings display one somewhere!

Paul also speaks of baptism, another unifying feature of the Church. In most Christian traditions, it is usual to use the sign of the cross in baptism – those who receive this mark carry it with them always.

Baptism is linked irrevocably to the cross, the death & resurrection of Christ. However, unity does not mean uniformity. The well-known hymn 'Lift high the cross' has the verse: 'From farthest regions let them homage bring, and on his cross adore their Saviour King'. But when people come from 'farthest regions' they bring their own distinctive versions and visions of the cross. Paul writes of 'the message about the cross'. What messages are the various images intended to convey?

What messages can we draw from the images? The full chorus of the hymn is 'Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore his sacred name'. How, in practical terms, do we do that? Think on these words: We praise you, Creator God, that where the world sees failure, you see opportunity; where the world sees wisdom, you see pride; where the world sees foolishness, you see faithfulness; where the world sees defeat, you see victory – namely through the death and resurrection of your Son, whose cross brings life and hope to us and glory to you.

A Sending Out Prayer:

May the cross of Christ bring you strength.

May the Church of Christ bring you fellowship.

May the love of Christ bring you joy.

And may the blessing of Christ bring you confidence.

Amen.