

THE SUNDAY SUPPLEMENT

14th June 2020 – 1st Sunday after Trinity / Proper 6

Welcome to this week's *Sunday Supplement*. For those who would like to, a service of Holy Communion is available on our YouTube channel from 7am Sunday.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMSD6j4ngi9rCe7kzY66Xfw>

The video includes an opportunity to share in the prayer for Spiritual Communion which is set out on page 4 of the *Supplement*.

READINGS & COLLECT

Exodus 19:2-8a

Psalms 100

Romans 5:1-8

Matthew 9:35 – 10:8

*O God,
the strength of all those who put their trust in you,
mercifully accept our prayers
and, because through the weakness of our mortal nature
we can do no good thing without you,
grant us the help of your grace,
that in the keeping of your commandments
we may please you both in will and deed;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

Amen.

SUNDAY MESSAGE

This message is also available as the sermon in our recorded communion service.

“The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few.” It’s a complaint which I suspect that the church has readily understood, and made, for much of its history.

It’s tempting to think of this teaching as a sort of agricultural parable, in terms of what was called in the past ‘the harvest of souls’. There are a great many people out there who do not yet believe. Those who do believe, and who can reach them and convince them, are few. This is part of what Jesus means.

Jesus is prompted to this teaching by his observation of the crowds. We are told that he has compassion for them, because he sees that they are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. The crowd, of course, is simply a shifting, changing mass of humanity. It is composed of individuals. Jesus is looking at humanity and he is moved. The human race needs shepherding, he says. If only there were more good shepherds.

I like to imagine what I would make of scriptural passages if I were an absolutely convinced atheist. Today, I don’t think that I would disagree that the human race needs shepherding. We face many challenges at present, many with a strong moral dimension. We need guidance as much as we ever did.

It’s worth looking behind the translation of this passage. The Greek word which is translated as saying that Jesus ‘has pity on’ or ‘feels compassion for’ the crowd, really has a much more visceral sense than the standard translations reveal. It is the verbal form of the noun used in Acts 1:18. That noun is euphemistically rendered as ‘inward parts’. I am sure you are familiar with Acts 1:18. It’s the verse that tells us what happens to Judas after he purchases a field with the ill-gotten gains of his betrayal: “*falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.*” It’s that word ‘bowels’ which is connected with the way Jesus is said to feel. So the word has the sense of being sick to one’s stomach. When Jesus sees the crowd, he is not just mildly perturbed. He doesn’t just think, ‘they could do with a few pointers in the right direction.’ His divine insight into their needs leads to the most extreme of emotional, of human, responses: he looks at humanity, as individuals and collectively, and, we might say, he finds their plight ‘gut wrenching’.

I am sure that you understand well what it is to feel sympathy for others. Try to think of a time when that sympathy was gut wrenching. We are not told anything specific about this crowd or anyone in it, so we are drawn to the conclusion that, from the perfectly loving perspective of God, the human condition, that of the ordinary first-century Israelite, is gut-wrenchingly sad to see.

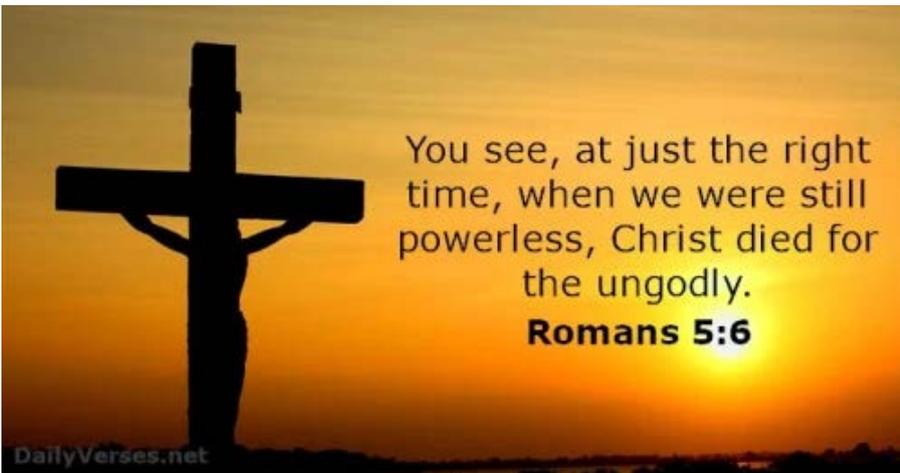
That ought to make us think. What if Jesus saw you or me in the crowd? Are we such that, viewed from a state of perfection, one might feel a gut-wrenching sorrow for us? How much more sorry might Jesus feel for those whose lives are not blessed with the material things, with the safety and security, that our lives generally are

