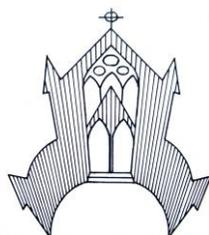
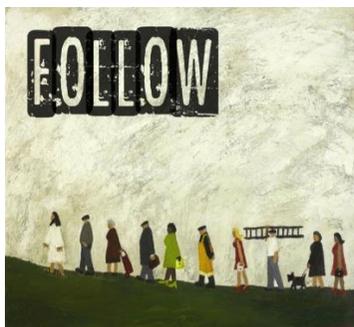


# Stokesley Methodist Church



**Sunday 26th June 2022**



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

The time is now, the Lord is here!

He calls us in this moment. Rejoice in the fullness of his love.

We gather in the power of your Spirit, O Lord.

Give us the wisdom to live in the Spirit, and to show the fruit of the Spirit in who we are.

Make us people of love, joy and peace; make us generous and kind; and help us to shape our lives with gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

Let our hearts be glad and our tongues rejoice.

When we walk in companionship with the Lord we are filled with joy in his presence.

Let us praise the Lord.

**Amen**

## **Lectionary Readings:**

**1 Kings 19 v15-16, 19-21** (p361) The Lord Appears to Elijah/The Call of Elisha

**Psalms 16** (p549) Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.

**Galatians 5 v1, 13-25** (p1171) Freedom in Christ/Life by the Spirit

**Luke 9 v51-62** (p1040) Samaritan Opposition/The Cost of Following Jesus

## **Some Things Can't Wait**

This week our focus explores how following Jesus is both important and urgent. Some things in life can wait. Other things have to be dealt with immediately. The call of Jesus requires instant and wholehearted attention but that is not always easy and challenges how we consider our priorities.

In 1 Kings 19 Elijah was told to appoint Elisha as his successor – what an invitation! ELIJAH was a great prophet – a great & godly man. Everyone knew Elijah. The Israelites were happy that God had given them such a great prophet. ELISHA was a younger man. He was a good man, but not a great man like Elijah, nor ever thought he would be. But Elijah, the great prophet, surprised Elisha, the young man. Elijah was wearing a special coat that identified him as a great prophet. Whenever anyone saw that coat, they knew that it must be Elijah, the great prophet.

But Elijah took off that coat and told Elisha, the young man, to put it on. Elijah knew that symbol would empower Elisha to take on that new role. Elisha wants to 'kiss his father & mother good-bye' before embarking on that new journey. And the people celebrated with a great feast – they knew this was a great occasion, the fact that this young man whom they knew & loved had been marked by Elijah to become a great prophet. They knew that Elijah would have to leave them someday, and they wondered who would take his place. Now they knew. It would be their friend, Elisha. There are superficial similarities to Jesus recruiting his disciples in this week's Gospel, but the work of Israel's prophets is painted on a much broader political canvas. Yet, those who are called to face the possibility of martyrdom (Luke 9 v23 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.') should hardly be regarded as politically safe.

Paul insists throughout Galatians that freedom comes through Christ, not Moses. He realises that by playing down the authority of Moses he could leave his churches without a moral compass. So, in Galatians 5 v13-25, he stresses that Christ's freedom is not a recipe for self-centred lawlessness (v16 'gratify the desires of the sinful nature') but the mandate for a paradoxical kind of slavery: '... serve one another in love.' (v13), which Paul regards as the key to Moses' teaching. All individuals and communities need a degree of regulation. But for Paul nothing is more important or urgent than the freedom-as-slavery won by Christ.

Christ's followers live with the competing pull of 'flesh' and 'Spirit'. In this they experience a kind of crucifixion (v24), but also the life-giving power of the Spirit. Most of the 15 named 'acts of the sinful nature' in verses 19-21 undermine social as well as personal life. By contrast, 'the fruit of the Spirit' brings peace to divided communities and struggling individuals alike.

