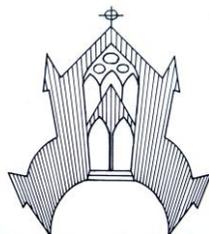


# Stokesley Methodist Church



**Sunday 29th May 2022**



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

Come to God with your longings: our heavenly Father knows them all.

Come to God with your belongings: our loving Saviour holds them all.

Come to God alone and together: the Holy Spirit is here for all.

Father God, you give us so much, and yet we long for more.

Help us to open ourselves to you today & draw us closer to you.

Help us to be open to one another & draw us closer together.

Let us come and worship the Lord Most High, who guards the lives of his faithful ones.

Let us rejoice in the Lord and praise his holy name.

**Amen**

## **Lectionary Readings:**

**Acts 16 v16-34** (p1112) Paul and Silas in Prison

**Psalm 97** (p603) The Heavens proclaim his righteousness ...

**Revelation 22 v12-14,16-17,20-21** (p1250) Jesus is Coming

**John 17 v20-26** (p1085) Jesus Prays for All Believers

*Coming Soon ...*

This week our focus explores longing and belonging.

In Revelation 22, Jesus tells John that all the visions he has seen are part of the message for the churches. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Everyone is invited to call Jesus back to earth, saying 'Come, Lord Jesus'. John's vision reminds us that we belong to Jesus, and that Jesus is coming soon.

Feelings of longing, and the need to feel we belong and are loved, are something everyone can identify with. We may long for many things, but if we belong to Jesus he can satisfy our deepest desires.

**Acts 16.16-34**

The brutality of life in Philippi, a prominent city in a Roman province, is well described in Acts v16-34.

The slave-girl is a disposable possession. Her owners' lucrative business disappears with her spirit of divination, and sadly we hear no more about her. Paul and Silas are dehumanised by racial and religious prejudice, mercilessly flogged and shackled in a dark prison cell. After the prisoners escape the jailer moves to suicide, fearing either summary execution by the authorities or lingering revenge from the released. But 'the word of the Lord' creates a new humanity. The jailer washes Paul and Silas' wounds, and in return they baptize him and his family, perhaps with the same bloody water. Baptized into Christ's death (Romans 6 v3), they become together 'a new creation' (2 Corinthians 5 v17; Galatians 6 v15).

The glory of God is revealed in Psalm 97 as a sovereign power that acts justly to put things right. While heaven and earth can rejoice at this revelation, humanity is divided between the wicked, who serve what is ultimately worthless, and the faithful, who are rescued from their

hands. The proclamation, 'The Lord is king', brings hope to the righteous who oppose evil. The very trembling of the earth can unfasten the chains of oppression, as in our first reading from Acts. Now back to the passage from Revelation 22.

There is little escaping the theme in this selection of verses from the end of Revelation: Jesus is coming soon. Indeed, this has been the warning from the beginning. Jesus is coming, and unless the churches in Ephesus and Pergamum repent of their collusion with the cruelties of city life, Christ will come to denounce and destroy them. The inactive church in Sardis is warned that Christ will 'come like a thief'. And the church in Laodicea must repent of its complacency and open the door to Jesus. In contrast, the churches in Thyatira and Philadelphia are encouraged patiently to continue their work because Jesus is coming soon.

After the presentation of John's vision is complete, and an assurance that 'These words are trustworthy and true' (22 v6), we hear three more times, 'I am coming soon' in the last few verses of the book. The churches must be transformed and ready. They must live in the expectation that Christ is coming soon and all that is described will soon be fulfilled. The light that shone in the darkness, the one who came into the world, will be the undisputed, universal and eternal light of the world. And at this point we might recall every reference, every allusion, to God or Jesus as, in some sense or another, light – the bright morning star, the light to which nations shall come, the brightness of the dawn, and many more. Or as the source of life-giving water – cleansing, renewing and refreshing. Or as the bride of God, filled with mutual desire and passion – perhaps this in particular, as the intimacy of desire brings Revelation, and the Christian Bible, to its conclusion. We are reminded of these words in every Eucharistic we make: 'For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes'(1 Corinthians 11 v26). And the letter ends as it began, as does our worship and life itself, with God's grace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, we have the passage from John 17. At the end of his 'farewell discourses' Jesus intercedes for his disciples and for those they will bring to faith, including us as readers of John's Gospel, 'written that you may believe' (20 v31). His disciples are being drawn into his relationship with the Father whose love for him and for them is eternal. And they will draw others after them, so that 'the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them'. His hour has arrived and, as Jesus prepares to go out into the garden, he looks back to his ministry to his disciples, 'I made your name known to them', and he looks forward to their ministry to the world, 'And I will make it known'. Let us take hope and encouragement from the uplifting verses of Revelation. Let us pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit to refresh and inspire us, to give us faith in the power of love. And let us have the humanity and humility to resist the polarising forces which seek to exclude those who are not like us.

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

Lord, we have come together,  
and now you send us out with your blessing.

As we go out,  
come, Lord Jesus!

As we go home,  
come, Lord Jesus!

As we go to work, school or college,  
come, Lord Jesus!

Wherever we are,  
be with us, Lord Jesus!

**Amen**