

East Durham Methodist Circuit:

20th February 2022

Prepared by Alf Waite

Theme: The Brave Disciple.

Welcome and Call to worship:

Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits - who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Prayer of Approach:

Gracious and almighty God:

Your love, which breathed this world into being,
established a covenant people, brought them out of captivity
and into a promised land. **Hallelujah!**

Your love, which from the moment of our birth
has known and called us by name from out of this world's slavery
into the kingdom of God. **Hallelujah!**

Your love, poured into the heart of Jesus
who endured the nails of our sin, defeated death to rise again
and causes our hearts to sing **Hallelujah!**

We join together in the prayer that Jesus gave us;

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done - on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever.**

Amen

Hymn: I stand amazed in the presence Charles Gabriel MP 296

1. I stand amazed in the presence
of Jesus the Nazarene,
and wonder how he could love me,
a sinner, condemned, unclean.

***How marvellous! How wonderful!
And my song shall ever be:
How marvellous! How wonderful
is my Saviour's love for me!***

2. For me it was in the garden
he prayed: "Not my will, but thine."
He had no tears for his own griefs,
but sweat drops of blood for mine.

How marvellous...

3. In pity angels beheld him,
and came from the world of light
to comfort him in the sorrows
he bore for my soul that night.

How marvellous...

4. He took my sins and my sorrows,
he made them his very own;
he bore the burden to Calvary,
and suffered and died alone.

How marvellous...

5. When with the ransomed in glory
his face I at last shall see,
'twill be my joy through the ages
to sing of his love for me.

How marvellous...

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16 - 6:2

New International Version

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: ¹⁸ The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. ^{6.1} As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ² For he says:

"In the time of my favour I heard you and in the day of salvation I helped you."
I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

Hymn: An Army of Ordinary People

Dave Bilbrough

MP32

1. An army of ordinary people,
A Kingdom where love is the key,
A city, a light to the nations,
Heirs to the promise are we.
A people whose life is in Jesus,
A nation together we stand.
Only through grace are we worthy,
Inheritors of the land.

**A new day is dawning,
A new age to come,
When the children of promise,
Shall flow together as one:
A truth long neglected,
But the time has now come,
When the children of promise,
Shall flow together as one.**

2. A people without recognition,
But with Him a destiny sealed,
Called to a heavenly vision:
His purpose shall be fulfilled.
Come let us stand strong together,
Abandon ourselves to the King
His love shall be ours for ever,
This victory song we shall sing.

**A new day is dawning
A new age to come,
When the children of promise,
Shall flow together as one:
A truth long neglected,
But the time has now come,
When the children of promise,
Shall flow together as one.**

Reading: Mark 2:13-17

¹³ Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵ While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹⁷ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Message:

When I was being interviewed for entry into the ordained ministry, I was asked a question in one of the panel interviews. "If I had ultimate power to change the church for good what would I do?" My reply was I would empower the lay people, the ordinary rank and file to share the good news, to grow the church. That is something I have strived to do over the years sometimes with success sometimes not.

When you look at the choices Jesus made with his band of disciples. They were a real mixed bunch just like the make up of any church's membership.

In my look at the individual disciples I come to Matthew, the Tax Collector. I have struggled with my personal picture of Matthew because of the depiction of him in a Youtube series on the gospels called The Chosen. They depict him as a weaselly kind of character. When you look at his Christian experience, I think him to be maybe one of the bravest of the twelve.

Matthew means 'Gift of God'. He is also called Levi and that is why I chose his calling recorded by Mark rather than the Gospel of Matthew, but they are the same person. Levi means 'joined' and we will come back to that later.

In the list of disciples Matthew is recorded as Matthew the Tax Collector. None of the other are classified by their professions. Why would that be? As a tax collector Matthew would be truly despised. Despised by the Jews, his own race, for working for the Romans. Despised for collecting the taxes by those who paid it. He would also not be that well thought of by the Romans and then when he left his job he would be classified as an enemy of Rome. That tells us something of the depth of love that Jesus had for Matthew to call him from all that.

Matthew is believed to be the one who wrote the Gospel that has his name. Dated about AD 60 at the latest, the gospel speaks of someone who had an orderly mind, it has a pattern to it that mirrors the first five books of the Bible (The Torah).

Someone said that the only thing that Matthew took with him when called was a notebook and pen. He would have been used to keep accurate records. He would also know how to ask questions, to get the information for the gospel. Detail would be important to him and he would have both eyewitness and earwitness to gather those details. That was crucial to the church he was writing too, a congregation of Jewish Christians.

And so, to the call.

Matthew's call and response seems to be instant. Though there could have been prior knowledge, maybe Matthew had watched Jesus for a while. Maybe, Jesus had gone to Matthew to pay Mary's taxes after the death of Joseph. Jesus said, "Follow me" and Matthew went, he left everything. That would not be easy for him, as a tax collector, he would be looked on with suspicion. We are not always good at forgiving people their pasts, Jesus maybe, but we are not. But Matthew left his old life behind.

