

Circuit Lent Service 21st February 6pm

Joel 2:12 and 13 Read by Chris Lusher (Circuit Steward)

Welcome to you all for this Circuit Service which marks the first Sunday in Lent. As a call to worship I will read from some words from the book of Joel.

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

For us to return to our God we need Jesus at the centre of our lives, let us sing that now.

Jesus be the centre (StF 447)

*Jesus, be the centre Be my source, be my light, Jesus
Jesus, be the centre Be my hope, be my song, Jesus*

Be the fire in my heart Be the wind in these sails Be the reason that I live Jesus, Jesus

*Jesus, be my vision Be my path, be my guide, Jesus
Jesus, be the centre Be my source, be my light, Jesus*

Be the fire in my heart Be the wind in these sails Be the reason that I live Jesus, Jesus

Be the fire in my heart Be the wind in these sails Be the reason that I live Jesus, Jesus

Lent liturgy Lead by Rev. Pauline Crispin (Circuit superintendent) Please respond with the words in **BOLD** type

“Brothers and sisters since the very earliest times in the history of our church, followers of Jesus have observed with great devotion the time of our Lord’s passion, death and resurrection. It is the custom of the worldwide Christian Church to prepare for this by a season of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

In the name of Christ, therefore I invite you to observe this Holy season of Lent, by prayer, self-denial and charitable giving; by self-examination and repentance, by forgiving and reconciling relationships that have been broken; by reading and meditating on God’s Holy Scripture.” *Pause*

“Jesus, Saviour of the world, come to us in your mercy.” **We look to you to save and help us.**

“By your cross and your life laid down you set your people free.” **We look to you to save and help us.**

“When they were ready to perish you saved your disciples.” **We look to you to come to our help.**

“In the greatness of your mercy loose us from our chains.” **Forgive the sins of your people.**

“Come now and dwell with us, Lord Jesus.” **Hear our prayer and be with us always.**

“And when you come again in your glory.” **Make us to be one with you and to share the life of your kingdom. Amen.**

When the music fades (StF 427)

*When the music fades All is stripped away And I simply come
Longing just to bring Something that's of worth That will bless your heart*

*I'll bring You more than a song For a song in itself Is not what You have required
You search much deeper within Through the way things appear You're looking into my heart*

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship And it's all about You It's all about You, Jesus
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it When it's all about You It's all about You, Jesus*

*King of endless worth No one could express How much you deserve
Though I'm weak and poor All I have is yours Every single breath*

*I'll bring You more than a song For a song in itself Is not what You have required
You search much deeper within Through the way things appear You're looking into my heart*

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship And it's all about You It's all about You, Jesus
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it When it's all about You It's all about You, Jesus*

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship And it's all about You It's all about You, Jesus
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it When it's all about You It's all about You, Jesus*

Matthew 6: 1-6 and 16-21 Read by Chris Slade (Circuit Local Preacher)

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ²“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁵“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then our Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

¹⁶“When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Preaching (Led by Rev. Martin Keenan - Circuit Minister)

As we look at this passage I want to look at one verse in particular (Matt 6:3). In this passage Jesus is talking about practicing piety. I think it is a wonderful phrase “practicing piety” when did you last practice your piety do you do it often, have you got the hang of it yet or are you still practicing? Not a phrase we often use and not one I have heard preached upon. Jesus tells us not to practice our piety before other people so that they will see us and praise us, do it secretly He say so secretly that your left hand will not know what you right hand is doing or for those of you like me so that you right hand will not know what you left hand is doing. That is easier in today’s society than it was in Jesus’ day because we have pockets and you can put one hand in your pocket while the other hand is practicing its piety then you can alternate and put the other hand in the other pocket. Don’t we just love literal interpretations? This passage is found in the Sermon on the Mount and this is the upside down teaching of Jesus found in Matthew (ch 5-7) and that sermon begins with the Beatitude this is not what we should do, this describes what a Christian is. This is what it means to be a Christian, this is how a Christian lives, how a Christian acts and how they behave we are not trying to gain a reward. If we are following Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit this is who we are and that is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about these are the blessing for the people who live like this and the rewards for the people who live like it and the values were the opposite of what the Jewish people were expecting from the Messiah in the first

