

Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit

'At Home Worship' for Sunday 11 July 2021

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One of Charles Wesley's great hymns begins with these words, " All praise to our redeeming Lord who joins us by his grace". We give thanks that although physically separate, by God's grace we are together in Spirit and share in His love.

Hymn StF 139.

1. Today I awake
and God is before me.
At night, as I dreamt, he summoned
the day;
for God never sleeps but patterns the
morning with slithers of gold or glory
in grey.
2. Today I arise
and Christ is beside me.
He walked through the night to scatter
new light.
Yes, Christ is alive,
and beckons his people to hope and to
heal, resist and invite.
3. Today, I affirm
the Spirit within me
at worship and work,
in struggle and rest.
The Spirit inspires
all life which is changing
from fearing to faith,
from broken to blest,
4. Today, I enjoy
the Trinity round me,
above and beneath,
before and behind;
the Maker, the Son,
the Spirit together –

they called me to life
and call me their friend.

John L Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Moule (b. 1958)

We pray together:

I weave a silence onto my lips
I wave a silence into my mind
I weave a silence within my heart
I close my ears to distractions
I close my eyes to attractions
I close my heart to temptations

Calm me O Lord as you stilled the storm
Still me O lord, keep me from harm
Let all the tumult within me cease
Enfold me Lord in your peace. Amen.
(from The Edge of Glory by David Adam)

Loving God, we come to you in this time
of worship, offering our praise, our
thanksgiving, our hearts.

As we come to you we know that you
come to us in so many ways.

We praise you, that in love for us, you
come to us as the great Creator, the giver
of life and all that is good. We wonder at
your greatness and majesty.

We praise you, that in love for us you
come to us in Jesus, showing us your ways
and show us how to live and how to love.
We wonder at your sacrificial love.

We praise you that you come to us as the
Holy Spirit, enabling and empowering us
to be your people. We wonder at your
life-giving power.

Loving God, as you come to us, help us to
come to you bringing our joys and
sorrows, our hopes and fears, our
strengths, and our weakness. That as

Creator you continue to recreate us, as Jesus you continue forgive us and as Spirit you continue to empower us to love and serve you. In the name of Christ we make our prayer. Amen.

A reading from the prophet Amos Ch 7: 7-15

This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?' And I said, 'A plumb-line.' Then the Lord said,

'See, I am setting a plumb-line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by;
the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.'

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said,

"Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land."'

And Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.'

Then Amos answered Amaziah, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from

following the flock, and the Lord said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

A reading from the gospel of Mark Ch 6: 14-29

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, 'John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him.' But others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.'

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, 'Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.' And he solemnly swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother, 'What should I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the baptizer.' Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the

Baptist on a platter.’ The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Hymn StF 404

1. God’s Spirit Is In My Heart
He Has Called Me And Set Me Apart.
This Is What I Have To Do,
What I Have To Do

Refrain

He Sent Me To Give The Good News To
The Poor
Tell Prisoners That They Are Prisoners
No More
Tell Blind People That They Can See
And Set The Down Trodden Free
And Go Tell Everyone The News That
The Kingdom Of God Has Come
And Go Tell Everyone
The News That God’s Kingdom Has
Come.

2. Just As The Father Sent Me So
I’m Sending You Out To Be,
My Witnesses Throughout The World,
The Whole Of The World

Refrain

He Sent Me To Give The Good News To
The Poor.....

3. Don’t Carry A Load In Your Pack,
You Don’t Need Two Shirts On Your
Back
A Workman Can Earn His Own Keep,
Can Earn His Own Keep

Refrain

He Sent Me To Give The Good News To
The Poor.....

4. Don’t Worry What You Have To Say,
Don’t Worry Because On That Day
God’s Spirit Will Speak In Your Heart
Will Speak In Your Heart

Refrain

He Sent Me To Give The Good News To
The Poor.....

(v 1 and refrain Alan T. Dale (1902-1979) vv 2 – 4 Hubert Richards (b. 1921))

Address – “The Voice of a prophet”

Our bible readings today tell us something about the nature of Prophets. Some people might regard prophets as, some kind of, fortune tellers people who can see into the future and predict what is going to happen. The prophets in the bible are certainly not fairground characters with crystal balls and the, so-called, ability to tell who is going to meet a tall dark handsome stranger, how long we will live or whether we will suddenly become very wealthy.

The Prophets we find in scripture are hugely different to this mystic, fortune telling, image. The common feature of the prophets of the bible, is that they stand close to God. Because of their ability to draw close to God, they are inspired to comprehend some truth of God. This truth they share with others, often involving self-sacrifice.

The prophet Amos from our Old Testament reading today was a shepherd and a farmer, not someone in any form of authority; yet his closeness to God helped him to realise that it was important to speak out strongly for justice and against

the religious leaders of the day, he took severe criticism for doing so. He wanted to see social justice. A verse from earlier in the book, he says 'let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream' Amos 5:24. He spoke about abuse of the poor, perverting the course of justice, and of thinking that wealth and riches were a sign of God's blessing, instead of exploitation of others.

