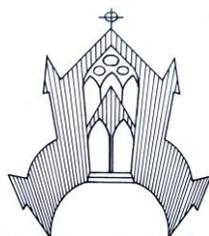


# Stokesley Methodist Church



**Sunday 19th June 2022**



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

Healing Lord,

we come with wounds that often only you know; we bring weariness and fears as well as hopes and aspirations.

Heal us and refresh us; restore your image in us.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Almighty, powerful God, who is full of compassion, who rescues us from danger, who strengthens the weak, who feeds the poor:

**we bow down and honour your name.**

Almighty, powerful God, who brings hope and healing, who hears our cry,

whose heart feels our pain, who heals us inside and out:

**we bow down and honour your name. Amen**

## **Lectionary Readings:**

**Isaiah 65 v1-9** (p751) Judgement and Salvation

**Psalms 22 v19-28** (p554) But you, O Lord, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me.

**Galatians 3 v23-29** (p1170) The Law and the Promise/Sons of God

**Luke 8 v26-39** (p1038) The Healing of a Demon-possessed Man

## **Healed – Inside and Out**

This week our focus explores the impact of Jesus on a damaged and divided world.

In Luke 8 Jesus encounters and dramatically heals a man possessed by many demons. The man is transformed from someone naked and who appeared frightening, into someone 'clothed and in his right mind'. The local community are fearful and ask Jesus to leave. Jesus tells the man who was healed to tell everyone what God has done for him.

What relevance does this story, and Jesus' healing ministry in general, have for the world of today? How does it impact and challenge the way we live?

The prophet Isaiah announces God's unremitting desire to embrace his chosen people, even when they provoke him by following the religious practices of the people among whom they are exiled: fertility rites, communing with the dead, and breaking Israel's food taboos (Isaiah 65 v3-4; notice the echoes of v4 in the Gospel reading).

Yet for all their willingness to imitate the nations, they are deluded by their supposedly superior holiness. Not surprisingly they face God's judgement. But not all of them. Some exiles have maintained a genuine holiness by continuing to serve the Lord in the trying circumstances of their Babylonian exile. Like the wine produced from a cluster of grapes, they will find blessing, the reward for their loyalty to God's promise of land and posterity to Abraham and his offspring.

The opening words of Psalm 22 are very familiar. 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' is the heartfelt cry of a righteous person who suffers unjustly & are repeated by Jesus on the cross. The

psalm's ending (v 19-28) could not be more different, because the prayer for deliverance has been heard. Now released from the power of his animal-like enemies, the psalmist turns from lament to praise, convinced that the Lord hears and satisfies the afflicted.

The passage from Galatians 3 describes how Paul explores the consequences of baptism for those who feel imprisoned by a world that judges them according to race, wealth and gender. Baptismal faith releases them from the constraints of rules and customs. They are now growing into the freedom of Christ, whose self-giving love is healing their damaged world. For all their differences, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women now belong equally to God's new creation. The impact of Jesus on their divided world is dramatized in the baptismal ritual. Candidates for baptism removed their outer clothes before going under the water, and once they emerge put on new clothes to symbolise their sharing in the risen life of Christ (v27; see also Romans 13 v14, Ephesians 4 v22ff, Colossians 3 v9ff). The newly baptized would all be dressed alike, 'clothed with Christ', to reveal – like the man in the Gospel – their inside-and-outside renewal. Now back to Luke chapter 8.

It can't have been much of a life. When they could the townsfolk locked the man up, as best they could; but somehow and often he managed to escape. He didn't conform to any societal norms. He probably had no idea of hygiene, and he didn't bother with clothes. We are not told what he thought about all this. Simply that he was rejected and, where possible, ignored. And because he was different, people were a little bit frightened of him. Those who are different can be unsettling, whether it is because of the way they dress or the way they speak or what they wear. But is that really a good reason to side-line or ignore them? He didn't ask for healing. If anything, he seemed to be scared of it. He tried to ask Jesus what he wanted of him or at least the voice that came from him cried out. Jesus seems to approach the man and command his healing immediately. He commands the healing by calling out the unclean spirit. But this spirit – or these spirits – answer back. They do

not want to return to the abyss. The abyss is the hell from which they originated. This is almost a plea for healing. It is as if they want to avoid the torment of the abyss at any cost and in a sense that is because they are seeking to be healed.

Here are two contrasting impacts that encounters with Jesus bring. The first is wholly positive, in that the man is restored and made whole. The second is more difficult. The destruction of the pigs must have been a financial disaster for the swineherds. This is a reminder that encounters with Jesus can be costly and have unforeseen consequences.

The people have at best an ambivalent reaction to Jesus. He has robbed some of the community of their livelihood. But he has restored health to the man whom they believed to be possessed. In sending the man home Jesus does two things. First, he completes the restoration begun in the healing by restoring the man back into his community. Second, he uses the man to show a Gentile community that the love of God is for them as well. It is a glimpse of what Paul envisaged when he wrote that there is no longer Jew nor Greek.

In today's world, there are many who are damaged and excluded, and there are many divisions of all sorts. These passages remind us that unity and not division are God's desire and the impact of an encounter with Jesus may be the first step on the way to wholeness. It is up to his followers to proclaim this and to play their part in bringing healing and unity.

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

Come with us, Lord, in our brokenness and bring healing.

Come with us, Lord, into our divided world and unite us.

Come with us, Lord, and cast from us that which is not of you, that we may live as your children in your world, today and always.

**Amen**