

Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME:
Sunday 21st January 2024
Prepared by Revd Peter Rayson

for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all
ye who follow shall not fall.

*Robert Bridges (1844-1930) (alt.)
based on Joachim Neander (1650-1680)*

Our call to worship:

For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.

Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.
(Psalm 62:5, 8 NRSVA)

***Read, listen to or sing to "All my hope on
God is founded" (StF455)***

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaP7CNrqF_k

- 1 All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he
guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.
- 2 Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.
- 3 God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom passing thought;
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.
- 4 Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.
- 5 Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising

A prayer of praise:

Lord God, as we gather in your presence
let us never lose hope in the promises you
give us.
You are faithful and trustworthy and we
rejoice
in those promises given to us and to the
faithful throughout the ages.
We praise you as Father, creator of all things;
we praise you as Son; redeemer of all things;
we praise you as Spirit, sustainer of all things.
May your presence fill our lives with joy and
expectation
of the coming of your kingdom, this day and
always. Amen.

A prayer for this Sunday (MWB)

Loving God,
through your Son you have called us to repent
of our sin,
to believe the good news,
and to celebrate the coming of your kingdom.
Grant that we may hear the call to
discipleship
and gladly proclaim the gospel to the waiting
world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

A prayer of confession

Loving God,
as Jesus commanded us,
we come before you to confess our sins;
for all those times we have knowingly let you
down
through selfishness, fear or weakness,
Lord have mercy; Lord forgive.
For all those times we have unknowingly let
you down
through carelessness or ignorance,
Lord have mercy; Lord forgive.

Let us know in our hearts
the truth of Jesus' promise to us;
to all who truly repent, your sins are forgiven.
Amen. Thanks be to God.

We now turn to the holy scriptures, seeking wisdom and guidance.

Read Jonah 3:1-5, 10 (NRSVA)

3 The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²‘Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.’ ³ So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Now read Mark 1:14-20 (NRSVA)

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’

¹⁶ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Sermon

I was sitting down to watch an old Midsomer Murders and just before it started, the continuity announcer gave a warning that the programme contained scenes of “violence and gore.” I thought, what would I be expecting? Surely the clue is in the title; it’s not as if the programme is called “Genteel afternoon teas.” How many people settle down and turn on the TV to watch Midsomer and then change their mind when the announcer warns of violence and gore?

Later I reflected on this further and realised that, for all of us, there are many occasions in life when what is happening should be clearly obvious and yet, somehow, we miss it until someone has the gumption to actually stand up and point out to us what, in hindsight, should have been so obvious to us. Looking back, this is not a new phenomenon. Reading the Bible, you will find many examples of this happening thousands of years ago.

Looking at today’s Old Testament reading, it seems clear to me that Jonah is being tasked by God’s to act as his continuity announcer. He is sent by God to Nineveh to warn the people of the city what is so obviously happening and what the consequences will be for their city.

The difference in this case, is that it isn’t a warning about something that someone else is doing. Jonah is sent to tell the people what they themselves are doing wrong. However true and obvious it might be, telling people that what they are doing is wrong is a risky business. If you tell people the truth that they don’t want to hear and you are in trouble. Consider, for example, what happened to Jesus in the synagogue in Galilee. (Matthew 4:14-30) That Jesus left unharmed is in itself a miracle. It was worse than this for Jonah because he was not just being sent to criticise the ordinary people. Just as Jesus went on to criticise the rulers of the people, so Jonah was sent to challenge the King; someone who literally held the power of life or death. If I’d been Jonah, I would probably have run too.

Returning to the text, Jonah is a short book and if you read it all then you will notice that it is mostly about Jonah and his relationship with God. Chapter three is the one chapter that isn’t. Chapter three is about the people of Nineveh and their response to the message which Jonah eventually brings. What is unexpected here, to Jonah and to us, is their response and we should ask ourselves, what is it that made the people believe in Jonah’s message and respond so quickly and willingly to it. Was it perhaps that he revealed to them what they already knew? Did they already know how outrageous and unacceptable their behaviour was but were refusing to admit it to themselves? How many were really surprised at what God, through Jonah, had to say to them?

