

Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit

Worship at Home Advent 3 12th December 2021

What then should we do?

If you have an Advent wreath, or 3 candles,
Please light them and say:

As we light this Advent candle,
may its flame be for us a sign of the light
that reveals to us our path through life,
that inspires us to live simply and generously,
after the example and call of John the Baptist,
that we ourselves may be signs of the good
news we proclaim. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Call to worship

Let us meet with our God,
whose Spirit is with us now
and throughout our daily lives.
Let us pray for opportunities to
share the blessings we receive,
for God to provide the words
with which we might speak them,
and inspire actions through
which we might share them,
that all might be drawn to the God we serve.

Hymn (StF) 272 From heaven you came

- 1 From heaven you came, helpless babe,
entered our world, your glory veiled,
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.*

- 2 There in the garden of tears
my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said.

- 3 Come see his hands and his feet,

the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

- 4 So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him,
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Prayers of adoration, Thanksgiving and Confession

O Lord our God,
God of the prophets and God of the now,
you are with us.
Your power gives us victory.
You take delight in us.
And in love, you give us new life.
Hear us as we come to you today.

To you, O God, we lift our hearts;
how great you are.
You are our saviour;
you are our power;
you are our strength.
You are the giver of life-giving water
to quench our spiritual thirst.
Praise to you, Lord God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We praise you for the gift
of witnesses to your love.
We give thanks for the witness of John the
Baptist and his message to the people,
and its relevance for us today.
In his story and his teaching,
we see the heart of your being -
fairness and justice and
equality for your people.

We give you thanks for the ordinary everyday
life that witnesses to your power and glory.
We give thanks for your light
in our times of darkness,
for your hand in times of aloneness,
for your leading in times of uncertainty.

Blessed God, hear our prayers of sadness and regret for times when we have been blind to the needs of neighbours, deaf to the cries of the distressed, and silent at the sight of the abused and the vulnerable.

Open our ears and eyes, Lord, and our hearts, to be more receptive to what we see and hear from those around us.

God knows the depths of our sorrow.
God knows the depths of our grief
for wrongs done.

God knows the pains of regret
for deeds undone.

God knows the depths of our hearts.

To God we repent, and forgiveness is given.,
through Christ our Saviour.

Amen.

Bible Reading Luke 3:7-18

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”

⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰ “What should we do then?” the crowd asked.

¹¹ John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”

¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

¹³ “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.

¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”

He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, “I baptize you with water but one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

Word

John tells those who have come to be baptized that their faith needs to make a difference to their everyday living. He shares three kinds of teaching: a warning to the crowds not to rely on their religious pedigree; advice on some simple ways to live justly; and a prophetic promise about the greatness of the one who is to come. His listeners want to know what they need to do. John’s response is not without cost to the individual. He speaks directly about the everyday situations that those asking the questions are living within – and speaks of how what they do can relate to others.

Most of the crowd that came to John for baptism thought their ancestry was enough, and they didn’t need to do any more than that. Perhaps we think that calling ourselves Christian, or attending church, is enough. But it isn’t. We are called to ‘bear good fruit’, and the responsibility for that lies with us.

So when the crowd asked John ‘What then should we do?’ (v.10). It’s a question we need to ask too.

And it is a recurring question raised in Luke’s Gospel, yet the called for response is profoundly down to earth and practical, centring on the generous sharing of resources. Underlying this is an ethic and attitude of contentment – a call to be content with one

good coat, enough food, the legitimate amount of tax revenue and sufficient wages, as we read here.

