

## Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2024

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Readings     Jonah 3:1-5, 10  
                  Mark 1:14-20

### Reflection

Lectionary readings come round every three years and one of the challenges for those leading worship regularly is to identify the fresh insight which comes from rereading a passage in the light of the world. One of today's readings is from Psalm 62 and what struck me particularly is verse 10 which reads 'Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.' Put simply do not be led astray seeking money.

Our world rotates around money. It is broadly divided into those who have money and those who do not, and the power lies with those who have money. In Star Trek, The Next Generation, we are introduced to the world of the future, a world in which money is held in common for the benefit of all, and there is no personal wealth. Resources are used to enable exploration of humanity and creation in all their wonders and majesty. Having travelled back in time and inadvertently engaged with early space pioneers, in a time not too different from our own time, the travellers of the future are astounded at the basic nature of the ships used for space travel. The travellers of the past are equally astounded at the complexity and generosity of future machines and ask the question – 'how can you afford this'? The future travellers are at first unsure of the question as their culture has no perception of affording, if something is needed for the good of the community, at a local, global or universal level, then the common purse provides for it.

Surely this is a picture of the kingdom. However imagine the process of change, the letting go needed to achieve it and the reluctance to embrace such a radical new way. In our reading from Jonah we see an example of such radical change being embraced. Jonah was a prophet, although if you read the whole story you will see he was a little reluctant at times. It was not so much that he had a problem with the message as that he knew the God of love would not follow through and would go to any length to allow his people to come round to the idea. This frustrated Jonah and yet it is a reminder of the Old Testament concept of judgement which was not about retribution but about being right with God. I believe that God does not force change upon people but nudges in the right direction until we choose the change which moves us on. In this instance the King of Ninevah responds straightaway and demands his people change their ways, leading from the front. What could humanity achieve if we responded likewise?

Jesus did not demand change of his disciples, he invited and urged through his own example and sharing of ideas. We read of an instant response but I often wonder what their families thought of it all. I was reminded of a part of my own story. My parents sent my brother and sister and myself to Sunday school. As soon as they were old enough my brother and sister exercised their right to choose and left whilst I also exercised my right to choose and stayed, progressing through a nurturing system which encouraged questioning and reflection. Some years later, when I was involved in different aspects of church life my dad had a quiet word suggesting I was too involved. I have to admit my response was that he had started my journey by sending me to Sunday School. I often wonder what my mum and dad would think of where I am today if they were still alive. Did those around the disciples have similar worries for their loved ones?

For the disciples it was a roller coaster journey, the highs of getting it, followed by the lows of confusion, but they stuck with it and many of them became leaders in the resultant early church. Not one of the original disciples but certainly an influence on the early church, Paul wrote letters of encouragement and challenge, letters which chart his own journey of understanding. In the first letter to the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians 7:29-31) we read 'I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none,<sup>30</sup> and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions,<sup>31</sup> and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.' Paul is speaking of the coming of the Kingdom and the radical change it will bring. Now the question that comes to my mind is that if the kingdom means an end to life as we know it are we really looking forward to it or are we secretly hoping it won't happen in our time? Are we ready for the massive change for which we pray in the Lord's Prayer?

All of us to some extent struggle with change, we are afraid of the unknown and hesitant to let go of the familiar and yet that is what it means to respond to the call of God. We cannot be disciples and expect things to remain the same. As we work to make a better world things will have to change and they will change for us also. The prophets were called to speak out about the things that were damaging life for God's people. Today there are prophets from all walks of life and all ages speaking out about the things which threaten life on our planet, are we with them? Is the church playing its part as a prophetic voice? Are we challenging the practices that limit choice and deny people their opportunity to grow?

The early disciples life involved

- Challenging unjust structures
- Facing new ideas
- Living with no personal belongings
- Relying on each other and also on strangers
- Learning a new way of being.

In our time the factors are the same, we are called to

- Challenge the structures of our country and our world when they threaten to destroy life.
- Recognise that when faced with new ideas we need to embrace change, embrace the technology that offers a solution
- Live more simply, don't buy more than we need, don't keep upgrading our tech, campaign against unnecessary packaging.
- Help rebuild communities, support those who are struggling, talk to one another and share and encourage interdependence.
- Learn about what it means to be fully human, to be more like Jesus in that we are growing our relationships with each other and with God.

Is our response to God's call as radical as the King of Ninevah and those first disciples. We are only at the beginning, but are we as sure as Paul that we want the Kingdom to come and are we ready to embrace the change that it will mean for all of us and to inspire others to embrace the change? Are we ready for a world that shares fully and lets go of personal wealth replacing it with personal growth through the power of love. I hope so and my prayer is that we will start now because the world need to change.