

Worship for Sunday 28th June 2020.

Words of welcome by Rev Andrew Farrington noting that this is Conference Sunday and thus is 18 years since his Ordination. Acknowledgment that ordinations are not taking place today at Conference or within the Church of England. Holding Rev. Alison Wagner and Rev. Sophie Cowen in prayer.

Today's theme is focusing upon a Christian response to those who are marginalised, abused or experiencing discrimination.

Hymn:

Come, all you vagabonds,
Come all you 'don't belongs'
Winners and losers,
Come, people like me.
Come all you travellers
Tired from the journey,
Come wait a while, stay a while,
Welcomed you'll be.

Come those who worry
'Bout houses and money,
And all those who don't have
A care in the world;
From every station
And orientation,
The helpless, the hopeless,
The young and the old.

Come all you questioners
Looking for answers,
And searching for reasons
And sense in it all;
Come all you fallen,
And come all you broken,
Find strength for your body
And food for your soul.

Come all believers
And dreamers and schemers,
And come all you restless
Just searching for home;
Movers and shakers
And givers and takers,
The happy, the sad
And the lost and alone.

Come to the feast,
There is room at the table.
Come let us meet in this place.
With the King of all kindness
Who welcomes us in,
With the wonder of love,
And the power of grace.
The wonder of the love,
And the power of grace.

Come self-sufficient
With wearied ambition,
And come those who feel
At the end of the road.
Fiery debaters
And religion haters,
Accusers, abusers,
The hurt and ignored.

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Matthew 10:40-42 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)

⁴⁰ 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous;

⁴² and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.'

Sermon

‘Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones... will not lose their reward’.

The New Revised Standard Version of Matthews gospel entitles this section of Jesu’s teaching as “coming persecutions”. Jesus is preparing his disciples for a journey of experiencing persecution resulting from their by being alongside, and speaking for, those who are marginalised. To do this they are to go to the cities, the places of power, and challenge those with in places of leadership. Jesus acknowledges that this is not to be an easy journey. He prefaces the passage we have heard with a call that the disciples will need to “take up their cross and follow”. By doing so they may be found worthy of a place in the Kingdom of God. They are asked to be alongside the abused, the marginalised, those suffering prejudice, and to encounter persecution for the sake of others.

Jesus is explaining to his disciples what signs they may receive to that His message has been received understood and responded to. The offering to them of just a single cup of cold water will be a sign of change of heart of hearers.

The response is about welcoming. To welcome Jesus into your heart, is to show care, respect in valuing others, and to be good neighbours. Yes - even the giving a single cup of cold water to a thirsty child is a hopeful sign of a changing of attitude. This simple, uncostly, act of grace will be the first step in acceptance of the Gospel message of ‘good news for all’.

Having instructed the 12 disciples, Jesus went on to teach and proclaim his message to the cities. The message of the need for repentance, turning around, rethinking values, change, renewal, obedience to God's laws, and caring for all. Will this become our reawakened new-normal?

How did you feel as you sang the hymn “Come all you vagabond's”? I took a risk. This popular song is not found even in Singing the Faith. For all its jollity and calling to all, there remains some anguish about the final sentence of the last verse. And this is with good cause. We have sung “Come fervent debaters and religion haters, accusers, abuses, the hurt and ignored”. A challenging list of those who might be welcomed at Christ table? Yet, they can be welcomed when they respond by declaring ‘Jesus, is Lord’.

Maybe we find the order too challenging: “accusers, abusers the hurt and ignored”. It makes for good poetical scanning but, really, can we put abusers before those who have been hurt? Jesus often offers a topsy-turvy vision of God's kingdom: the first shall be last, the least shall be the greatest. Surely, we are called to first help the abused and then to change the attitude of the abuser. The Good Samaritan does not walk on past the abused but takes the risk of intervening and restoring well-being by showing radical hospitality in a place of danger and uncertainty.

Abuse can take many forms. From physical harm, slavery, and wilful neglect, to prejudice, racial hatred, name calling, and poor institutional patterns of behaviour. These past weeks have highlighted many inequalities in our society. All are abuse in some form. The significantly higher impact of a virus on Black, Asian and Ethnic Minorities; the plight of those in poor housing and marginalised communities; the inequality of provision; abusive relationships; the challenge of home schooling without adequate resource; the shame of zero- hours contracts; and the risks taken by poorly paid workers. And, of course, the reawakening of the painful reality that discrimination and prejudice remains prevalent through society and its institutions (even in our churches). We are called to respond. To offer even just a cup of cold water in love, in faith, and in humility to those in greatest need and to the abused.

The Methodist Conference will this week consider “God for All: a strategy for evangelism and growth”. Great hope here. Yet, can we claim to be a place of welcome without first asking ourselves if truly if all are truly welcomed and valued. Do we too quickly judge people by their gender, race, sexuality, ability, and faith? Are there still practises and endemic cultures that prevent everyone from finding an equal voice and

place? If not, what signs do we have that all are equally valued regardless of gender, race, sexuality, ability, and faith? It is not hard to imagine that, in all innocence, we have failed to recognise our own inherent prejudices. With eyes-wide-open, we are still failing to offer even “a cup of cold water” to all.

Repentance and reformation are the characteristics and key principles for Christian life. They are a starting point in re-formation of relationships. The abusers are called to acknowledge their wrongdoing, repent: turn around, and start again. In the desiring for a newness of relationship, the abused must be noticed, heard, understood, and cared for. Unless we are prepared to hear and learn we cannot move towards a place of repentance and on to a time for healing and reconciliation. Restoring the quality of relationships and the valuing of diversity is the sign of a Christian community. How have we let people become marginalised, ghettoed, ignored, and treated differently? How can we tolerate such inequality of wealth power and privilege?

For Jesus warns, it is better that you place a millstone around your neck and jump into a lake, than to cause suffering to just one of His little ones. So, the teaching is clear: in the name of Jesus, by the grace of God, and through the power of the Holy Spirit we can, should, and will work to bring justice, equality, and righteousness for all. Amen.

A prayer reflection

It's difficult to live with uncertainty.
However bad a situation,
knowing what you have to face
means that you can start coming to terms with it,
facing your fears,
planning your strategy.
When the 'big picture' is too big or too blurred
and indistinct,
it's easier to focus on small details,
to try to control what you can.

The world has changed,
how does that affect our living in the meantime?
How do I need to change?
How do I want to change?
Is it possible to live each day as a new
opportunity,
while knowing that it feels the same as
yesterday?

I need your help, God,
to listen for you in the clamour of voices calling
for my attention,
to focus on you in the midst of competing
priorities,
to trust you in this time of uncertainty.
Amen.

Jesus, when we receive you and believe in your name

Jesus, when we receive you and believe in your
name,
You give us power to become children of God.

When we are lonely,
help us to remember
We are the children of God.

When we are scared,
help us to remember
We are the children of God.

When we are hurting,
help us to remember
We are the children of God.

When we are sad,
help us to remember
We are the children of God.

Fill us with the power of your love,
Now and always.
Amen.

Spirit of fire, warm us with your everlasting love

Spirit of fire, warm us with your everlasting love.

Spirit of wind, blow away hurtful words that
damage relationships.

Spirit of earthquake, carry away our fears.

Spirit of breeze, restore our peace with your
calming breath.

Spirit of the living God, speak to us in words
we can understand.

Amen.

HYMN

Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.
Break me, melt me,
mould me, fill me.
Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.

Daniel Iverson (1890–1977)

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We go in peace to love and to serve the Lord.

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, amen.

Rev. Andrew Farrington