Amos was not a professional religious person, in our reading he says: 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees; yet he still felt compelled to speak out about important religious subjects. He received the call of God, the passage we read ends by Amos saying 'and the Lord said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel"'.

So, we have this picture of a prophet as a messenger, called by God who proclaim their conviction of the will of God whatever the consequences for themselves.

We heard from the gospel of Mark about another prophet John the Baptist. We have this rather seedy and, ultimately, gory scene which is something like a very early soap opera.

Herod had John the Baptist put in prison. We find out that Herod had married his own brother's wife and John the Baptist tells the king that it was wrong for the king to have his brother's wife. Herodias had now progressed from being married to the king's brother to being married to the king. She wasn't taking kindly to John interfering in her business. Using her daughter to dance for Herod, she found a way to get rid of him once and for all.

So in the reading from Amos and from Mark we have people of God, who we may call prophets, proclaiming the will of God, especially against the powerful people of the time; challenging the authority with a new God-given authority.

The passage in Mark is an interlude in the telling of the story of Jesus ministry; immediately prior to this account of the death of John the Baptist, we have Jesus sending the disciples out with his authority and we read that they preached, drove out demons and healed the sick. Then after this episode we find the disciples telling Jesus about what they had done. The good news of the gospel, the work of Christ continued and was expanding.

So, what I take from our readings is that God uses his people to challenge authority; whether that be our political leaders at national or local level, leadership in any organisation which is not exercising leadership in a just way, maybe even within our church structures and organisation.

We all have a duty to listen to God, to listen to His prophets in our day. We have seen from Amos and John the Baptist that God calls people who might, to some might seem unlikely and seek to make his voice heard, even if what we say is not especially popular. I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees said Amos and from elsewhere in the gospels we know how John the Baptist did not conform with his clothing made of camel's hair, a leather belt, eating locusts and wild honey. Then throughout the gospels we see Jesus time and time again calling the outcast, the rejected, the poor and the broken.

So, are we looking for and listening to the prophets of our day? It may be a church leader, it might be a secular leader; but equally it might be a neighbour, a friend, a colleague, a relative or someone we don't personally know but hear about because of something they have to say which is the right word for us that we need to hear.

As well as listening to the prophets of our day, also maybe God is calling us to be a prophet, to speak up, to speak out against situations that we are aware of that need to have a voice heard. It may be that we are being called to support a cause or to petition or stand up against some injustice. We all have a duty and responsibility to speak out what we believe God is saying to our church and society.

The prophets of old pointed the way to the coming Kingdom of God, a prophesy fulfilled in the person of Jesus; the work of the prophet continues today.

There is a well-known quote by St Teresa of Avila in the 16th Century, which is absolutely true for us today

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

Some words from a hymn by George Wallace Briggs:

God has spoken by the prophets, spoken the unchanging Word,
God has spoken by Christ Jesus, Christ, the

everlasting Son,
God is speaking by the Spirit, speaking to our hearts again.

May we listen for the prophet's word and, where we can, speak with the prophet's voice.

Thanks be to God, Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Let us join together in praying to God for the needs the church, the world, our communities and ourselves, trusting in his love which reaches out from before the foundation of the world.

Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer

We pray for God's church, especially for the people he has called to be prophets and teachers in our generation. We pray that they will be strengthened and protected by the Holy Spirit.

Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer

We pray for the leaders of the world carrying responsibilities for the lives of their people. We pray for all victims of the world's injustices and for a new spirit of righteousness and integrity in the hearts of the powerful.

Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer

We pray for the people of our communities especially for those who feel excluded, exploited or ignored. We pray that as God's people we may work to build a community as open and generous as God's love shown to us in Christ Jesus.

Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer

We pray that God will bring healing in mind, body and spirit to all who are troubled. We pray that in lives darkened by any kind of pain, distress or grief the

light of Christ will bring comfort, hope and a sense of God's all-encompassing love.

Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, hear these prayers we offer you in his name. By the power of your Holy Spirit work within us and among us to bring your kingdom values into this world. Let your will be done so that all people may live only for your praise and glory. Amen.

(Prayer from www.katherinesmith.org.uk)

The 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 StF 509

1. Safe in the shadow of the Lord,
beneath his hand and power,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
my fortress and my tower.
2. My hope is set on God alone,
though Satan spreads his snare,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
to keep me in his care.

3. From fears and phantoms of the night,
from foes about my way,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
by darkness as by day.
4. His holy angels keep my feet
secure from every stone;
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
and unafraid go on.
5. Strong in the everlasting Name,
and in my Father's care,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
who hears and answers prayer.
6. Safe in the shadow of the Lord,
possessed by love divine,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
and meet his love with mine.

(Timothy Dudley-Smith b. 1926)

Blessing

May the blessing of Almighty God ever surround you, the grace of the Lord Jesus go with you and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit fill your hearts.

In love and in the light and strength of God, we pursue our hope. Amen

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