It is notable that John – often presented as a fiery, radical prophet – does not call people who are in what were controversial occupations to find new work. Instead he calls them to work out the substance of their repentance and live their newly baptized lives within their normal day-to-day duties. Commenting on this, Joel Green says, ‘John’s message contains within it a critique that not only points the finger of judgement at large-scale injustice but in fact reaches into the realities of day-to-day existence. Life at the local level and one’s own normal network of relationships are touched by this ethical vision, with the result that repentance must be understood within and related to even the most mundane.’ Note Luke’s little phrase ‘Even tax collectors’ (v12). They came to John, seeking God. When was the last time we gave thanks for and prayed for those working honourably at HMRC? You may have seen in the news recently that Extinction Rebellion were protesting outside Amazon warehouses, Darlington being one of them. A worthy cause, to protest against a big multi-national that avoids paying taxes, and has poor working standards and pay. But the way they went about their protest, meant the very people they were offering to support, couldn’t get into work, so were sent home – without any pay. Hardly helping them is it? Many of us can find ourselves working in areas where we see corruption, exploitation, unfair practices. It is quite a challenge to speak up and try to provide a ethical work environment, we hear of whistle-blowers losing their jobs when they have tried to change things. John’s suggestion is that we do what we can in our own small corner of the business, he acknowledges it is difficult to reach to the top on your own, but if, as an individual, you are acting in a just and fair way, seen to be sharing what you have, not being greedy but content with what you have, then others can see and

follow your way and changes will be made over time.

Is there something you can do today to raise an issue of concern you are aware of? Perhaps write to your MP, or local press. Consider also your daily living, do you shop local, buy in season, or from Fairtrade? Do you focus on new purchases, when second-hand – or even not upgrading is just as good. Do you pass goods on for recycling, instead of throwing away?

Pause for personal reflection :
What then could you do?

A prayer of Commitment

The world says, ‘You can never have enough money’; but we say,
‘Let’s share. Let’s dare to be different.’
The world says, ‘You can never have too many clothes’; but we say,
‘Let’s share. Let’s dare to be different.’
The world says, ‘Enough is never really enough’; but we say,
‘Let’s share. Let’s dare to be different.’
In Jesus’ name,
‘Let’s share. Let’s dare to be different.’ Amen.

Hymn 36 There’s a quiet understanding

- 1 There's a quiet understanding
when we're gathered in the Spirit,
it's a promise that he gives us,
when we gather in his name.
There's a love we feel in Jesus,
there's a manna that he feeds us,
it's a promise that he gives us,
when we gather in his name.
- 2 And we know when we're together,
sharing love and understanding,
that our brothers and our sisters
feel the oneness that he brings.
Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jesus,
for the way you love and feed us,
for the many ways you lead us;
thank you, thank you, Lord;
thank you, thank you, Lord.

Tedd Smith (b. 1927)

Prayers of Intercession

God of judgement and of mercy, we pray
for those entrusted with great wealth,
that they would see where they could make
changes and enrich others;
for those entrusted with great power,
that they would make changes for the good of
those they serve;
for those entrusted with great influence,
that they would make changes that would
inspire others.

We pray for ourselves,
that we too might change,
and become more approachable, more open,
more generous,
and more like your Son, Jesus Christ, our
Saviour.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the
glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn 660 Called by Christ to be disciples

- 1 Called by Christ to be disciples
every day in every place,
we are not to hide as hermits
but to spread the way of grace;
citizens of heaven's kingdom,
though this world is where we live,
as we serve a faithful Master,
faithful service may we give.
- 2 Richly varied are our pathways,
many callings we pursue:
may we use our gifts and talents
always, Lord, to honour you;
so in government or commerce,

college, hospice, farm or home,
whether volunteers or earning,
may we see your kingdom come.

- 3 Hard decisions may confront us,
urging us to compromise;
still obedience is our watchword --
make us strong and make us wise!
Secular is turned to sacred,
made a precious offering,
as our daily lives are fashioned
in submission to our King.

Martin Leckebusch (b. 1962)

Lord, help us to go into the world in peace;
to be of good courage;
to hold fast to that which is good;
to strengthen the faint hearted;
to support the weak;
to honour everyone;
and to love and serve the Lord.
Be within us and among us,
and remain with us always.

Blessing

May the blessing of God, the Father, the Son
and the Holy Spirit be among us and remain
with us always. Amen.

Kathy Lowrie