

SUNDAY 11 JULY 2021

WELCOME & OPENING PRAYER

Welcome to our Sunday Service where this week we will be looking at how our faith encourages us to speak truth to power as we are reminded of all the good things God has prepared for us his people. As we are loved so we should love others.

Our opening prayer is the collect for today:

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding; pour into our hearts such love towards you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; 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 forever. **Amen**

HYMN: HOW DEEP THE FATHERS LOVE STUART TOWNSEND

READINGS: By Nina

Ephesians 1:3-14 NIV

Praise for Spiritual Blessings in Christ

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.

Mark 6:14-29 NIV

John the Baptist Beheaded

King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.” Others said, “He is Elijah.” And still others claimed, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.”

But when Herod heard this, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!” For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled yet he liked to listen to him. Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, “Ask me for anything you want, and I’ll give it to you.” And he promised her with an oath, “Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom.” She went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask for?” “The head of John the Baptist,” she answered. At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: “I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. On hearing of this, John’s disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

REFLECTION

Speaking truth to power, has always been a dangerous pursuit. For John The Baptist it ended up with him being beheaded – though to be fair to Herod I don’t think he wanted to kill John. Because although John publicly condemned Herod for marrying his brother’s wife, presumably having committed adultery with her, and for this ended up in prison-it seems Herod spent time visiting with John, so perhaps Herod had something of a conscience?

However, Herod’s ego got the better of him, and we are told at his birthday party, where I am assuming much alcohol flowed, Herod makes a foolish promise to his step daughter. “Dance for us and you can have anything you want” – which just goes to show don’t promise your teenage children anything they want, or you might find yourselves severely compromised!

Herod was not a man to lose face in front of his officials and he behaved as many power-hungry people do: he sacrificed another life to save face.

I find it interesting that Matt Hancock and girlfriend were not condemned for committing adultery: but for breaking social distancing rules, rules he had made, and for this, was soundly condemned in the press. He also received £16,000 for resigning!

Frankly it’s the spouses and all the children involved I feel for, having their parents’ adultery made so public cannot be easy for all involved.

Many people think that religion should have nothing to do with politics, rather stay a private internal affair, as if faith has nothing to do with a just economic, social and political life.

But as Mahatma Gandhi, said, “Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion is.”

An exclusively privatised faith is not consistent with the witness of Scripture. Think of Moses taking his people out of slavery. The Hebrew prophets, were vocal in their condemnation of those who abused power. And it is certainly not how Jesus embodied God’s presence in the world. From John the Baptist, to Martin Luther King Jnr. to Jesus, people of faith have spoken truth to power, and that my friends is a political act.

Jesus spoke truth and justice to political and religious powers in their treatment of the outcast, the sick, the marginalized, the poor, the widow, the hungry, women, and the children. Through his healing power—Jesus restored and reconnected the marginalized to their social standing in the Temple and the public square. Spiritual and physical healing by Jesus had social, political, and economic implications as they became re-connected with their community.

The word “religion” comes from the Latin word “ligare,” which means “to join” or “link”—often understood to mean the linking of the human and the divine, but it is also about being linked and connected to each other.

The Greek word “polis” (not the Geordie word for the police!)—gave us the word “politics”—meaning “city” or “public forum” where people come together. This is the place we live out our connectedness to God, each other and for the common good. Religion and politics have been bound together since the beginning of human community.

During this last eighteen months, understandably focus has been on the pandemic, however there is now much coming to light about the misuse of public money, contracts given to friends and family that have made many very rich. And underneath all this, is a growth of a very real and widening gap between the rich and poor. Things are getting worse for the poor, the hungry, the vulnerable, the homeless, the migrants to name but a few.

Priti Patel is advocating a four-year prison sentence for those attempting to come to the UK in unofficial boats over the channel. A lot of compassion there for those risking the lives of their families as they flee from terror with little to their name.

It is proposed that those carrying Down’s babies may terminate the pregnancy right up to birth. Is this eugenics by another name? I don’t know but it worries me.

Child Povert Action Group reported there were 4.3 million children living in poverty in the UK in 2019-20.1 That’s 31 per cent of children, or nine in a classroom of 30.

Shelter, posted on 22April 2021 that, “almost 100,000 households recorded as homeless at the start of 2021.”

Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, food banks in the Trussell Trust’s UK wide network distributed 2.5 million emergency food parcels to people in crisis, a 33% increase on the previous year. 980,000 of these went to children. They go on to say that, “compared to this time five years ago, the need for food banks in our network has increased by 128%.”

YMCA's Young and Black report found that 95% of young Black people in the UK have heard or witnessed racist language at school, with 51% of males saying they heard it "all the time".

