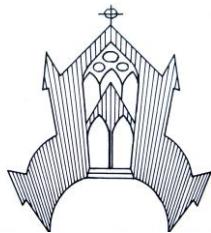


Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 22nd May 2022



A Gathering Prayer from the Roots resources

Come if you're healthy, come if you're hurt.
Come if you're hopeful, come if you're sad.
Let God's light shine upon you. Let God's life fill you.
Let God bring you healing and hope today.

God of light and life, you see all our problems and our pains: help us to open our hearts and minds to you, to receive your healing and forgiveness, and to learn how we can bring hope and healing to others.
Let us be glad and sing for joy, lifting praises to our Gracious God whose light shines upon us.

Amen

Lectionary Readings:

Acts 16 v9-15 (p111) Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia/Lydia's Conversion in Philippi

Psalm 67 (p581) May the Nations be glad & sing for joy

Revelation 21 v10 & 21 v22-22 v5 (p1249) The New Jerusalem/The River of Life

John 5 v1-9 (p1068) The Healing at the Pool

All Shall Be Well

This week our focus explores visions of hope and healing.

This week's verses from Revelation describe John's vision of hope and healing for the world. He sees God and Jesus form the Temple in the new Jerusalem, and they are the light of the world. John sees the water of life flowing clear and bright like crystal, and the tree of life bearing fruit that will bring healing to all nations. Together the tree, water and light give life to all things – a hopeful picture of the future for all humanity and all God's creation.

Written for Christians facing extreme persecution, the powerful imagery encouraged them to hang on to the promise that, in the end, light will triumph over darkness, hope over despair, and all people, nations – and indeed all of creation – will be healed and made whole: truly 'All shall be well'. While this may seem far removed from our own world, there is much in our lives and in the world where God's hope and healing are needed. Today we explore how God might use us as agents of hope and healing for others.

In Acts 16 v9-15 Paul, Silas, and Timothy were frustrated in their plans to travel either south or north, arriving instead in Troas, on the western shore of what is now Turkey.

They accept this frustration as the work of the Spirit, and a new vision leads them to set sail for Philippi, in what is now Greece. They find 'a place of prayer' for women, supported by Lydia, a wealthy Gentile worshipper of Israel's God. As she opens her heart and is baptized with her household, the church in Philippi is founded, the first in Europe.

Baptism in a river by the city gate anticipates the vision in Revelation of the river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God through the holy city with the ever-open gates.

Psalm 67 recalls Aaron's blessing (Numbers 6 v24-26), regularly used in our worship.

'May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us.'

As we look to the face of God for grace, mercy and peace, we see the light shining to guide everyone and make the earth productive. We will continue to be blessed as we bring the ends of the earth to join us in praise. As Revelation reminds us, there is 'an eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth' (Revelation 14 v6).

From a mountain God showed Moses the land of promise, 'I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there' (Deuteronomy 34 v4). Ezekiel was given a vision in which, from a high mountain, he saw a restored Temple in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40 v1-2). A river flowed from the Temple with the trees on its banks bearing fresh fruit every month for food and unfading leaves for healing (Ezekiel 47 v1-12). John, the writer of Revelation, also has a vision from a high mountain. He sees the new Jerusalem – also called the bride of the Lamb – coming from heaven. This new city is beautiful, it is a holy place, filled with God's generous love – in contrast to the great cities of human greed and ambition.

John sees no Temple in this city, since the Temple is the place where God dwells, and we have already been told that God now lives with and among his people – that is the people whose names are written in the book of life. In his vision, Ezekiel saw God's shining glory return to the Temple; but John sees God's glory as a light shining on the whole city and its citizens – no other light is necessary, not even the sun or moon. We might be reminded, perhaps, of the mountain of transfiguration, where three disciples saw that Jesus' face shone like the sun' (Matthew 17 v1-2). But John does see Ezekiel's river. The trees, John says, are the 'tree of life' (22 v2); once denied to Adam, they are now given to all

who depend on God. Their 12 kinds of fruit suggest fulfilment for Israel (see Revelation 7 v1-8) and the leaves heal not only people (as Ezekiel implies) but 'the nations'. In Exodus, Aaron wore a gold rosette on his forehead engraved, 'Holy to the Lord' and God spoke 'face to face' only to Moses. In John's vision, everyone has God's name on their forehead, and everyone sees God's face.

Finally we read the passage from John 5 v1-9.

The man lying by the pool had been there for 38 years when Jesus asked him, 'Do you want to be made well?' And the people of Israel complained and rebelled in the wilderness for 38 years before the old generation perished and a new generation was ready to possess the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 2 v14-18). Jesus made the sick man well on the sabbath, when God rested from the work of creation (Genesis 2 v2). We might wonder if we are prepared to accept what is really necessary, both for our own wellbeing and for the healing of our planet. Are we ready to let the river of the water of life heal and nourish everything (Revelation 22 v1-2)? Or will we continue to step past those with no one to help them as we push forward to plunge into our own self-contained pool?

Sending Out Prayer:

Glorious God, you shine your light
into the dark places of our lives and of our world.

Gentle God, you touch us with your healing love and make us whole.
We ask you to be with us and shine through us this week,
and use us to bring hope and healing to others.

Amen