Even if we do not feel that gut-wrenching sorrow for ourselves, for whom ought we to feel it?

If we don't feel it, is that failure to feel sorrow itself something about which Jesus might be sorry?

What does Jesus see in the crowd? They are just ordinary people. He sees a problem somewhat beyond what language can describe: they are troubled by things that they have no power to escape. It is not that they are wicked, rather that they lack direction. They do not know and understand what is good, how to live correctly, in order that they might do so.

This is something that I think is true of our own age too. I think that what Jesus is seeing is something of what Chesterton was thinking about, when he said that *"when men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything."* If I was an atheist, I might object



to the God part of that aphorism, but I think I might agree that once people are set adrift from a coherent source of authority – moral or intellectual – the result is not necessarily that they alight on a coherent alternative, but that they start picking and mixing. Or giving up altogether. They find themselves adrift, even if they don't realise it. That is true of faith, of politics, of morality. I think it is part of what is behind what we call 'post-truth' society. We are now so independent-minded, so libertarian, that absolute and objective truth, truth that can be trusted, is becoming distant.

A glimpse of where we have come to can be found by listening closely to political or journalistic discourse on both sides of the Atlantic and indeed elsewhere. Another microcosm of how we treat each other, and how inconsistent and unmoored our views are becoming, can be found on Twitter and other social media. We daily witness both the uncritical agreement of supporters of a particular view, and also vitriolic, ill-informed, sometimes downright dishonest opposition. There are many signs that worry me deeply, about the direction our society is taking.

We might say, "I will ignore politicians" or "I don't read that newspaper" or "I don't use Twitter". But that will not save us. Because none of us is an island. We are all part of the crowd. As Christians, we believe fundamentally in living in relationship with others. Things will not get better if we cut ourselves off. Other people will go on engaging and many will be convinced, sometimes by things that are very wrong indeed. We cannot all withdraw from the world. John Stuart Mill said, *"Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing."*

Jesus advised his disciples to, *"ask the Lord to send workers"* and so we too are called to pray: to pray for workers in the harvest field. But latter part of today's passage shows that our responsibility is also more immediate. Jesus's next step is to call his apostles and give them authority. Jesus, we are told, had gone *"throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction."* That's what Jesus does. And when, in the passage immediately following, he calls and authorises his disciples, the instructions he gives them are almost exactly the same *"he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction."*

We are to understand from this that true followers of Christ follow in his footsteps. They seek to do as he did. They are to go into the world to teach and to heal. To right what is going wrong and to heal the wounds. We are called not just to pray for labourers, but each one of us is called to labour in the harvest field ourselves, because that is what Jesus did.

There are crowds in our world at present. They are protesting harassment, in the form of racism, that has

been going on for centuries. I saw its impact when I was at school; I saw it at university; I saw it in my previous job. You will have seen it too. We have all seen racism; we have all known its impact. Even if by chance we have not, we will have known sufficient discrimination or ill-treatment at some point in our lives to find the empathy needed to look on the victims of racism and feel our gut wrenched. We should be unsurprised to find that Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on black and minority ethnic communities, an impact which seems to be nothing to do with tiny genetic differences in the population. It is the result of social, economic, health and educational disadvantage. And when people of one ethnicity are, on average, served less well than another, that is racism.

