

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 14 July 2024 - The Seventh Sunday of Trinity

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Amos 7. 7-15; Psalm 85. 8-13; Ephesians 1. 3-14; Mark 6. 14-29

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Valerie Kilner, Permission To Officiate (Retired), Somersham and Ramsey

'It's not easy doing what God wants.' Words of wisdom from a seven-year-old when the vicar he had known all his life told everyone that he felt God was calling him to work in a different parish. Doing what God wants may certainly appear to be far from easy at times.

We often read parts of the Old Testament which tell us how those spirit-filled people who featured significantly in the growing relationship between God and his people felt called to do something for God that turned out to be far from easy.

There's the boy Samuel, for example, who did not realise at first that God was speaking to him, but eventually said: Yes - I'm listening. And Amos, just a shepherd in Judah, who felt called to give God's message to his people in Israel. We may recall Isaiah. He had an amazing vision of God in all his glory, basically saying: I need a messenger: whom shall I send?

Ordinary humans being asked by God to let him use them for his purposes in the world can inspire us. But often, having heard of these people's positive responses to God's call, our readings from the Bible stop. If we do read on, we find that what they had been called to do was far from easy!

Samuel had to tell his mentor Eli that he stood in judgement with his sons for desecrating God's name and God's place and doing nothing to stop them. Amos and Isaiah had to tell those who claimed they were the people of God that in no way were they living as his people should. They were not showing what God was like to the rest of the world.

In our Gospel reading we heard of John the Baptist who was born and filled with the Holy Spirit to prepare the people of God for the coming of their long-desired Messiah. He had a message for those who called themselves the people of God. Repent. Think again. Just because you can work out that you are descended from Abraham is not enough. Your lives must show that you are the people of God.

When we human beings are challenged, we have to make choices - to accept the challenge, reject it or to simply ignore it. There were those who responded to John's message and were baptised. Jewish people were used to the ritual of being immersed in water as a sign of purification. Converts to Judaism had to go through ritual bathing as part of the conversion

process. In being baptised they were saying that their lives were not showing that they were the people of God. They needed to change – they wanted to change.

And there is a challenge here for us – the people of God in Jesus. How Jesus-like are our everyday ordinary lives? How willing are we to change – or to be changed by the Holy Spirit in us?

We heard in our Gospel reading that the Jew, Herod, was one who rejected John's message. This was Herod Antipas who had succeeded his father, Herod the Great, and been appointed by the Roman emperor Augustus to rule over one quarter of his father's kingdom.

The Herods were not known for their keeping of the Jewish law. Any opponents were imprisoned or killed – even family members. John had publicly criticised Herod Antipas for unlawfully marrying his half-brother Philip's former wife, Herodias. Herod had wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of a public uprising if he did because many considered John to be a prophet. So, he had him imprisoned. But his wife Herodias seizes the opportunity to have him killed by manipulating their daughter, so that when Herod promises her anything she wants, she asks for the head of John the Baptist. Doing what God wants was not easy by the world's standards for John.

Neither was life easy for Jesus. His teaching and his calls to the people of God to change and to be changed were mostly rejected or fell on deaf ears. Jesus repeatedly said that being like him would not be easy for his followers. He knew that those who didn't know him or want to know him would find them disturbing because they would be challenged by them.

In our western culture today, followers of Jesus are generally accepted, side-lined or ignored. Perhaps we should be asking ourselves why others do not find our lifestyle challenging or disturbing. Do we really live differently from those who do not know Jesus?

In other parts of the world following Jesus is not acceptable and Christians face persecution. Spending time on the internet is revealing. More than 365 million Christians are suffering high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith says one website - 1 in 7 worldwide, 1 in 5 in Africa and 2 in 5 in Asia. Another tells us that Christians, or their homes and families, may be physically attacked or discriminated against at work and school. They may not be allowed to vote, may risk sexual violence, torture, arrest, imprisonment and even face death. It is estimated that, worldwide, more than 5000 Christians were killed in 2023.

All those being persecuted are our neighbours whom we should love as ourselves. More than that, they are our brothers and sisters in Jesus. So, we have another challenge - do we care enough even to pray for them?

Let us pray that we, and all our brothers and sisters in Christ, may know the reality of the presence of the living Lord Jesus in our lives, helping us by his Spirit to become more like him however difficult that may be. May we with confidence know, with St. Paul 'that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder whether I really do live differently from those who do not know Jesus?
- I wonder whether I speak out for what I know to be the truth in Jesus even if it makes me unpopular.
- I wonder whether the Holy Spirit in me is asking me to make changes?
- I wonder how I would cope with being persecuted for following Jesus?

Suggested intercessions

For followers of Jesus

Lord, may those who are the body of Christ on earth today, live as Jesus lived.

May our lives be full of his self-giving love and compassion so that others may see him in us.

We ask that those whose lives are endangered may know your presence, your power, your wisdom, your comfort and your peace.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

For our world

Lord, with wars and conflicts internationally and nationally, we seek your peace.

With threats to our planet from the effects of unwise use of its resources we seek your wisdom.

May there be those who recognise evil and are prepared to speak against it and those who can discern wise paths to take and share them with others.

And may there be ears open to hear your call through them and hearts willing to act.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

For our communities

Lord, we ask you to help us to make the communities in which we live places of welcome and acceptance. In times of uncertainty and upset, may we be ready to share the love of Jesus with hope, peace and comfort.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

For those who suffer

Lord we pray for those for whom life is not easy:

for those weighed down by ill health,

asking you to bring them wholeness of body, mind and spirit;

for those weighed down by worry,

asking you to give them wisdom, peace and reassurance;
for those weighed down by fear,
asking you for their freedom, release and liberation;
for those weighed down by sadness,
asking you to give them comfort, strength and joy.
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

For ourselves
Lord, be the life we live and the love we give
for Jesus' sake.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Suggested hymns/songs

Stand up and bless the Lord
All I once held dear
Take my life and let it be consecrated
Will you come and follow me?
All for Jesus
Father, hear the prayer we offer

Activities to accompany the service:

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.com/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@ lectionary resource)