From the way they responded, I can't help but think that most, if not all, of the people, including the king, knew that Nineveh was in trouble. Without God doing anything against them, Nineveh was already destroying itself. The people also knew that they needed to do something about this self-destruction. As many of us do, they probably all said to themselves, "I'll do something about it tomorrow," but Jonah was the one they needed to spur them into action. He was sent to warn them of God's impending wrath but his message was actually what prompted them to take the action they knew was needed and enabled them to save themselves from themselves.

The people of Nineveh were saved by God's grace but this was only given to them because they showed that they actually wanted to be saved. If they had not wanted to be saved and shown this by their actions, Jonah's words would have been true but ultimately useless and their destruction assured.

Prompted by God, Jonah proclaimed the consequence of not changing one's ways. In the New Testament, Jesus takes a very different approach. As we read in John 3:16 (NRSVUE), "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." While there are warnings of the consequences of failing to listen to God, the Gospel Jesus brings is about proclaiming the benefits of allowing oneself to be transformed and so saved by God's grace. It is not a message of destruction but of salvation. Jesus makes it clear that these are benefits which God offers to all. So, in today's Gospel reading, we see Jesus beginning to gather the followers he will need in order to share this good news with the world.

Jesus reveals to the world that each and every one of us needs to be saved from destruction and he reveals to the world that, by God's grace, each and every one of us can be saved from destruction but our salvation does require one more thing. God does not force his grace upon us. We need to be willing to respond by accepting that grace which we are offered while there is still time.

Look back to Nineveh. The people realised that they needed to change and, having

realised this, they also desired to change. Having shown this realisation, God responded by giving them the opportunity to change. Despite Jonah's annoyance at God, there would have been no point in his visiting Nineveh if God was not intending to give the people the opportunity to change. God sent Jonah because it was not too late for them to change; almost too late but not quite.

As it was then, so it is still; however late it might seem it is never too late to change. The book of Jonah shows us that God never closes the door. Jesus' offer of salvation remains open to all; all anyone needs to do is say, yes, and they will have that opportunity.

Thanks be to God.

Read, listen to or sing "Have you heard God's voice" (StF 662)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzJr9T5JYRU>

- 1 Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
though the way be rough and narrow?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?*

- 2 Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground
when the crowds are turning violent?
- 3 In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
will you share your faith with the faithless?
- 4 Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
and believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

*We will walk the path that will cost us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to us
the disciples of tomorrow.*

Jacqueline G. Jones

***Prayers of the Church, the world and for
one another:***

Almighty God,
we have heard your voice and we seek you
follow your call
but we know that we cannot do so unaided.
So we come to you, seeking your help
and trusting in you to meet us according to
our needs.
We pray for vision for all the faithful
that we might see the path you have set
before us.
Strengthen us to follow that path
that the world might see and respond
to the grace you offer
through Jesus Christ, our Saviour.
Guide the rulers of the world
that they might see the vision of your Kingdom
which is so much greater
than any human endeavours can achieve.
May they be inspired to seek your Kingdom
and be guided in ways of peace, hope and
justice
for all peoples.
We pray for all who are suffering
but especially remembering all who suffer
through human injustice.
Strengthen and sustain them according to
their needs
that they might know that they are each
loved and cherished by you.
We pray for ourselves that through us
those we meet might see your love and turn
to you.
These things we ask in the name of our
Saviour
who has taught us to pray:

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

***Read, listen to or sing "A charge to keep I
have" (StF658)***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHSEmU5Y0Sg>

- 1 A charge to keep I have:
a God to glorify;
a never-dying soul to save,
and fit it for the sky;
- 2 To serve the present age,
my calling to fulfil;
O may it all my powers engage
to do my Master's will!
- 3 Arm me with jealous care,
as in your sight to live;
and O your servant, Lord, prepare
a strict account to give!
- 4 Help me to watch and pray,
and on yourself rely,
so shall I not my trust betray,
nor love within me die.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

And so, as this time of worship ends; go
remembering God's faithfulness to you and
striving to be his faithful followers. And may
his blessing be with you always. Amen.

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