

Parish of Central Exeter

15th Sunday after Trinity 12th September 2021

Wise choices

Welcome everyone.

Introduction

The four readings appointed for today are:

- Proverbs 1:20-33 The famous passage about wisdom
- Psalm 19 The heavens declare the glory of God.
- James 3: 1-12 Our tongue – and other small things – and the power they have.
- Mark 8: 27-38 Who is this person, Jesus?

I have not included the Psalm as a reading, but it does serve as the base for the call to worship. The readings have messages about the wisdom of listening to God (who may be found in many places) to help us determine our actions and of the importance of self-control in our daily life.

This week Sheila has provided us with reflections on both the Epistle and the Gospel readings. Many thanks to her.

Call to Worship (Based on Psalm 19)

The heavens are telling the glory of God

May our worship reflect God's glory.

The firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

May we see each other as the handiwork of God.

Let our prayer and praise, our singing and proclamation project the love of God.

**We commune with Christians around the world,
with Christians throughout time.**

With Christians across geography and across time,

Let us worship!

(from Jesus Sets the Table, resources by the United Church of Christ, posted on their Worship Ways website.)



Opening Prayer

In the book, *Basic Christian: The Inside Story of John Stott*, Anglican cleric John Stott shared this prayer. It was his habit to pray it every day.

Good morning heavenly Father,
good morning Lord Jesus,
good morning Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, I worship you as the creator and sustainer of the universe.
Lord Jesus, I worship you, Saviour and Lord of the world.
Holy Spirit, I worship you, sanctifier of the people of God.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father,
I pray that I may live this day in your presence
and please you more and more.

Lord Jesus,
I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you.

Holy Spirit,
I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself
and cause your fruit to ripen in my life:
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity,
three persons in one God,
have mercy upon me. Amen.

(John Stott, quoted in Basic Christian: The Inside Story of John Stott)

Gathering Hymn

'Praise to the Holiest in the Height' Sung here by the Huddersfield Choral Society. Words are on the screen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVP6nQj1a_c

An act of confession

God Almighty,
we have failed to serve you faithfully.
Our lives are anything but blameless.
You invite us to see with a new vision,
but we continue in our old ways.

You call us to set aside our own desires
so that we may embrace your desires,
but we are stubborn and refuse to let go.
Lord, rebuke our shameful ways.
Guide us to find our place, directly behind Christ.
Teach us to take up our crosses
and follow wherever you lead, we pray.

(written by Amy Loving, and posted on The Worship Closet: The Place for Creative Worship Ideas.)

Assurance of Pardon

Scripture says that those who are in Christ are a new creation;
everything old has passed away;
see, the new has come!

Hear then Christ's word of grace to us:
'Your sins are forgiven.'

Thanks be to God.



The collect for today

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit
upon your Church in the burning fire of your love:
grant that your people may be fervent
in the fellowship of the gospel
that, always abiding in you,
they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service;
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.

Old Testament reading

Proverbs 1: 20-33

The Call of Wisdom

²⁰ Wisdom cries out in the street;

in the squares she raises her voice.

²¹ At the busiest corner she cries out;

at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

²² 'How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?

How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing

and fools hate knowledge?
²³ Give heed to my reproof;
 I will pour out my thoughts to you;
 I will make my words known to you.
²⁴ Because I have called and you refused,
 have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,
²⁵ and because you have ignored all my counsel
 and would have none of my reproof,
²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity;
 I will mock when panic strikes you,
²⁷ when panic strikes you like a storm,
 and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
 when distress and anguish come upon you.
²⁸ Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
 they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.
²⁹ Because they hated knowledge
 and did not choose the fear of the Lord,
³⁰ would have none of my counsel,
 and despised all my reproof,
³¹ therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way
 and be sated with their own devices.
³² For waywardness kills the simple,
 and the complacency of fools destroys them;
³³ but those who listen to me will be secure
 and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.'



In Christian icons, the scroll symbolises the Wisdom of God, and is shown in the hands of Old Testament prophets, the apostles and later saints.

Worship music

'God of mercy, God of grace', sung here by the choir of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nvn4OEq9ezU>

New Testament Reading

James 3: 1-12

Taming the Tongue

3 Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. **2** We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. **4** Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. **5** Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. **6** The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.



7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, **8** but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. **10** Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. **11** Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? **12** My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Reflection

The morning prayer Old Testament readings have just finished going through Proverbs, so I have been reminded of the power of the tongue for good and for ill. Here James uses illustrations which were common in the Greek culture of his day and are still relevant today to show the influence of our tongues. The horses' bit or the ship's rudder control the horse or ship. In the same way our tongues, even if we do not speak the words, control our thinking as we frame thoughts in words.