As I said earlier, he was also known as 'Levi' which means 'joined'. He was joined to Rome through his profession and now he is joined to Jesus and has become an enemy of Rome, a criminal in their eyes. The conversion of Matthew definitely shows that Jesus looks at the heart not at the outward trappings.

Matthew shows he is a true disciple of Jesus by throwing a meal for his friends and for Jesus and his followers. This shows that Matthew must have been wealthy to live in a house big enough. Matthew's meal marks three things. It was a Jubilee Meal to celebrate the new life he has found. As Paul says in Corinthians, 'those who are in Christ are a New Creation the old has gone the new has come. Matthew becomes a true example of that.

It is also a Farewell Meal, a public confession to all his friends that he is now following Jesus, so goodbye to them and to the trappings of wealth that he enjoyed. He would now be moving around and sometimes sleeping in the open air. It wouldn't be safe to hang around.

Thirdly, it was a Witness Meal, a witness to his friends. He gave Jesus an audience he would not have found at the synagogue: sinners, and publicans. Hence the religious authorities criticised Jesus.

A friend of mine occasionally had opportunities to speak in prisons. She said that what was freeing for her was that you did not need to convince them they were sinners. They may not be admitting their crimes, but they knew they had done wrong. So, she could just speak the Good News of God's love. It is so easy when you come to faith to lose your old friends when they are the people God has given you to share his love with.

A more unlikely character you would not have imagined to be a follower of Jesus. So for me Matthew was the bravest. Yes, we need to understand that what he gave up was the trappings of his wealth and position. Also, the flack he would have taken from the people of his own race, the Jewish Community. And his life was put in danger by leaving his job.

Many new Christians fear the response of their families to their newfound faith. Matthew's heart was to share his faith, which led him to mission in Asia Minor and like the majority of the Apostles, he lost his life in that mission. Cut down by an axe. **Amen.**

Hymn: Sweet Is The Work, My God, My King, Isaac Watts MP 620

1. Sweet Is The Work, My God, My King,
To Praise Your Name, Give Thanks And Sing;
To Show Your Love By Morning Light,
And Talk Of All Your Truth At Night.

3. My Heart Shall Triumph In The Lord
And Bless His Works, And Bless His Word:
God's Works Of Grace, How Bright They Shine —
How Deep His Counsels, How Divine!

2. Sweet Is The Day, The First And Best,
On Which I Share Your Sacred Rest;
So Let My Heart In Tune Be Found,
Like David's Harp Of Joyful Sound.

4. Soon I Shall See And Hear And Know
All I Desired On Earth Below;
And All My Powers For God Employ
In That Eternal World Of Joy.

Prayers of Intercession:

Loving God, we offer ourselves in worship and service to you, like Matthew may we be willing to give our whole and let go of the things that stop us doing that.

We don't normally feel the pain of persecution for our faith, but we know it is happening all over the world. And sometimes in the most unexpected places. We pray for those who are persecuted and punished, violated and scarred for their faith

We ask you to bless those who are ill, in hospital or at home, mentally or physically, having tests or waiting for results, worrying about an operation or recovering from surgery and all affected in any way by Covid 19. Bring your healing to them and those who care for and love them.

Bless all who have been bereaved in any way, let them know that you are walking beside them and supporting them.

We pray for those who are beginning the journey of faith. May the love they feel now sustain them here on earth and in your glorious heaven. We pray that you will build your church and rejoice that the even the gates of hell will not bring it down.

We pray for our communities those live around us, we pray for every home and Care Home, every place of work, every place of commerce. Every person is precious to you.

Lord we ask that you bless our families in and out of the church. We are your family and as such benefit from your everlasting love.

We ask these prayers in the name of your son Jesus Christ.

Amen

Hymn: I will sing the wondrous story

FH Rowley

MP 315

1. I will sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
How He left His home in glory
For the cross of Calvary.

**Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
Sing it in the light of glory,
Sing it through eternity.**

2. I was lost, but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray,
Threw His loving arms around me,
Drew me back into His way.

Yes, I'll sing...

3. I was bruised, but Jesus healed me;
Faint was I from many a fall;
Sight was gone, and fears possessed

me,
But He freed me from them all.

Yes, I'll sing...

4. Days of darkness still come o'er me,
Sorrow's paths I often tread,
But the Saviour still is with me;
By His hand I'm safely led.

Yes, I'll sing...

5. He will keep me till the rapture,
Day by day He'll wash my feet,
And will transform all my nature
That in glory we may meet.

Yes, I'll sing...

Blessing:

And so, to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in our lives this day and always. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord **Amen.**