

THE SUNDAY SUPPLEMENT

5th July 2020 – 4th Sunday after Trinity / Proper 9

Welcome to the first Sunday Supplement as we return very carefully to church. Please observe hygiene and distancing rules for your own safety and that of others.

Collect

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that with you as our ruler and guide we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not our hold on things eternal; grant this, heavenly Father, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Zechariah 9:9-12

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
¹⁰ He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the warhorse from Jerusalem;
and the battle-bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
¹¹ As for you also, because of the blood of my
covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
¹² Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.

Romans 7:15-25a

¹⁵ I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³ but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-end

¹⁶ 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,
¹⁷ "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn."
¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; ¹⁹ the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'
²⁵ At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.
²⁸ 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Post-communion

*Eternal God,
comfort of the afflicted and healer of the broken,
you have fed us at the table of life and hope:
teach us the ways of gentleness and peace,
that all the world may acknowledge
the kingdom of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

SUNDAY MESSAGE

“Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you”. These are some of the earliest words I remember from church. I suspect I heard them first around 1979 and they have stuck with me ever since. I know that they come from distant memory, because the translation, particularly the word travail rather than labour, is very unusual. These were words that stuck. Comfortable words. Comforting words. The sort of words I think that we need to hear today. I remember sometimes thinking as a child that I was heavy laden and that I wanted something of this refreshment. I’m not sure what travails really afflicted me when I was young. When I look back, the world I knew then seems a great deal more innocent, a great deal less worrying than the world I know today.

Today’s Gospel reading is in two parts. Between them are verses 20 to 24, the woes which Jesus pronounces on the unrepentant cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. It’s important to remind ourselves that Jesus wasn’t always gentle, meek and mild. He sometimes turned over tables and frequently dispensed very harsh warnings. I hesitate to speak a word against Charles Wesley, but if we were choosing some words to sum up Jesus, I would have said that he spoke truth unhesitatingly, and healed freely, not that he was gentle, meek or mild.

The first half of our passage, the parable of petulant children, is a good example of this firm but fair teaching. Jesus compares the whole of the present generation, ours as well as his own, to these children. We recognise their behaviour immediately. They play the flute and wail, and then complain that other children don’t want to dance or mourn. The children insist on doing one thing, their own thing, and then complain that other people refuse to play along. I’m sure we have all experienced that behaviour in others, and in ourselves, in adulthood as well as in childhood.

We all want the world to be as we want it. But farmers in adjoining fields cannot pray for rain and dry on the same day and both expect to be satisfied. This conundrum is a natural part of human existence. Like many of our damaging tendencies, it has value when under control. Self-respect really requires us to have a firm idea of what we want, not just to be a doormat or a slave to the wishes of others. But respect for others in its turn, requires us to remember that their self-respect will be pushing them their way, and that true

justice requires us to come together; it requires both give and take.

The children in the parable are not just a mirror in which we see our own behaviour. They also reveal our attitude towards God. We tend to have our own clear, personal goals, our own views, our own preferences. We want to live our lives how we choose. But our goals and views are often inconsistent with the goals and views of others, whom we fail to love; and they very seldom have as their starting point what God has commanded. So we fail to love him too. We often end up convincing ourselves that God wants exactly what we want. This is what the Rich Young Ruler did, willingly following the commandments, right up to the crunch, where he was asked straightforwardly to give up his wealth. We don’t know whether he managed that.

In our passage, Jesus talks about opposition to John the Baptist and himself. It is another example of the world wanting its own way. People complained that John the Baptist was too austere, that his example demanded too much sacrifice. Then people complained that Jesus was too generous and joyful, changing water into wine and socialising with people they dismissed as sinners. This may be a message about our inconsistency or hypocrisy, but I don’t think it’s necessarily the same people doing the complaining against both John and Jesus. The people who were inclined generously applauded Jesus and railed against John. The people who wanted to see austerity in their religious leaders applauded John and railed against Jesus. We tend to criticise what we don’t like and applaud what we do like. If that is all we do, then we live in the sort of echo chamber that social media encourages.