What do you think it means to be free? We often think being free means you can do what you want to do and go where you want to go. That is partially true, but to be truly free we must also learn to make good choices.

Wild horses running free are one of the most beautiful sights you could ever hope to see. With their manes and tails flowing in the wind they are a symbol of freedom. It seems as if they could do anything they want to do, but even wild horses live with certain rules. Wild horses band together and live in families. Each family has a male leader (a stallion) who guards the herd and alerts them when there is danger. There is also a female lead horse (a mare) who guides the other horses to food and water. Wild horses learn how to get along with each other, how to care for their young, and they even follow rules about which horse will eat and drink first.

The Bible gives us good information about freedom and tells us this: "For you ... were called to be free" (v13). God gives each one of us freedom to make our own choices. The Bible provides suggestions and guidelines for how to live the best life. We all have the opportunity to love God and follow those suggestions. When we choose to be guided by God's Spirit, The Spirit teaches us how to make good choices and brings such things as love, joy, peace, patience, and generosity into our lives. The Bible tells us that we are "called to freedom" and that is a good thing, but freedom also comes with responsibility to make good choices. That's what it means to be free.

In Luke 9 we now reach a major turning point in Jesus' ministry. After Peter's confession and the subsequent revelation on the mountain of Transfiguration, Jesus looks towards Jerusalem where, like Elijah, he will be 'taken up' into heaven. In the mountaintop vision of Jesus with Moses and Elijah, there is talk of Jesus' departure, but the Greek word is 'exodus'. Jesus' journey of liberation towards his ascension takes him through crucifixion and resurrection. On the way he calls followers to be 'fit for service in the kingdom of God' (9 v62), and Luke packs his account of the journey with matters of great importance for disciples.

The Samaritans, through whose villages he must pass, refuse to welcome a Jewish pilgrim travelling to a holy place whose status they reject. But, unlike Elijah, Jesus will not allow the Jews' traditional enemies to be consumed by heavenly fire. His disciples must learn to set aside age-old prejudices, so that they can appreciate the importance of being open to the faith of others, even those they despise. The urgency of the coming of God's kingdom means that some conventions must now be

suspended, including creature comforts and the duty to bury one's father (Jesus' 'shock language' is very different from Elijah's concession in 1 Kings 19). Followers of Jesus are like those who plough well: straight furrows are the fruit of focused attention, with eyes fixed on what is both important and urgent. Everything else is perilous distraction.

Have you ever noticed wild geese flying in a v-shaped formation? They do that because it is the most efficient way for them to travel. The goose at the tip of the vee feels the wind's force the most, while the others are more protected. When the lead goose gets tired from flying in the foremost position, another goose moves in to take a turn.

Wild geese, like many other types of birds, migrate. They fly to warmer climates when the temperature drops, snow covers the land and the lakes freeze over. They fly back to northern locations as the temperatures begin to get warmer. They migrate so they will be in a place that provides them with adequate food and good nesting areas. Birds have an internal clock that tells them when to start their migration, and they have amazing ways to stay on course. They use their eyes to check for landmarks like rivers and mountain ranges. They navigate by watching the position of the stars and sun. Some birds even have tiny grains of a mineral (magnetite) in their heads that allows them to navigate by monitoring the earth's magnetic field.

Migrating birds must eat to build up fat in their bodies so they will have energy for the long journey. Once they start their migration, they do not look back. All their effort is focused on getting to their destination.

When Jesus came to live on earth, he had a purpose. All his energy was directed toward God's plan. He did not look back but did what was necessary to reach his destination. He counsels us to do the same.

In today's Gospel reading he told a man to, "Follow me!" (v59). Once we have set our course to follow Jesus, we need to be committed to our faith and do what is necessary to be the person God wants us to be. Like migrating birds we must stay on course and focus on our destination.

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

May God grant us the wisdom to know what is important.

May God guide us to act, to do what is urgent.

May God help us to know the one we follow better each day.

May God help us to be people who don't always look back.

May God help us always to be faithful and true.

**Amen**