The weekend reflection in the CMS Prayerlines for 4-5 September was titled 'silence, solitude and little foxes'. The writer is an unnamed mission partner in Spain who wanted to have a short retreat so had spent a night on a mountain near his home. After describing the sunset, he notices a little fox nearby shortly before he attempts to go to sleep. He is kept awake by the fox and his friends and wrote this reflection in his journal.

'I recognised my desire, during solitude, for a significant encounter with God, an "a-ha" moment. Sometimes, however, solitude reminds us of the small part we play in a much bigger picture. I remembered the scripture, "the little foxes spoil the vineyard." I thought of my poor sleep and the foxes that had spoiled the night. Revelation hit: the foxes were drawn by the smell of my food. The first fox I met had been eating crumbs of the couscous I had carelessly discarded after my evening meal. Those little foxes that had spoiled my metaphorical vineyard – I had invited them through my own thoughtlessness. This was quite a thought. I pondered my everyday life and the foxes that spoil my day – careless words or a lack of compassion that exacerbates problems instead of bringing peace – these are consequences of my own actions, deliberate or not.'

In his conclusion he reflects how 'small thoughtless acts and habits can create space for the bigger annoyances and things that spoil. I have to guard my own vineyard.' (*Song of Songs 2:15*).

Worship music

'O God of Earth and Altar'. The second verse seems most relevant for the reading. Words are on the screen. The music is a traditional English melody collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams. The words are by G K Chesterton.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFG-CqYXyOo>

Gospel Reading

Mark 8: 27-38

Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Messiah

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

²⁸ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

²⁹ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus Predicts His Death

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

The Way of the Cross

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

Reflection

Our reading through Mark’s gospel comes now to the middle section which is bookended by two healings of blind men. The first only occurs in Mark and is just before today’s section in 8:22-26. Here a blind man is brought to Jesus who takes him away from the village to perform the healing which takes two stages. First, he sees people who look like trees and after the second touch by Jesus he can see clearly. Mark links this with the slowness of the disciples to see and understand who Jesus is. (See 8:17-21 and as we read the next few chapters.) The second healing is the gospel for 24 October.

Today, Peter, as spokesperson for the disciples, first declares that Jesus is the Christ – the ‘Anointed One’ or ‘Messiah’ that the Jewish people were waiting for. Yet his understanding of ‘messiah’ is not the one that Jesus now begins to teach them. He takes a different title from their scriptures, ‘Son of Man’ and gives it a new meaning of one who would suffer and die, not one who would overcome problems with violence. This is radically different to the disciples’ perception of what they thought would happen and Peter says so. Jesus rebukes him and goes on to give teaching for all his followers.

This is the challenge for us today. Do we assert our rights, our needs, our privileges or do we accept that all life is a gift? That the way to true freedom and peace is by living in the love of God. This is the heart of the Christian message and yet I know it is one that I struggle with and need to be constantly reminded about.

Another message from CMS this last week was from Ian Adams reflecting on the images of the Afghan refugees and the call to ‘Love the Stranger’. He ends his reflection with these

words 'Love is not so difficult when we know that we are truly beloved. Thanks be to God, this may be how we might love the stranger, and live and love in the time of othering.' See the link for the full reflection <https://churchmissionsociety.co.uk/1MY-7IRJF-9AFS53-4JV3V2-1/c.aspx>

Prayer

What was it about Jesus
that was so confusing for governments
and for ordinary people?

Pilate couldn't make sense of Jesus
and half the time we can't either.

We want a God who comes in might and power to take all before him
and yet we get Jesus:
unmistakably human and vulnerable,
trouble-maker
peace-lover,
political subversive
always on the side of love, not power
human, even to the point of death.

We keep asking the question,
'God, who are you?'
in the hope we'll get a different answer.
And God just keeps coming back with this one.

(written by Cheryl Lawrie and posted on [hold this space].)

Intercessions

Gracious God,
today's scripture reminds us that words matter
and that the way we choose our words
holds within it the capacity to either harm or heal, to wound or welcome.
In this time when words are tossed around so casually,
may our words be used to build up the Body of Christ
and share love and compassion in a broken and battered world.
Holy and Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

Healing God,
we pray for those who have been hurt by words of hate:
for refugees and immigrants with or without documentation,
for women and girls who have endured words of sexism,
for people of colour who hear words of racism,

for people with disabilities who are told they are “less than,”
for elderly people who are told they are useless,
for young adults who are told they are entitled, selfish, and irresponsible.
God of the Living Word, help us speak the truth in love
and to care for one another with the words we choose to speak.
Holy and Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

God of Healing and Wholeness,
we lift up to you our words of prayer
for the people near and dear to our hearts
as we lift them up silently before you...
Holy and Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

Triune God,
we love you for you hear our voice and our supplications.
We lift these prayers to your ears
along with the prayer you taught us to pray....

