

Worship for 25 October 2020

Introduction

Paul recalls the confidence in God required to preach in the challenging circumstances facing them in Thessalonica. They focused not on their own needs but on God's good news, and their authority as apostles was expressed not in self-promoting demands but in self-giving tender care.

Call to worship:

Let us thank God for each other as we share in worship wherever we are and as we come to pray and praise. Let us thank God for the witness of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit to inspire and move us. Come. Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.

Amen.

Hymn: Love divine, all loves excelling

Opening prayers

We bring ourselves to a moment of quiet, to a place of peace, to this place of safety and welcome. We bring ourselves to cast off the cares of the world and for a time to reflect on you, Lord God, that our batteries may be recharged, our direction be refocused and our energy renewed; that we may let go of things that hamper us and be free to care gently for those we share time with. O God, we pray, renew us that we may renew others.

Holy Spirit of God may our confessions and grief for what we have done wrong, or what we have left undone, be taken from us. May our burdens be lifted, and our inner souls released to share afresh the love we have known in you. Holy Spirit of God forgive us and assure us that our sins are forgiven, that our lives are renewed, that we are loved, cherished and cared for.

We give thanks, Lord God, for the gentle caring people in the world whose love of you radiates from their lives. For their gentleness of voice and touch, for their gentle smile, their listening ear, their quiet reassurance and understanding, their patience and perseverance with us. We thank you, Lord God, that you have touched the lives of these people and have enabled them to touch our lives and bring us to our faith and enrich our knowledge of you.

Amen.

Readings 1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8
 Matthew 22:34-46

Reflection

So deeply do we care – having the strength to be gentle

Charles Wesley's hymn 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild' is now often seen as dated and inappropriate. However, critic and theologian GK Chesterton's view was that the imagery was true but incomplete. It is worth reading quietly through Matthew 22.34-46 again and asking the question:

What sort of man is Jesus? He must have had an awareness that the Pharisees were trying to trap him. Yet he is patient with them. His response is gentle and mild explaining his understanding of the Scriptures. At the same time, he is stating his beliefs and showing strength of mind and character in so doing. That steely strength needs to be added to the gentleness to begin to grasp the full picture of Jesus.

The potter needs skill but also strength to start the moulding on a wheel but then needs a gentle touch for the finer shaping which makes the final item.

The stereotypical representation of strength has little or nothing to do with gentleness. Strength is more typically portrayed as being about power, and about a determination to achieve one's own will regardless of others. Yet, on his website 'A Home for Gentle Rebels', UK-based musician, writer and podcaster Andy Mort asserts that gentleness is strength because it remains constant and clear-minded across all manner of situations. He describes ways to develop strength founded in gentleness. The image of the nurse tenderly caring for children is a great picture of gentleness as is a nursing mother. Yet that tender care requires strength and determination and sometimes even 'tough love'.

Across the pastorate we do our pastoral care differently because of our different circumstances. We have recently had more restrictions imposed on us about how and where we can meet up with friends. This is hard for us all particularly those who live alone. Are we still



caring enough for them all? As you may know each elder has pastoral oversight for a group of church members and friends at Weoley Hill. Certainly, during lock down in the early months, we were contacting our groups regularly to see if they are ok. Are we still doing this? It is not just the elders who should be caring for the congregation or just the minister, Leonora, either as it is our joint responsibility. We should all have access to everyone's phone numbers within each church of the pastorate, so why not ring someone today that you don't always have a conversation with, maybe someone who doesn't come to church at the moment. There are several people who for different reasons are not coming to church and mainly they are the elderly who live alone. As visiting people in their homes is not allowed at the moment, we can still meet up with people outside so why not suggest a local, short walk near where they live, keeping social distancing, of course.

Recently the Matthew reading was included in the Fresh from the Word devotions I use and I quote the reflection. 'What the commandment is attempting to encompass is that we are to love God with everything. Our love of God is to encompass the whole of our lives, it is to influence how we engage with our emotions, how we understand our selves, how we pray, how we think, where and why we labour. Like a sponge underwater, our whole being is to be saturated, filled up to the brim, dripping with the love of God. There are people like this and they show a kindness, a wisdom, a balance, a no-nonsense gentleness, a deep trust in God and just being in their company is to catch some of the overflowing of their love of God' These people show gentle caring, loving neighbours as themselves, and it is all done with the strength of the love of God. Let us try to be like them. If you are feeling down and alone at the moment remember God is always there and he is supporting and loving you constantly even though you may feel others are not. Don't be afraid to ask for help. amen

Hymn: Spirit of God, unseen as the wind.

Prayers for the people

Loving God, as we come together today we bring you our thanks – for this place where, week by week, some of us can come and share fellowship; for our churches, dedicated to worshipping you; and for this time set aside from the daily tasks of life so that we can offer you

our praise, reflect on your word and seek your will. We thank you for everything our coming to church has meant and continues to mean.

Lord of the church; unite us through the love of Christ.

But we pray now for those who, for a variety of reasons are unable to worship with us – those confined to their homes, those choosing to worship at home for fear of COVID 19, those no longer fit enough to get out and about, those in hospital, those who work on Sundays, those looking after loved ones. We are united with all these through the love of Christ.

We pray too for those who have drifted away from regular attendance – those who have lost their faith, or joined other churches, or moved to a new area among new people. Unite us all through the love of Christ.

Loving God may each of these, our friends, know they are still much remembered, much valued and much cared about. May we find ways of expressing our concern, showing our support, and expressing our interest in their welfare. And, whatever their situation, may they know you close by their side, joined with us and all your people in the fellowship which only Christ can bring. In a moment of silence let us bring our individual concerns to you, Lord

Lord of the church; unite us in the love of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen

Let us come together with the words our Lord taught us to pray...
Our Father ...

Hymn: God is love, his the care

Offertory prayer

Lord we ask your blessing on the gifts of money given in the different ways we do and, on those people, who serve you and our churches in many ways now and in the time to come. Amen

Blessing

From the security of this place at home or in church, with friends and family and our faith community in person or spiritually, be with us, eternal God, as we step into the world of 'mixed-up all-sorts'. May we be kind and caring to all people, no matter how they treat us. May we be true to ourselves and hold our heads high, sharing your love and your care with all those we encounter. Amen