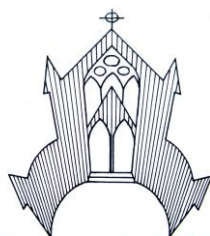


Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 14th April 2024



A Gathering Prayer from the Roots resources

Come, all who have made mistakes.

Come, all who have said or done things they regret.

Come, all who have failed to do what was right.

Come, all who want to start afresh.

Come to the God who offers hope, healing, and forgiveness.

God of grace, you know our weaknesses,
and how we let you, ourselves and others down
by the things we say and do or fail to do.

As we come to worship, open our hearts and minds,
to learn from our mistakes, to know more of your ways,
and live and love as Christ loves us.

Amen

Lectionary Readings:

Acts 3 v12-19 (p1095) Peter Speaks to the Onlookers

Psalm 4 (p544) Let the light of your face shine upon us, O Lord.

1 John 3 v1-7 (p1226) Children of God

Luke 24 v36b-48 (p1062) Jesus Appears to the Disciples

Learning to Live After Our Mistakes

Failing is not always a bad thing; it can make us want to learn and improve. As Edison famously said about inventing the light bulb, 'I have not failed 10,000 times – I've successfully found 10,000 ways that will not work.' How do we respond to our mistakes? Do we learn to live better lives as a consequence?

Words and actions belong closely together in Acts.

Speaking God's Word with boldness is accompanied by signs and wonders. The action comes first as Peter heals a lame man, 'in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk' (3 v6). Now, as the crowd runs towards them in astonishment, Peter explains what has happened. When Peter 'took him by the right hand and raised him up' the lame man was given 'perfect health' through Jesus. This is the new life that began with Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is the author, or pioneer, of this risen life. Peter accuses the crowd of Jesus' murder, 'You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead'. He doesn't choose here to mention his own shameful part in the story, falling asleep when asked to pray with Jesus in his agony (Luke 22 v45-46), weeping bitterly after denying three times that he knew Jesus (Luke 22 v62). But Jesus had said to him, 'When once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers' (Luke 22 v32). Now he urges the crowd to repentance with similar words, 'Turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out'. In Jesus' suffering, to which he contributed, in Jesus' resurrection, to which he witnesses, and in the repentance that he proclaims, Peter sees the fulfilment of the loving promises of God. This echoes the words of the risen Jesus to the disciples in today's Gospel, 'Thus it is written'.

Psalm 4 is an individual's prayer for help in trouble. He feels trapped but is able to recall that praying faithfully through distress brought the comfort of finding the 'room' to carry on. He rails against opponents who, he says, 'love vain words, and seek after lies'. He warns them not to sin but to be silent, and to be careful to worship sincerely and 'trust in the Lord'. And then he takes his own advice, turning from arguing with his neighbours to being silent in the presence of his God. He is able to let go for a while and trust the God with whom alone we are safe. 'I will both lie down and sleep in peace'.

There is a tension in the reading from 1 John 3 between 'now' and 'what will be'. For now, the world that did not recognise God's Son does not recognise God's children. But the one who died on the cross will be fully revealed as God's light and love. Then those who already walk in his light and abide in his love will be seen as transformed into his image. We have been told not to say we have no sin (1 John 1 v8-9), but now we hear that 'those who have been born of God do not sin'. We live with this tension between what is and what will be. We can bring our failures to the light because this hope of loving as completely as Jesus loves is already purifying us from sin.

And so to the reading from Luke 24 v36b-48. Angels told the women at the tomb, 'He is not here, but has risen'. Remembering that Jesus had said he would die and rise, they announced the resurrection 'to the eleven and to all the rest'. But they thought this 'an idle tale' (Luke 24 v1-12). Now Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus have returned to Jerusalem and told the eleven and the others how they had recognised the risen Jesus 'in the breaking of the bread' (24 v13-35). As they are talking Jesus appears; but, despite what they have heard from Mary Magdalene and her companions and from the two from Emmaus, they are terrified and doubt what they see. They, unlike the women and the two disciples – but like Thomas in John's Gospel – are invited to touch him and to examine his hands and feet. John's risen Jesus passes through locked doors, and already breathes the Holy Spirit on the disciples. Luke stresses the physicality of the resurrection, and the Holy

Spirit will come at Pentecost, after Jesus has ascended to his Father. At the tomb Mary Magdalene and the other women had remembered that Jesus had said his death and resurrection would fulfil what the prophets had written. They believed and remembered that 'the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners'. Now the risen Jesus opens the men's minds to the Scriptures. Although they had thought this 'an idle tale', they are appointed as 'witnesses'.

In 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse', Charlie Mackesy writes: 'The greatest illusion, said the mole, is that life should be perfect.' On that page the paw mark left by the author's dog walking across the manuscript underlines the mole's point. We are far from perfect. All of us make mistakes. Some of them are minor. Mistakes are woven into the fabric of life and can be productive. It is important that we understand that not all mistakes are sins, nor should we feel guilty after them. Some are necessary and even positive in order to learn or gain experience. The inventor Thomas Edison made thousands of 'mistakes' before he came up with a working light bulb. Few of us learn how to ride a bike or drive a car safely the first time; we have to have a number of goes, sometimes a lot! Peter in his sermon in Acts says recognising that they had made a mistake about Jesus is the pathway to forgiveness. By recognising our failure to live as God desires and turning to him brings us forgiveness and the restoration of that relationship brings new life. God does not remember or hold against us the sins that we have truly confessed. He offers us a fresh start, a new beginning that will bring joy.

Sending Out Prayer

Lord, thank you that you don't give up on us when we fail,
that you offer us a fresh start through your forgiveness.
Guide and teach us that we may learn from our mistakes,
And walk with us into each new day,
In Jesus' name.

Amen.