(The Lord’s Prayer)

Loving Creator we honour you,
and we honour all that you have made.
Renew the whole world in the image of your love.
Give us what we need for today,
and a hunger to see the whole world fed.
Strengthen us for what lies ahead;
heal us from the hurts of the past;
give us courage to follow your call in this moment.
For your love is the only power,
the only home, the only honour we need,
in this world and in the world to come.
Amen. *(Paraphrased by Sarah Dylan Breuer)*



(Intercessions taken from Liturgy Link.)

Affirmation

Jesus said: Take up your cross.

We will follow you, O Christ,
into the needs of the world,
into the truth of our lives,
into the pain of our hearts,
into the presence of God. Amen.

(by Brian Woodcock, in Traveling to Easter with Jesus as our Guide, posted on the website of Patmos Abbey—The Order of Saint Columba.)

The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.



Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing
can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.

As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to the Langford Singers with 'The Table of the Lord', words by Richard, music by Nigel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCZmrj81t8o>



Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for 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.



Post Communion Collect

Keep, O Lord, your Church, with your perpetual mercy;
and, because without you our human frailty cannot but fall,
keep us ever by your help from all things hurtful,
and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Commission & Benediction

May you depart knowing the invitation of God, to move
- from comfort to insecurity
- from what we know to what we have yet to discover
- from where we have been to where we have yet to go
- from safety to a place of risk
Go in the example of the saints before you,
the Israelites in the wilderness,
Paul blind in Damascus waiting for Ananias.

Go in the name of Jesus, our Christ,
who said 'follow me' without saying where he was going,
just promising transformation and relationship
with the Triune God along the way. **Amen.**

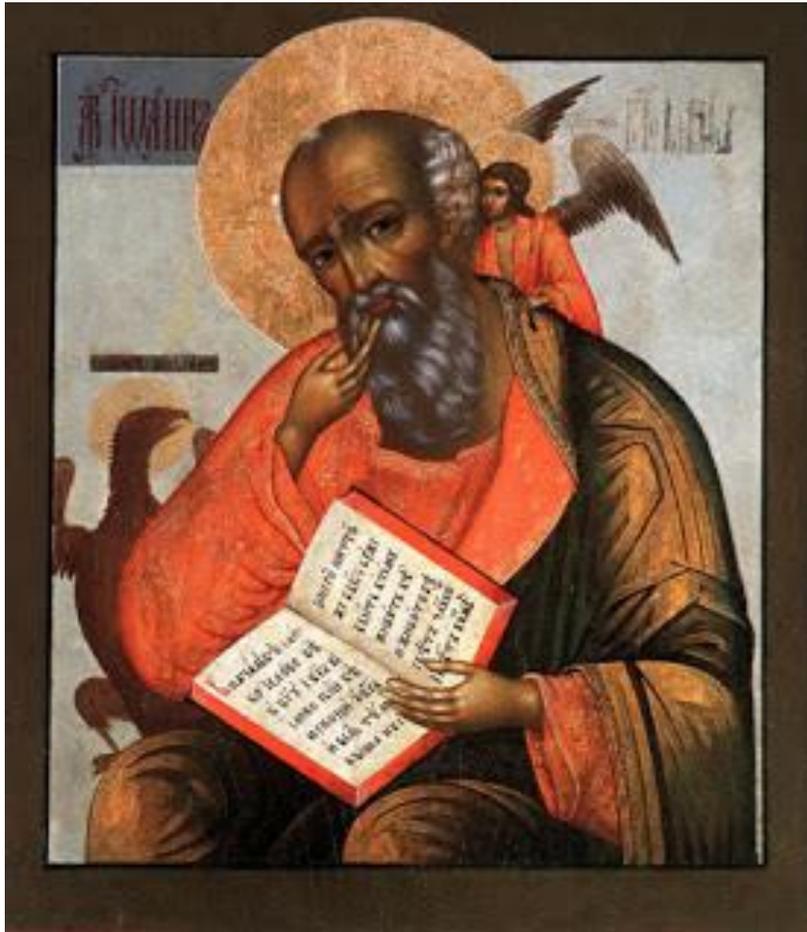
(posted on the Northwest Ohio Association Faith Formation blog (United Church of Christ).

Closing Hymn

'Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord for thee.' Sung by the St Michael Singers.
Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Of4I5bTdZ8M>

The wisdom of silence



This icon shows the Apostle John in his later years, as the elder “Theologian”. In his hands he holds the Gospel, with the words: “In the beginning...” (John 1:1). To his left, an angel is shown whispering the Gospel into John’s ear, yet the Apostle does not look to him, but casts his eyes down in contemplation. The Saint’s right hand is raised up, making the sign of the cross over his mouth, guarding it lest he were to say something from his own imagination: the great Evangelist is reduced to silence.