Home Service Sheet for Sunday 22nd January 2023

Call To Worship: Isaiah 9:2-4

The people who walked in darkness

 have seen a great light;

those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,

 on them has light shone.

You have multiplied the nation;

 you have increased its joy;

they rejoice before you

 as with joy at the harvest,

 as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

For the yoke of his burden,

 and the staff for his shoulder,

 the rod of his oppressor,

 you have broken as on the day of Midian.

Opening Prayer

In this dark world, in which we live, You are the one true Light, Lord Jesus. Not only do You help us to see ourselves better, but You show us Your perfect and righteous ways. In You alone is there light, life eternal and salvation. Heavenly Father, we thank You and praise You for sending Your Son into this world as the true light, through whom we can be adopted into Your family. We praise You for Your great and wonderful love towards us, and for the gracious work of Your Holy Spirit who gives to us the gift of faith. Help us today to read Your Word carefully, and by Your Spirit may You illuminate its meaning for us that we might walk by faith and to Your glory, amen.

Hymn Here is love by William Rees, translated by William Edwards

https://youtu.be/jgugcW7Ez-Y

Here is love, vast as the ocean, loving kindness as the flood,

When the Prince of Life, our Ransom, shed for us His precious blood.

Who His love will not remember? Who can cease to sing His praise?

He can never be forgotten, throughout heaven’s eternal days.

On the mount of crucifixion, fountains opened deep and wide;

Through the floodgates of God’s mercy flowed a vast and gracious tide.

Grace and love, like mighty rivers, poured incessant from above,

Heaven’s peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love.

Let me, all Your love accepting, love You, ever all my days;

Let me seek Your kingdom only and my life be to Your praise;

You alone shall be my glory, nothing in the world I see.

You have cleansed and sanctified me, You Yourself have set me free.

In Your truth You shall direct me by Your Spirit through Your Word;

And Your grace my need is meeting, as I trust in You, my Lord.

Of Your fullness You are pouring Your great love and pow’r on me,

Without measure, full and boundless, drawing out my heart to Thee.

The Lord’s Prayer

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 that 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.

Bible Reading: Matthew 4:12-22

12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. 13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,

 the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles -

16 the people dwelling in darkness

 have seen a great light,

and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,

 on them a light has dawned.”

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Reflection

Last week, when we were considering John the Baptist, we noted how John’s ministry and influence must decrease in order for that of Jesus to increase. At the start of our Bible reading today we see this taking place through the arrest of John. In fact, as we read elsewhere in the Gospels, John was never again to enjoy earthly freedom after this point. Within a short period of time he would be beheaded following the request of Herod’s step-daughter, Salome. Yet this was necessary, and a part of God’s plan. No longer would John be the voice of God here on earth, but rather it would be the Messiah, Jesus.

Clearly it was a dangerous time to be teaching and preaching the Word of God, as arrest and execution were par for the course if the rulers disliked what you said. Today clear and faithful preaching of God’s Word is becoming increasingly unpopular, even within the Church. However, at present, the worst we are likely to face is censorship, cultural cancellation and, perhaps, police interview. The reality is that sinful human beings do not like to be called out for their sins, but this is exactly what the Holy Spirit does when we rightly preach the Scriptures. We are not here to say what folk want us to say that will keep them happy and content. There are plenty of people who will do that, but that is not the way of Christ.

Jesus withdrew to the region of Galilee, Matthew tells us. However, it would not seem to be out of a sense of fear, but rather out of wisdom and a knowledge of His Father’s will. God’s plan was always that His Son would die at the right moment, in the right place and this was not that time. He still had to call disciples to Himself, train and teach them so that they would be prepared to lead the early church. There is also the matter of fulfilling prophecy, as we see here by Matthew quoting the prophet Isaiah. Jesus came as the light of the world into this dark world to shine the true light of God upon the people of this world. The physical region of Galilee was the ancestral inheritance of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, and this was where this light was prophesied to come from.

The prophecy is not saying that the folk of that region were worse than others, but rather that there were people there and throughout the whole world who were “dwelling in darkness”. This is, of course, metaphorical rather than literal. All human beings are lost, groping around in moral darkness without God. It is only when the light of Jesus is shone into our lives through the Gospel that we recognise that we are truly living in darkness. Jesus is the only source of light who can cause us to live in the light, and it is by us placing our faith in Him that we come into the light. He shows us how to live and through His Word gives us light by which to live. As the Psalmist writes, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)

Jesus’ ministry begins with the preaching “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (v.17) This is basically the same message that John the Baptist preached and it is the same message that the early Church would also preach in the Name of Jesus. Through the work of the Holy Spirit granting people the gift of faith many would enter into eternal life through faith in Christ in response to this message. This also needs to be our basic message to the world around us. It is the Gospel that they need to hear that calls them to faith in Christ Jesus with repentance for the forgiveness of their sins.

Our Bible reading today concludes with Jesus calling the first disciples. Matthew records Jesus speaking to Andrew, Simon Peter, James and John. It is interesting to note the differences here between Matthew’s account of their calling, and that provided by John, which we heard last week. Like eyewitnesses today, Matthew and John pick up on different details and words. It doesn’t mean that one is correct and the other is not – rather it points to different parts of the same event. Perhaps what John records is the first meeting of Andrew with Jesus, but what Matthew records is the actual calling of Andrew and Simon to follow Him as disciples? What we do know, though, is that God’s Word is completely trustworthy and true as it’s author is faithful and true. Let us place our trust in Jesus and His Word that we may live in His light and guide others to that same light. Amen!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we know that we live in a world where there is much darkness, fear, hatred and violence. May You help us to be ambassadors of Your love and light where You have placed us. We pray for those caught up in the darkness of addiction, oppression and abuse. Grant to each the freedom to escape into Your marvellous light revealed through the Gospel. We ask that Your Church would always be a beacon of Your light, spreading hope, salvation and love amongst every person with which we come into contact. Help us to live lives that reflect the light of Your love, and help us to speak words of comfort and hope through our words and deeds. We ask this prayer in Jesus’ Name, amen.

Benediction

Almighty God, we ask that You would fill us afresh with Your Holy Spirit this day so that the love of the Father, the light of the Son and the holiness of the Spirit would flow in us and through us, bringing glory to Your Name. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.