Some of the crowds we now see, seem helpless to avoid violence and vandalism. A minority of the population has always looked for an excuse for violence, and it is easy to get away with it in a crowd. Football crowds were, especially in the past, a favoured cover for such people.

If Jesus were looking at these crowds, I think he would weep for them and for their cause. He would see a few wicked people, taking advantage, but mostly he would see a crowd that was harassed, and helpless. Helpless because, even though we all know that there is racism, we all know that disadvantage follows from racism, we all agree that racism is wrong – nevertheless we have not done enough about it. We have not sought to bring it to an end once and for all. Those of us who do not to fall into a minority group which is the subject of discrimination should repent of our failure to take active steps to bring such discrimination to an end.

In the *Wednesday Supplement* this week, I talked a little about the issue of statues in public places. There is a legitimate debate to be had about that, but I think we need to be careful not to be misled. Statues are a visible sign and a focus, but they are very, very far from being the only, the worst, or the most immediate aspect of racism. As a society, we will have to have a sensible discussion about what we do about the commemoration of great people who nevertheless partook of the racism of their time. Amongst other things we are going to find that to be human is to err. And we will need to remember that historians in 200 years will probably look back on our time – and they will no doubt find plenty to criticise by the standards of their day. I very much doubt that we are living in an age of exemplary moral excellence.

As Christians, Jesus calls us to look on the crowd, on every crowd, on the whole of humanity, and recognise **how** they are harassed and helpless. He calls us to plunge in now, bringing healing.

In our Exodus reading, we see God extending his promise of grace to a chosen people. In the New Testament reading, we find that this promise is extended to all of us. We need not despair of our own complicity in the evils of the world, for Christ died for the ungodly, and for the weak; not for the perfect and the strong. If there is sin in the crowd then we must own our own part in it, and find forgiveness and understanding. We must look past sin and recognise the harassment and helplessness.

We must go out, proclaiming the good news: for those crowds, that humanity, is the harvest – and we few are the workers.

YOUTH GROUP

I'm pleased to report that the Meeting Point Youth Group got underway again this week, with assistance from the video-conferencing app Zoom.

If you know any young people at Secondary School who would benefit from a weekly catch-up, please get in touch: contact details are at the top of page 1.

NOTICES

If you need help that you can't get elsewhere, no matter what your age or circumstances, you can email duddoncommunity@outlook.com In Kirkby, you can phone Stephen Tudway (01229) 715259 or Linda Dean (01229) 889630. In Broughton and the valleys you can phone Stephen Tudway (01229) 715259 or Selwyn Wright (01229) 716797.

CLOSING PRAYER

*Eternal Father,
we thank you for nourishing us
with these heavenly gifts:
may our communion strengthen us in faith,
build us up in hope,
and make us grow in love;
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

You may wish to set aside a space for prayer in front of a cross and/or candle, in a part of the house which is calm and comfortable.

The Act of Spiritual Communion is best used at the time of normal church services, or as a personal response after listening to a broadcast or livestreamed service.

Guidance appears in italics. You may wish to say aloud the words in bold type.

Introduction

Begin by making the sign of the cross and thinking of those who might otherwise be sitting around you in church.



**In the name of the Father,
And of the Son,
And of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Reflection

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

**Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you
in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.**

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon us, pardon and deliver us from all your sins, confirm and strengthen us in all goodness, and keep us in life eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Word of God

Read one or more passages of scripture, perhaps the readings set for the day. Today's readings can be found listed earlier in this Sunday Supplement. You may wish to read the sermon.

Prayer

Begin with the Collect. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to the needs of the world, our community, family and friends and to the prayers you ought to offer for them.

Spend time in silence to reflect on the issues raised in the readings or the sermon and apply them to your own life.

End with the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven... or

Our Father in heaven...

Prayer for Communion

This prayer may also be used at the appropriate point while watching a live or recorded service of Holy Communion.

**Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day.
Amen.**

(After the prayer of St Richard of Chichester)

Closing prayers

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory. Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us, so we and all your children shall be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name; through Christ our Lord.

**The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life. Amen.**