

Traditional Home service Sunday 5th Sep

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God,
whose only Son has opened for us
a new and living way into your presence:
give us pure hearts and steadfast wills
to worship you in spirit and in truth;
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.
Amen

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

**God our Father, long-suffering, full of
grace and truth, you create us from
nothing and give us life.
You give your faithful people new life
in the water of baptism.
You do not turn your face from us,
nor cast us aside.
We confess that we have sinned
against you and our neighbour.
We have wounded your love and
marred your image in us.
Restore us for the sake of your Son,
and bring us to heavenly joy,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the
name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to
God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms,
hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*Praise to the Lord*)

READINGS - Proverbs 22.1-2,8,9,22,23
James 2.1-10; 14-17
Mark 7.24-37

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth. I believe in
Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who
was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of
the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius
Pilate, was crucified, died, and was
buried; he descended to the dead. On
the third day he rose again; he ascended
into heaven, he is seated at the right
hand of the Father, and he will come to
judge the living and the dead. I believe in
the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness
of sins, the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*Spend some time praying for our nation,
our community and our families.*

THE LORD'S 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 2 (*Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your
love*)

CONCLUSION

The God of all grace, who called you to
his eternal glory in Christ Jesus,
establish, strengthen and settle you in
the faith; and the blessing of God
Almighty, the Father, the Son and the
Holy Spirit be among you and remain
with you always.
Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the
King of creation!
O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy
health and salvation!
All ye who hear, now to His temple
draw near;
Praise Him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things
so wondrously reigneth,
Shelters thee under His wings, yea, so
gently sustaineth!
Hast thou not seen how thy desires
e'er have been
Granted in what He ordaineth?

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper
thy work and defend thee;
Surely His goodness and mercy here
daily attend thee;
Ponder anew what the Almighty can
do,
If with His love He befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord, oh, let all that is in
me adore Him!
All that hath life and breath, come now
with praises before Him;
Let the Amen sound from His people
again,
Gladly for aye we adore Him.

Refrain:
*Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,
show us how to serve the neighbours
we have from you.*

Kneels at the feet of his friends,
silently washes their feet,
Master who acts as a slave to them.

Refrain

Neighbours are wealthy and poor,
varied in color and race,
neighbours are near us and far away.

Refrain

These are the ones we should serve,
these are the ones we should love,
all these are neighbours to us and
you.

Refrain

Loving puts us on our knees,
silently washing their feet,
this is the way we should live with you.

Refrain

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Sermon Notes - Adrian Morton
Proverbs 22:1-2,8,9,22,23;
James 2:1-10; 14-17;
God's heart for the poor

I have to say I do love the book of Proverbs..

The selected ones that Louise read out today direct out attention to God's heart for the poor.

Prov 22:2 says:
Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all.

Prov 22:9 says:
A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.

Prov 22:22-23:
Do not exploit the poor because they are poor...

And actually both our readings this morning direct out attention to God's heart for the poor.

And that is what I want to speak about this morning.

But also, what is our response...
If that is God's heart and we claim to follow him...
Then of course it follows that it should be our heart.

And if we take the letter of James seriously, he says, "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

So there needs to be some practical action from us.
Regarding the poor.

Now I think our context in these villages of Northampton is one where we are relatively well off.

Yes, there is a degree of poverty around us, often hidden behind closed doors.

But generally, compared to some places, we are fairly well off.

So I want to talk about God's heart for the poor and what is our response using two

contexts or issues that are currently in the news.

One is a national issue, or international really.
The other is more local.

Lets also understand that poverty is not just financial poverty.
But there are other forms of poverty, social poverty, spiritual poverty.

But James talks about the 'poor in the eyes of the world'.

The first issue is illustrated by the situation in Afghanistan..

With many trying to flee the country.

Though the issue of refugees is wider than that, with many 100s coming across the channel in dodgy boats.

West Northamptonshire council are one of the local councils that have said they will receive families that have fled the country.

So the council will be put up families in hotels first, and then find accommodation.

But they are also saying that there will be unaccompanied children sent by families who couldn't get out themselves, but the children were able to get out... and were sent with other families.

I looked up some stats for refugees...

- Around half of the world's 26 million refugees are under the age of 18
- The UK received 3,775 asylum applications from separated children in 2019
- 45% of separated children applying for asylum in the UK in the year up to June 2020 were from Iran, Vietnam and Afghanistan

Firstly what is our theological response...

I was also interested to see on the news a couple of reactions to these refugees coming to this area.

