

## Rev'd David Treharne's Sermon from Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September - Trinity 17

### **Collect**

Almighty God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you: pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself, and so bring us at last to your heavenly city where we shall see you face to face; 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.

### **Or**

Gracious God, you call us to fullness of life: deliver us from unbelief and banish our anxieties with the liberating love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Post Communion**

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **James 5:13-end**

<sup>13</sup> Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup> Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup> Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. <sup>17</sup> Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. <sup>18</sup> Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

<sup>19</sup> My brothers and sisters, <sup>[e]</sup> if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, <sup>20</sup> you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's <sup>[h]</sup> soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

### **Mark 9:38-end**

#### **Another Exorcist**

<sup>38</sup> John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone <sup>[i]</sup> casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' <sup>39</sup> But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. <sup>40</sup> Whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup> For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

#### **Temptations to Sin**

<sup>42</sup> 'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, <sup>[k]</sup> it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. <sup>43</sup> If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, <sup>[l]</sup> to the unquenchable fire. <sup>[m]</sup> <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. <sup>[n][o]</sup> <sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, <sup>[p]</sup> <sup>48</sup> where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

<sup>49</sup> 'For everyone will be salted with fire. <sup>[q]</sup> <sup>50</sup> Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? <sup>[r]</sup> Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'

### **Sermon. Our hearts and lives are out of kilter until they find their rest in Christ.**

I met with a couple of former colleagues the other day and we were talking about how there's almost a sense of starting all over again as church at the moment. The time we've been through being so long it does feel like a whole new beginning. New people, new circumstances, new routines, new dynamics amongst us and around us.

There's been a tangible sense of sadness at what we haven't done together over the last 18+ months, and what has now passed for good. People who are no longer among us and are not sharing the journey of faith with us in the same way, if at all. Yet, as I hinted a couple of weeks ago, there is also now a sense of newness, possibility and excitement brewing. I have met up with a lot of new people in the Parish over recent weeks. I sincerely hope some of them will end up joining the church family here in Tidenham Parish,

because I really think God has been drawing people together. It really does feel as though there is a sense of plan about it. The Lord bringing people together here for such a time as this!! If you're a familiar face here be encouraged... God is leading us into the next bit of life together!! If you're a new face here be encouraged... I think there may be a plan and purpose behind it!! You, me, we now just need to be open to hear what the Spirit may be saying to the church!!

### **Now to the main sermon for today!!!**

This year the Church readings have had us going through the Gospel of Mark, the shortest of the gospels. When one reads Mark's Gospel it is helpful to realise some of its influences. I've preached before on this how Mark would have been influenced by writings such as the book of Enoch (Great Grandfather of Noah) – a Jewish religious work anything from 300BC to 1st Century BC describes Enoch's visits to heaven in the form of travels, visions and dreams, and his revelations. gives an account of what's wrong with the world. There's all kinds of mythical language ... angels and demons, dreams and visions...

These writings are trying to make sense of a world that is not as it was created to be... it is out of kilter/balance/harmony.

It is a document that would have been known to the early church writers and it is thought that they would have been influenced by it... certainly by its language. It is likely that Mark picked on the theme of the fallen and frail human condition... and the problems we live in are a result of more than the totality of man's wrongdoing.

When one reads through Mark you have this sense of things not being right with humanity and the world... it's all out of kilter, out of balance! There is discontinuity, disconnect, dis-ease in the world!

I find this a really helpful lens to look at the world around me and indeed at my own human experience and life of faith. Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria etc, etc, etc... out of kilter. The fuel and energy issues in our economy... out of kilter. The Covid situation... the world out of kilter. The environment... out of kilter. And it filters down to the personal and interpersonal, where things are out of kilter. Relationships don't always work as they should, and we are only too aware of the chronic and acute problems with anxiety, addiction, mental well being... things are out of kilter.

The idea of things being 'out of kilter' very much extends to religion and faith. Time and again in Mark's Gospel we read of people being out of touch with Jesus and what the kingdom of God is all about. The disciples misunderstanding Jesus and getting the wrong end of the stick with his teaching and his need to correct them. It's in the reading again today, and you'll find this correcting to be a running theme throughout Mark's Gospel... and a great lesson for us today. "Think you're right? Think again! You're out of kilter!"

Isaiah puts it well when it says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD." Isaiah 55:8

The book of James has been giving us good examples of this out of kilter-ness in our lives which leads to misunderstanding. Your deeds don't match your words... faith and works (James 2). Your tongue says one thing one minute that glorifies God and then the next moment contradicts it (James 3:9). Last week we had James writing about the cravings at war within us (James 4:1). Being double minded and asking wrongly from God (James 4:8). This sense of things being out of balance within us... getting the wrong end of the stick about how we should live in God's world.

Poor old Peter in the Gospel a couple of weeks ago was inspired to confess Jesus as Messiah and then in the next moment he is inspired by Satan as he spoke (Mark 8). St Paul in his letter to the Romans 7 says, "what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."

Things being out of kilter is only too familiar to me/us as we struggle with sin, the flesh and the devil... faith, life and prayer etc...

So where do we go from here? Well, rather importantly, there is another rather crucial message in the Gospel of Mark. Again going back to the influence of writings such as Enoch and Daniel, it is only when someone comes to deal with the unclean spirits that inhabit not only the world but the lives of human beings... it is only when someone comes to deal with these unclean spirits and banishes evil that the world will finally come back into kilter. The **Good News** for Mark, and in Mark, is that that person has come! In the person of Jesus God has come to put things back into kilter, into balance. God's son Jesus is the one who touches and transforms life, turns things around and upside down and sets things straight. He is the One pushing back and destroying the powers of evil and setting free the one possessed by unclean spirits, or bound by sin; the One healing the dis-eased, the One reconciling those at odds with neighbour or enemy or self or life or God. Jesus is the one who comes to those in trouble, need, sickness or any other adversity. He is their (our) help, their salvation, their hope and their peace.

God in Christ brings us back into harmony. Augustine (St Augustine of Hippo 354-430) today puts it so well in the collect for today. Lord, you have made us for yourself... that's what it is to be human... to be in union with divine love... and our hearts are restless... they are out of kilter... till they find their rest in you. As documented in his book 'Confessions' Augustine journeyed through excessive pleasure, philosophy, overindulgence and confusion to the place where his soul finds true rest and peace. Where? In the Creator God, divine love.

How do we find this rest, this peace, this balance, this beauty?

Our openness to God's action in our lives. "Pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself." "Yes, please Lord!"

I don't know too many prayers that better express the need of the human heart. Deep deep down we know this truth; to live life in co-operation with the love of God. 'Live in the flow of God's love.' Align/realign ourselves with the flow of God's love. To be in Communion, union, intimacy, deep closeness with him. In the flow... with no blockage!

As part of this alignment, getting into kilter, James exhorts us to pray individually and corporately, for ourselves and for others. Through confession and forgiveness with one another we are to set out relationships right with one another and with God. Relationships being out of kilter affect human health and well being.

As far as it depends on us (Romans 12:18), we are called to be 'in kilter', at peace, in harmony, in alignment with God, with each other and with the wider community and all creation... as his agents day by day, "living Life Together in the Flow of God's love."

I conclude with a marvellous quote from St Cyprian (pre Christendom).

*"It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and good people who have learned the great secret of life. They have found a joy and wisdom which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are Christians. . . and I am one of them."*

— Cyprian

He discovered the good news of the Gospel! May we all discover it afresh and live it out too!!!