Christians need to remember that both John and Jesus come from God. God is not about one simple thing, he’s not a soundbite, his message consists of more than a few words. God is not simplicity or complexity, poverty or plenty. God is about justice and about balance and sharing. The narrow way that is the right way.

When we go by our own will, we are very likely to end up resenting John, or Jesus, or both. That’s why Jesus says that the true knowledge of the Father has been revealed to the innocent. He isn’t criticising wisdom: he has already said that there is true wisdom, and it is vindicated by its deeds. When Jesus talks about things being hidden from the wise and intelligent, he isn’t criticising those qualities. He is criticising our tendency to think that we possess wisdom in great measure, that

we have nothing to learn from others, that we have made our minds up already. The cleverest people I have ever known have known very well where their own expertise runs out. The truly knowledgeable know the limits of their own knowledge. They know that their understanding is not complete, their judgment imperfect, their opinions provisional. They anticipate that new information may change their mind a little, or even a lot. The truly intelligent are confident in their own opinions because their opinions are based on sound information and careful reasoning, but they also have the humility necessary to amend their views when they have good reason.

At its best, the Church of England shows that sort of intelligence, that provisionality of opinion that accommodates many views on hard questions to which it doesn't necessarily know for sure the right answer. I leave you to judge how often the Church of England is at its best.

This is the sort of self-awareness and humility that Paul shows in speaking to the Romans. For me, these really are comfortable words. To quote from the New Living Translation "*I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.*" I often feel that. It is comforting to find so great a disciple of our Lord as Paul wrestling with the same problem. And his response, his humility, is faithful to the Gospel as we have heard it today. He admits that he struggles to act for the best. He is aware of the limits of his own understanding and ability.

The prophet Zechariah describes the ideal King in terms of this same humility. The righteous person of power is humble, riding on a donkey; but it doesn't stop him from being powerful: cutting off the chariot, the warhorse and the bow. The prophet says that it is possible to live, indeed possible to rule triumphantly and gloriously, in a way that is humble – in a way that is not so self-confident as to be blind to the possibility of being wrong, heedless of the views of others or of God. It is a lesson that the rulers of the nations today ought to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest.

Our Gospel concludes with Jesus' assurance that his message is not another burden. Thank goodness, because we live in a time of burdens enough. Jesus does not ask us to be perfect, he does not ask us to have all the answers, indeed he positively discourages us from the illusion that we might have. He accepts us and forgives us when, like Paul, we do what is wrong and fail to do what is right. He asks us to rest in him. He asks us not to judge for ourselves, not to run the world,

or our lives, after our own scheme. He asks us to put on his yoke, the yoke of the humble in heart. In doing so we give up the obligation and the illusion of self-sufficiency, we give up the desire to control or manipulate circumstances or others. The right way, the Christian way, is one in which we give up trying to call the tune.

NOTICES

Mobility scooter

Clive Moody (Broughton) has asked me to draw to your attention that he has a mobility scooter, no longer required by a relative, for which he would like to find a good home. It is in good running order, and recently had a new battery fitted.

Duddon Community Support

Duddon Community Support continues to be available to help those who need assistance during the lockdown which they cannot obtain elsewhere.

Home Communion and visits

From this weekend a certain amount of indoor visiting is possible. If you would appreciate a visit, or home communion, at any time, please let me know.

Those who are shielding will still be taking precautions, but I am pleased to visit, or hold a home communion service, outdoors and at a safe distance, weather permitting.

Contact details

stephen@kdbchurches.com

01229 715259

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

Compassion and forgiveness belong to the Lord our God, though we have rebelled against him. Let us then renounce our wilfulness and ask his mercy by confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

**God of mercy,
we acknowledge that we are all sinners.
We turn from the wrong that we have thought
and said
and done,
and are mindful of all that we have failed to do.
For the sake of Jesus, who died for us,
forgive us for all that is past,
and help us to live each day
in the light of Christ our Lord.
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.