

Service for Sunday 2 August 2020

During August we will be looking at the parables of Jesus and asking the question, "where is the kingdom of God today"?

Focussing on God

Your very hands have held me and made me who I am; give me more revelation-light so I may learn to please you more. ⁷⁴ May those who love you see how you treat me and be glad, for your words are entwined within my heart. In this moment, we seek you God. You are our God and we are aware of your amazing love and care for us, every day. As we worship, quieten our minds to take in your majesty, invade our hearts with your spirit and presence so that we can truly worship you, as you deserve today. Draw us closer to you and each other, through our worship, reminding us of your faithful, adoring heart, which strengthens our faith and adoration. Amen.

For the beauty of the earth,

For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies, *Lord*
of all, to thee we raise
This our grateful hymn of praise.

For the beauty of each hour
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
Sun and moon and stars of light, *Chorus.*

For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child, Friends
on earth, and friends above,
Pleasures pure and undefiled, *Chorus.*

For each perfect gift of thine,
To our race so freely given,
Graces human and divine,
Flowers of earth and buds of heaven, *Chorus.*

Prayer

Gracious God, you have been our constant companion through this week, in the ups and downs of life. Come and dwell in our hearts, afresh today. Remind us of your constant love and embrace as we worship you. We ask for strength to hear your voice and heed its purpose and direction. Bless us now, and fill us with your Holy Spirit, so that we can worship in spirit and truth. Amen.

Reading 1 Luke 21: 1 - 2

As Jesus looked up, he saw some rich people putting their gifts into the Temple money box. ² Then he saw a poor widow putting two small copper coins into the box. ³ He said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow gave more than all those rich people. ⁴ They gave only what they did not need. This woman is very poor, but she gave all she had to live on."

Reading 2 Luke 18: 1-8

One day Jesus taught the apostles to keep praying and never stop or lose hope. He shared with them this illustration: ² "In a certain town there was a civil judge, a

thick-skinned and godless man who had no fear of others' opinions. ³ And there was a poor widow in that town who kept pleading with the judge, 'Grant me justice and protect me against my oppressor!' ⁴⁻⁵ *"He ignored her pleas for quite some time, but she kept asking. Eventually he said to himself, 'This widow keeps annoying me, demanding her rights, and I'm tired of listening to her. Even though I'm not a religious man and don't care about the opinions of others, I'll just get her off my back by answering her claims for justice and I'll rule in her favour. Then she'll leave me alone.'"* ⁶ *The Lord continued, "Did you hear what the ungodly judge said—that he would answer her persistent request? ⁷ Don't you know that God, the true judge, will grant justice to all of his chosen ones who cry out to him night and day? He will pour out his Spirit upon them. He will not delay to answer you and give you what you ask for. ⁸ God will give swift justice to those who don't give up. So be ever praying, ever expecting, just like the widow was with the judge. Yet when the Son of Man comes back, will he find this kind of persistent faithfulness in his people?"*

Prayer

Faithful God, help us to hear your voice through these inspired words and join our hearts with yours. Give us insight into your thoughts to help us today. Amen

Father, I place into your hands
The things I cannot do, Father,
I place into your hands
The things that I've been through.
Father, I place into your hands
The way that I should go, For I
know I always can trust you.

Father, I place into your hands
My friends and family. Father,
I place into your hands The
things that trouble me.
Father, I place into your hands
The person I would be, For I
know I always can trust you.

Father, we love to see your face,
We love to hear your voice. Father,
we love to sing your praise And in
your name rejoice.
Father, we love to walk with you And
in your presence rest, For we know
we always can trust you.

Father, I want to be with you And
do the things you do. Father, I
want to speak the words That
you are speaking too.
Father, I want to love the ones
That you will draw to you, For I
know that I am one with you.

Message

In the bible, widows have a special compassion bestowed on them in the law of Moses, along with

orphans. Because there may be no-one to support widows, the community must ensure that they are not disadvantaged by their circumstances and are protected and honoured. Laws and special provisions are in place to safeguard widows against neglect and abuse. Jesus condemns the Pharisees for ill-treating those who were vulnerable in society, admonishing them to take care of how they are treating those who are especially precious to God. It is with this background, that we consider this parable.

We assume that the judge knows the law, pertaining to widow's rights. But there seems to be some discrepancy between the law and the practice of the law in this case. There seems to be another party exerting pressure on the judge to rule in their favour and leave the widow without any redress or rights. But the widow is persistent, until she gets, what the law requires and her situation is resolved well.

I really love the woman portrayed in our reading today. She sounds a very "no nonsense" person. She knows she has rights that need to be satisfied and she becomes an irritant to the judge. She goes as far as she needs to, in order to receive justice and be honoured for her status as a widow. There was a story of a church in a small village that had to stop worshipping because there was so few of them. It saddened one lady, who took it upon herself to pray and to carry on talking to the village people, over a number of years. She was persistent in imploring God to hear her prayers and after a number of years, a new church was founded and each member gave thanks, at its inauguration, for the woman's influence in their lives and in strengthening their prayer life as a church.

The first verse, of Luke 18, reminds us to pray and never give up, never give up hope of achieving what you desire, for the good of humanity. The reminder to never give up praying is one we looked last week. God hears our prayers and responds in incredible ways. God is not like the judge in the parable, who denies the rights of the widow. God is the one who marks the widow out for special compassion. Her circumstances make her vulnerable and in need of rights to protect her life and wellbeing. God responds by hearing and answering with no bias, except towards those who need special protection. This demonstrates the love of God in a powerful way, therefore, we, too, need the protection of God and we will be honoured in our service of faith. We can all find ourselves in vulnerable situations, but, when these events happen, we need to put our trust in God to help us to cope and face the future, just like the feisty widow. We need to persevere in faith and prayer. This is the way to change the world, one person and one situation at a time. *Silent reflection*

Lord's Prayer

Our gospel reading reminds us widows and orphans need our prayers. We think of many places in the world where vulnerable people are being denied rights and treated badly. Lord, hear their prayers and join

our prayers with theirs. Help us to hear the cries of those seeking justice in our own communities in the UK. Help us to stand up for those who cannot stand alone and who need us to stand alongside them. Give us ears to hear and hearts to respond to your call, to uphold justice and continue to pray. Raise up advocates and champions to highlight what life is like for those who are always disadvantaged. Hold all we have prayed for in your abundant love.

Amen

The kingdom of God is justice and joy;
for Jesus restores what sin would destroy.
God's power and glory in Jesus we know
and here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God is mercy and grace;
the captives are freed, the sinners find place,
the outcasts are welcomed, God's banquet to share;
and hope is awakened in place of despair.

The kingdom of God is challenge and choice:
believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross:
our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal;
in Jesus begun, in heaven made whole.
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call and all
things cry 'Glory!' to God all in all.

Prayer

⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people. (Galatians 6:9 and 10)

Loving Lord Jesus, inspire us to love people, showing our passion for them and for you, as we live the life of faith. Amen

Blessing

If there is righteousness in the heart. If there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.

So let it be. Amen.