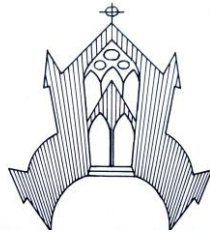


Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 7th August 2022



A Gathering Prayer from the Roots resources

As we come into God's presence,
let us open our hands and hearts, let us invite God to fill us with the
treasure of his Spirit – the treasure of his compassion for others, and
the treasure of his unconditional love for us.

God of all, we thank you for being here with us. We thank you that in
your presence we find heavenly riches beyond any earthy treasure.

As we come to worship, help us to seek and find the treasure of your
kingdom, so we can live our earthly lives holding treasure that will
transform us – right here and right now.

We put our hope in the Lord; the Lord is our protector and our help,
the root of our gladness and in the Lord we trust. May your constant
love be with us, Lord, as we put our hope in you.

Amen

Lectionary Readings:

Genesis 15 v1-6 (p15) God's Covenant with Abram

Psalms 33 v12-22 (p561) ... the eyes of the Lord are on those ... whose hope is
in his unfailing love ...

Hebrews 11 v1-3, 8-16 (p1209) By Faith

Luke 12 v32-40 (p1045) Do Not Worry/ Watchfulness

Right Here, Right Now

This week our focus explores where we are looking for treasure.

Jesus tells his disciples not to be afraid for God is offering the kingdom.

Treasure is in heaven rather than on earth, because 'where your treasure is,
there will be your heart also'. God is like a master who is ready to serve his
own servants – but be always alert and ready, because you don't know when
he will arrive.

The Gospel reading makes an astute connection between treasure and our
emotions, between what we value and the values that drive us. The challenge
is to understand what real treasure is. Real treasure comes from God. This is
treasure that will last forever. Yet, it can be found right here, right now; and
we find it by looking at what God is doing all around us and joining in the
work of his kingdom.

First, we go back to Genesis 15 v1-6. For the second time God promises
Abram descendants too numerous to count, having already promised to
make him a great nation. But why does Abram believe God? He is old, as is
his wife, who is well beyond childbearing age, so he knows that his household
servant will inherit his fortune rather than a son. But God contradicts him; his
physical descendants will be too numerous to count. Perhaps this is why the
episode begins with God telling Abram not to be afraid – to not be afraid to
trust and follow. Although Abram had seen God at work already, it was
nothing compared to what is to come. Will he lay aside his fear and trust
him? After this, the mood darkens and God reveals the cost of his
commitment to Abram in a scene of terrifying darkness and gracious
sacrifice.

Perhaps you've read stories about knights. In these stories knights are often
described as brave men who save ladies in distress or fight to keep the bad
guys away. Ages and ages ago there actually were knights. They served the

king. They went into battle to uphold the ideas and values of faith, loyalty, honour and courage & they usually wore a suit of armour, a helmet and carried a sword and a shield. It was the duty of some knights to defend the Christian faith. Their shields could be made of leather, wood, bronze or other metals and they were formed into many shapes. The shields were decorated in a way that allowed the knight to be recognized when his face was covered by a helmet. The shield was very important to the knight because it was his protection. It sheltered him from the swords of his enemies.

The Bible tells us that Abram had a vision (dream) from the Lord and it frightened him, as dreams sometimes do. The Lord God said to Abram, “Don’t be afraid, Abram. I am your shield...”.

What a wonderful idea to think of God as being our shield. His love is like that – it protects us when we are afraid. We are able to hold onto God’s love and feel comforted. We can think of being decorated with God’s love in the way a knight’s shield is decorated with his king’s design. When we live with God’s love, others are able to recognize us as Christians. God says, “don’t be afraid...I am your shield.”

Although a psalm of Israel, the focus of Psalm 33 is on the fact that it is individuals who catch God’s attention. Trusting in the army, the power of the economy, human technical prowess is foolish. We need to trust in God. This leads out of Genesis with its focus on fear and into Jesus’ focus on trust in Luke 12.

How do we understand faith? What does it mean to trust someone? The passage from Hebrews 11 is one of the Bible’s grand statements of faith. It’s fleshed out by a telling of the story of Abraham that focuses on his faith (leaving out his doubts and contradiction of God’s word!). The key to his faith, and that of the others mentioned, is that it was in something beyond the things around us that catch the eye. Faith is about living in uncertainty, in something temporary, while always looking ahead to the permanent home that God is creating for the faithful. The writer is aware not only of the narrative arc of the Old Testament, but also of the message of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus – something that is here and yet is still coming. And so, he calls us to faith.

Helen Keller is a woman who was born in 1880. When she was 1 ½ years old she had an illness that caused her to be blind and deaf. She could not see and she could not hear. We can hardly imagine how difficult life would be for

such a person. She was unable to communicate with anyone. She could not hear words that were spoken to her therefore she had no way to learn how to speak words. Because of this she became an unruly child and others thought she was unable to learn. When Helen was six years old her parents hired a teacher, Anne Sullivan who came to live with the family and work with Helen. Usually a person who is blind is taught to use Braille, a system of small raised dots that represent letters and numbers. When the dots are touched they can be translated into words which allow a sight impaired person to read. People who are unable to hear learn sign language. Hands and fingers are positioned in various ways to represent specific letters, words or phrases. Facial expressions and body language are also used to help hearing impaired people communicate.

In Helen’s case, since she could neither see nor hear, it seemed there was no way to teach her sign language or Braille. Anne Sullivan, Helen’s teacher, was very persistent and caring. She worked with Helen every day for many hours. One day there was a breakthrough. Helen and Anne were outside near a water pump. Anne Sullivan, ran water over Helen’s hand and at the same time moved Helen’s hand in sign language, demonstrating the word for water. At that moment Helen learned there were names for things. There was now a way she could learn to communicate with others.

Helen Keller was a remarkable woman who went on to graduate from college (Ratcliffe) with honours, wrote many books, travelled all over the world and met world leaders. In spite of her disabilities she accomplished many things and was an inspiration to others. One of the most profound things she said was, “The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt within the heart.”

In the Bible Jesus talked about this very thing when he said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12 v34). The things that are really important are not the things we have, but the love we feel in our heart. It is love that comes from God and it is ours to give to others. Where is the treasure? It is in your heart.

Sending Out Prayer:

Lord, go with us. Help us to seek your treasure. Help us to look for all you’re doing right now. Help us – by our example as much as by our words – to share your treasure and your life-giving story with the people we meet this week. **Amen**