

ST STEPHEN'S HOME SERVICE – SUNDAY 28th JUNE 2020

INTRODUCTION

Choices, choices.

Our culture tries to persuade us that the choices we make don't matter too much: we can always change our minds later. But our choices do matter hugely: they shape who we are, and who we will become.

We all know what it is like to feel we have been trapped by the past mistakes – our mistakes, or what has happened to us. But the Good News is that, in Christ, God offers us the chance of new beginnings – new life. And He then gives us the freedom to choose to make each act of love – however small – into Something Beautiful for Him. So the new life God gives us becomes a blessing to others.

Pause for a moment to remind yourself of God's goodness: in all the acts of kindness you have received, small or great; and in the fact that you do not need to live in guilt, or fear, or regret for past failings or things suffered.

OPENING BIBLE VERSE AND PRAYERS

"The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
(Romans 6:23)

As we come to worship and praise

Father God, we welcome you.

As we come together in friendship,

Father God, we welcome you.

As we come to listen and learn,

Father God, we welcome you.

As we bring all that is on our hearts and our minds,

Father God, we welcome you.

Father God, you are here now,

And we welcome you.

TURNING AGAIN TO GOD

Loving God, you made us and you love us. We know that we have sometimes got things wrong. For the things we have said or done which have caused pain, and for the things we could have done to help others but didn't, forgive and heal us and them. Give us the strength to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, by the power of your Spirit. Amen.

NEW TESTAMENT READING (Romans 6:12-23, New Living Translation)

Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.

Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.

Because of the weakness of your human nature, I am using the illustration of slavery to help you understand all this. Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy.

When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING (Matthew 10:40-42, NRSV)

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION (by Revd Stephen Malkinson)

I am not sure how many have actually read Victor Hugo's famous and very long book *Les Misérables* but I am sure that you will almost certainly have seen the film. The pivotal theme is that of compassion and redemption. The central character Jean Valjean is changed from a desperate thief into a benevolent man. His life began to change when he stole some silver from the bishop of Digne. Jean Valjean was arrested for theft, but the bishop told the authorities that he had given the silver to him and asked Jean to take the silver candlesticks as well, with the plea that he does something good with them as he went on his way. He accepted the gift with amazement, and as the story goes, he thereafter changed into an upright and honest man. Compare that with Jean Valjean's nemesis the policeman Javert who hounded him

throughout the story and was determined to see his downfall as he was in his eyes an unrepentant thief. Towards the end of the story Jean Valjean rescues Javert from almost certain death by an angry mob. Javert could not come to terms with him saving his life and eventually feels that he has no option but to take his own life. The story wonderfully demonstrates how an act of kindness and tenderness with offer of a new start in life triggered a new-found and life-long determination to repay that act of kindness - although it also illustrates that some people can feel very threatened by the same acts of kindness.

When Jesus sent out the disciples he warned them that spreading the good news it is not going to be easy, and that their actions could create hostilities, even within families. In the last two verses of this chapter 10, in our gospel reading this morning, we focus on those who do receive good news even if that response is nothing more than the giving and receiving of a cup of cold water.

As followers of Jesus we aim to see something of God in everyone, and we know we are all made in the image of God. We try to react to those we meet as being loved by God as much as he loves us. This fundamental truth spurs us on to try and bring the good news to all. We try and do this by the way we live our lives and being brave, when the opportunity arises, to encourage others. It is amazing how many people have

been brought to Christ by something that we have said or done and I am sure that some kind word or deed set us on our own journey of faith and has brought us here this morning. The sadness is that many Christians do not see themselves primarily as being sent out but are content in their own non-challenging bubble and who see the reaching out as someone else's job - especially that of the vicar!

The Methodist church was built on the slogan 'every Methodist a missionary' and that is something that maybe we could revisit. Jesus disciples were not allowed to remain just disciples, by listening to and supporting Jesus in his ministry. Chapter 10 shows how they were changed to apostles, people 'sent out'.

Let us ask God to show us the times when an opportunity presents itself: to draw others in, to speak a kind word, to forgive, indeed to love. Bishop Digne used his opportunity with Jean Valjean. He didn't lecture him to change his ways, but gave some holy advice as he gave him the silverware. Any act of kindness, even to giving a cup of cold water, can change others, and at the same time ourselves.

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION....

Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you?
Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey, we are trav'lers on the road.
We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

I will weep when you are weeping, when you laugh I'll laugh with you.
I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through.

Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you?
Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant, too.

Richard Gillard

PRAYERS

Let us focus our bodies, minds, hearts and wills
As we pray to the God of our salvation.

Holy God, you are the focus of our love and worship,
Because you alone are the Lord
Who has made us and rescued us.
Give us strength to leave behind the thoughts, attitudes and ways of life
Which deny your goodness,
And help us to live in your freedom, serving you with joy,
In thankfulness for all you have done for us.
Silence

Heal us, Lord:

And use us to your glory.

Holy God, though the world may often reject you,
You never fail to believe in us all
And love us with tenderness.
We pray for all areas of conflict, deceit,
Mismanagement and greed,
And for all who are drawn in to the chaos of evil.

Silence

Heal us, Lord:

And use us to your glory.

Holy God, our daily lives provide such rich ground
For acts of loving kindness,
Self-discipline and courage.
Remind us of the opportunities,
And strengthen us to use them.

Silence

Heal us, Lord:

And use us to your glory.

Holy God, we thank you for all
Who lovingly look after those in nursing homes,
Hospitals, nurseries and prisons;
For District Nurses, and all home carers;
And we pray for all who need such care
And rely on others' help.

In a moment's silence, we hold before God everyone we know who is battling with illness.

Silence

Heal us, Lord:

And use us to your glory.

Holy God, we call to mind

Those who have recently died

And thank you for each act of goodness in their lives.

Have mercy on them and forgive their failings,

So that they may share the joy of heaven for ever.

Marcus Cairns-Terry, David Drew, Geoff Stephens, Richard Wickham, Linda Hampton, Simon Bowen, William Layton, Betty Wake, and Evelyn King.

Silence

Heal us, Lord:

And use us to your glory.

Holy God, we thank you

For our human potential for good,

And for your gift of grace

Which makes such goodness a real possibility.

Merciful Father

Accept these prayers

For the sake of your Son,

Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Take a few moments to remember before God other people and situations on your heart now.

The Lord's Prayer

We pray as Jesus taught us, saying:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily
bread.**

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who
sin against us.**

**Lead us not into
temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the
power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**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.**

CLOSING BLESSING

**May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you,
wherever He may send you.**

**May He guide you through the wilderness,
protect you through the storm.**

**May He bring you home rejoicing
at the wonders He has shown you.**

**May He bring you home rejoicing
once again into our doors.**

ENDING

**Though we are apart,
and living through times of great uncertainty,
be with us Lord, to comfort and guide us,
today and for ever.**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
Be with us all evermore.
Amen.**