century Israel and they are the opposite of what is expected in our society 21st Century today. The sermon continues with the same revolutionary approach to live in discipleship until we get to this verse Matt 6:3 which is the one I am looking at. We live in age of celebrities, an age of honours and recognition. We like to be remembered and recognised one of those things we used to ask in youth groups and it is a long time since I've been in a youth group but what would you like to be remember for, what would like to be engraved on your tombstone, what would you like people to say when they think about you, how would you like to be remembered? I remembered getting into trouble one time as a minister because I did not recognise an important person in one of my churches which cause a lot of difficulties because I had not recognise how important he was so when I moved to my next circuit at my welcome service I said in my opening could all you important people, in the circuit, make yourselves known to me in case I don't recognise who you are; it kind of helped. In my first circuit when I went on holiday I put the circuit treasure's name and phone number on my answer machine, it was a single minister circuit so there was no other ministers. When one of the circuit stewards found out they contacted all the others and they were really annoyed with me when I got back because I had not put their name on the answer machine, they wanted to be the ones that got the important position of filling in for me when I was away. So I probably have offended someone in this circuit by not recognising their importance, maybe there are no important people in this circuit, maybe you are unique I am grateful that church stewards wear badges so that I can see who is important when I visit a church. Now everything I have just said is true, unfortunately, everything I have just said happened in Christian churches and these are just a few examples that popped to mind I was going to talk about the New Years Honours list, or the Queen's birthday Honours list or honorary degrees handed out by universities to morally unfit people but Paul tells us this (1Corr 5: 12-13a). So it is not for us to judge people outside the Church. We are to judge people in the Church whatever goes on outside is, in a sense none of our business, God will judge those people, but if it happens inside the Church we are to judge. People like to quote what Jesus said "judge not, less you will be judged yourself". He is not saying do not judge just be careful when you judge other people, that they do not judge you with the same standard. Paul says here that we are to judge people inside the church. I stand here with a title, Reverend, a dog collar and a string of letters after my name so I recognise the irony and understandable the accusation of hypocrisy. I am drawing attention to myself in everything I am and do but Jesus is not saying don't give he is saying don't draw attention to yourself don't expect people to tread you differently because of what you do so while it is understandable that you could accuse me of hypocrisy it is not actually true,. I don't try and draw attention to myself. Jesus is specifically talking about giving to the poor and when we give in our weekly offerings it is an offering, it is not an offertory or a collection, God does not need us to have a whip round, it is an offering we are not giving to the poor we are giving so that we can meet our bills, so that we can pay our assessments, we are giving because we give to the Church but either way when we give in Church do it secretly. Jesus says when we give to the poor, notice he says when we give not if we give, again this Sermon on the Mount is telling us how Christians live not how Christians should live, this is what we do as Christians, not what we should do as Christians, Jesus assumes we will give he tells us how to give don't tell anyone, don't tell anyone how many charities you have direct debits set up for, don't tell anyone how much money you are giving away. I know some Christians who have been honoured with MBEs and CBE and inevitably some good work is public but putting letters after you name for ever after and insisting that people use them when they address you is not what Jesus is talking about here in fact it is quite the opposite and as unfair as that sounds look why Jesus says it (Matt 6:4 and 6:18b) compare this to verse 2 then ask the question of yourself whose opinion really matters to , who am I doing it for whose praise do I want, whose pat on the back do I want. In everything you do are you trying to please your heavenly Father or are you trying to stroke your own ego this is where the Sermon on the Mount turns the values of this world upside down. It does not matter what anyone else thinks about you, it really does not matter, those honours and rewards count for nothing in the end there are no titles in the new Jerusalem, no clerical collars no degrees

honoured or earned, no knighthoods, no other distinctions in the new Jerusalem, but the reward of the heavenly Father, that is worth aiming for. Jesus went through a lot of things including the cross and he endured the cross because He could see what was coming afterwards (Hebrews 12:2), what got Jesus through the crucifixion what helped Him in the garden of Gethsemane was the joy of what was coming next, the reward of sitting next to His heavenly Father. We live in a world that loves titles, honours, recognition but we are followers of a crucified God, our values should be different, our hopes should be different, our motivations should be different so let me recommend that you spend some time reading the Sermon on the Mount in as many different versions as you can and ask yourself if this is how a Christian lives am I really a Christian a genuine a follower of Jesus

Prayers: Led by Colin Besant (Circuit Local Preacher)

As Your people, Lord, we pray that You continue to guide us, To equip us and to inspire us. And that we might be listening for You, open to Your calling, Ready to follow You, eager to obey. So that our practice might match what we profess. That Your image might be seen in us, In the things we say, and the lives we lead, And in the influence we have on others. That You may be glorified in us. Lord, in Your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

We pray for our world - a world rich with beauty and yet marred by sin and currently ravaged by the pandemic. Lord, we pray for the world leaders, the decision makers and their advisors as they balance the needs of health and the economy. We pray again for those whose lives have been turned upside down during the past year because of the pandemic. Some have been bereaved by it; some are still suffering physical after effects of it; some have lost their livelihood as a consequence of lockdown whilst others have had to cope with extra work And we remember before You those we know whose lives have been impacted by it. Lord, we pray for Your hurting world. Lord, in Your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

We pray for Your Church – for fellow believers spread across all nations that we may be consistent, true to our calling. That we may stay close to You in thought and purpose That we may be bold for You in our witness. We pray for our Circuit as a part of that Church For our ministers and lay-workers and for the different assemblies that make up our Circuit. We thank You Lord for our Church families, the people with whom we share life's journey. *(A few moments quiet as we imagine ourselves in our "normal" seat on a Sunday morning and thinking of the people who, up until about a year ago, would be around us, worshipping with us, naming them in our hearts, thanking God for them and asking His blessing on them)*

And so, Lord, we pray for each other. For every member of every church in our Circuit that we may be blessed and that we might, each one of us, be a means of blessing to others, to each other and to the wider community. Lord, in Your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Seek ye first (StF 254)

*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God And His righteousness
And all these things shall be added unto you
Allelu Alleluia*

*Ask and it shall be given unto you Seek and ye shall find
Knock and it shall be opened unto you
Allelu Alleluia
Al - le - lu - ia Al - le - lu - ia Al - le - lu...*

Blessing from Phillip Dixon - Circuit Minister

Christ who we proclaim and follow, give us grace to grow in holiness, strength and courage to deny ourselves and take up our cross every day and conviction to repent of all that that does not glorify you. The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Spirit be with you and remain with you now and always Amen.