A TUC study reveals unemployment among BAME people is double the rate for white people (Guardian Feb 2021)

[www.theguardian.com>society>2021>feb>covid-job-losses](http://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/feb/covid-job-losses)

Ever since God called Moses from the burning bush to liberate the Hebrew people from slavery at the hands of Pharaoh, a primary role of religion has been to speak truth to power. Our faith calls us, because our God, the Creator of all, lavishes love and dignity on all of His creation, to hold accountable those in power, so that our institutions, government, and public life promote the common good, and the well-being of all.

We are not left alone to do this, indeed as Ephesians reminds us we are "blessed... in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ....and..received.... forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us".

It is out of the experience of being forgiven and in the knowledge of how much God has lavished love upon us that we can move into the public square to advocate for justice, peace, food, housing, opportunity, dignity, and respect for all people, whom God made and also lavishly loves!

Richard Rohr says, "God's love always yearns to save and transform us and the world. From Genesis to Revelation, we see images of God's intended and preferred vision for us: a world made whole, with people living in a beloved community, where no one is despised or forgotten, peace reigns, and the goodness of God's creation is treasured and protected as a gift."

French poet and essayist, Charles Peguy said it this way, "Everything begins in mysticism and ends in politics."

Our inner world—must inform our outer world. When our political, economic and social structures mistreat or oppress any individuals, the role of us as God's faithful people, is to re-ligare—to reconnect our structures and institutions with the values of justice, fairness and the common good.

So let us go to our source, our God, and pray. Pray for our institutions, our leaders and politicians, that they will act with justice for all. Let us pray for our community at St John's that we will be people who speak truth to power where we come across injustice.

This is not to say that as believers, we will all agree on the best course of action, or one policy solution on any issue. People of good faith have and will always have a diversity of opinions on how best to move forward.

But, let us seek God for as we are told in John 16:13, "when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come".

So let us be people who listen.

Amen.

PRAYERS By Nina Lloyd-Hirst

In the power of the Spirit, let us pray for the church and for the world and let us give thanks to our heavenly Father for all the blessings of this life, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

Lord, in your mercy: Hear our prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise you for the freedom to meet together to worship you and to speak about you. We pray for Christians throughout the world, especially for those who are persecuted for their faith, for those who do not enjoy the freedoms that we do. (Silence) We pray for all church leaders that they may not be afraid to speak the truth to those in authority. We pray for ourselves that we too may not be afraid to speak the truth in love. Living Lord Jesus, you came to set us free; you call us to know you, to love you and to serve you: sustain us by your love and make us worthy of your calling.

Lord, in your mercy: Hear our prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise you for the political freedoms we enjoy: democracy, freedom of speech and freedom of conscience. We pray for the kingdoms of the world, that they may become the kingdom of our God. We pray for world leaders that they may govern with integrity and humility, rather than selfish ambition or conceit. We pray that all those in authority may seek to truly serve and to seek to meet the needs of all people with compassion and justice. We pray for all those who are exploited, for all who are treated like slaves, for all political prisoners and for all who yearn for freedom and justice. (Silence) We pray for those areas of the world where there is war and civil unrest, those areas where there are natural disasters and those areas that suffer through human greed or cruelty. (Silence) Living Lord Jesus, lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust, lead us from hate to love, from war to peace. May peace fill our hearts and our world.

Lord, in your mercy: Hear our prayer

Heavenly Father, we remember our children and all those who teach and nurture young people. Thank you for the benefits of education and for the opportunities those benefits give us. We pray for children throughout the world, especially for those who are denied an education, whether by poverty or by ideology. (Silence) Living Lord Jesus, you care for every child, we pray that all young people may know the freedom of being able to fulfil their potential.

Lord, in your mercy: Hear our prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the developments of modern medicine and healthcare. We pray for those throughout the world who do not have access to the basics of life – clean water, sanitation, healthy food and adequate housing, doctors and medicine. (Silence) We remember those who are sick, those who find life difficult at this time and all those who take care of them. (Silence) We pray too for those who mourn. (Silence) Living Lord Jesus, we lift these into your healing light, that your love may bring them to wholeness of body, mind and spirit. Heavenly Father, you bind up our wounds, heal our sickness and restore

us to wholeness; make us sensitive to all who are in need or trouble, that we may care for the suffering and be generous in all that we do and say and think.

Lord, in your mercy: Hear our prayer

**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

HYMN: ALL I ONCE HELD DEAR: GRAHAM KENDRICK

BLESSING

God give us all grace, to become the people you has called us to be, that we may live and work to His praise and glory; and the blessings of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you and all those you love this day and always. **Amen**