Some people were really welcoming.. its great we can offer help.
Well done our council etc

Others (and they tended to be older in the news clips I saw) were more of the view - we haven't space for them, they will take our jobs... etc

So what is the the theological response...

What does the Bible say about this?

How can our thinking be informed?

Lets take the James' reading first.
He is warning the early church against snobbery really.

So there was no doubt there must have been social problems in the early church.

In the ancient world the Church would have been the only place were social distinctions didn't exist.

You can imagine the awkwardness when a master found himself sitting next to his slave.

Both being told there are equal in the eyes of God.

Also, in its early days the Church was predominantly poor and humble.

Therefore if a rich man converted there must have been a real temptation to make a fuss of him.

<Talk about my early days at Wollaston...>

It must have been a case when a rich man entered.. put your tithe here!

And James says "Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith."

And I think we see that across the world.. where so much of the miraculous is seen amongst the poorer nations.

Because faith wise, they are ahead of us.

But elsewhere in Scripture we hear how the poor are on God's heart.

Jesus' first sermon included, "He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."

Luke 6:20 says, "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God)

So it's clear God has a heart for the poor.

And actually the message of Christianity was that those who mattered to no one else mattered intensely to God.

It was a simple fact that the gospel offered so much to the poor and demanded so much from the rich, that it was the poor who were swept into the Church.

But what about refugees in particular?

Well, there isn't a mention of the word as such.

But there is much about strangers and foreigners.

Jesus famously said 'love your neighbour as yourself'.

Hebrews 13:2:

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

And in Ephesians 2:19 it says:

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household."

In other words we were all foreigners and strangers until we accepted Christ and were brought into God's household.

So I think it's clear God has both a heart for the poor and for the stranger or foreigner.

And that is what refugees are:

They are poor, and strangers and foreigners in a strange land.

And they will become our neighbours.

But what can we do..?

Well the bible doesn't give a political solution to such problems as the immigration issue.

And I'm not pretending that it is a simple solution for our politicians.

But the Bible does show us what is the right heart attitude to have.

And the state of our hearts will dictate, will form how we make decisions about any solution.

As I look at the Gospels, as I look at how Jesus dealt with the desperate, the needy, the poor.

His overriding heart toward them was one of compassion.

He acted out of compassion for people.
He showed pity.
he showed mercy.

And I think that this is the key.

If our hearts are shaped by compassion, we will tend to make the better decisions about how to deal with all this.

Practically speaking..

I know many of us here already give, for example to the Foodbank at the Daylight centre.

Many of us, I'm sure also give money to third world charities, such as TearFund and World vision.

All that is great...
And I don't want to give anyone a guilt trip about doing more if you feel that is all you can do.

I've put details in the newsletter of someone in Rushden who is coordinating the response in the Rushden area.

If it stirs your heart, drop them an email, find out what is needed.
There is a long list of food items and clothing that is needed.

Personally speaking, Louise and I are seriously considering offering to house another child - a refugee child.

We decided to foster care partly in response to James 1:27 which says:

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress."

I'm not sure whether we can house another child, because of having Teegan but we are looking into it.

And I realise not everyone can do that. We have a big house and we think we have the capacity in life to be able to do it.

Not everyone can, and that's fine.

The other issue I said I'd mention is in Wellingborough...
Before I went away on holiday we prayed for the vicar of St. Mark's on the Queensway estate.

Because of the stabbing and death of a 16yr old boy...

Those on our prayer walking team went this past week to pray with the vicar walking around the estate.

Such a great thing to do...

The situation there isn't great still...

I know Jayne is hoping to take some people to do a 'crafted prayer' session in the church there.

Asking the Lord, how should we pray strategically for this estate and the church that is called to minister in that place.

Because it's hard to know what to do practically.

Though supporting someone on the ground is doing just that.

I really wouldn't know how to go about dealing with some of the social problems that are evidently on that estate.

But we do know the One who has a redemptive solution for all problems.

So a good start is to be praying for the estate.

And the church at St. Mark's may already be doing that.

But we'll see whether they want more help
Again such a great thing to do.

We know that primarily, our struggle against darkness, is as it says in Eph 6:

“not against flesh and blood, but against the rules, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

I realise these are complex problems with no easy solutions.

Solutions that need multi-agencies working together.

That includes the church.

But if our hearts are formed by compassion and mercy.

And If we have the resolve to do something practically.

Then God's heart for the poor, stranger and foreigner will be worked out in faith and action as James calls for.

Amen.