

Salford Methodist Circuit



Everyone Like A Happy Ending - 27th December 2020

Rev Kim Ratcliffe

Good morning and welcome to the Salford Methodist Circuit on this first Sunday of Christmas. Shall we begin with prayer? Let us pray:

Lord,
A new year is just around the corner.
Is this our time to be renewed by you?
We come today called by you.
We come to you our Saviour and our Lord.
We are in awe of your awesomeness.
You speak to us today Lord just as you
Spoke to Simeon and Anna all these years ago.
You know that we can hear you.
Make us respond to your word
Our Prince of Glory and saviour to us all.
Amen

Hymn: See him lying on a bed of straw

*See him lying on a bed of straw;
draughty stable with an open door,
Mary cradling the babe she bore;
the Prince of Glory is his name:*

*O now carry me to Bethlehem
to see the Lord of love again;
just as poor as was the stable then,
the Prince of Glory when he came.*

*Star of silver, sweep across the skies,
show where Jesus in the manger lies;
shepherds, swiftly from your stupor rise
to see the Saviour of the world:
O now carry me to Bethlehem...*

*Angels, sing again the song you sang,
sing the story of God's gracious plan;
sing that Bethl'em's little baby can
be the Saviour of us all:
O now carry me to Bethlehem...*

*Mine are riches from your poverty,
from your innocence, eternity;
mine, forgiveness by your death for me;
child of sorrow for my joy:
O now carry me to Bethlehem...*



Bible Reading: Luke 2 : 22 - 40

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

The time came for Joseph and Mary to perform the ceremony of purification, as the Law of Moses commanded. So they took the child to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord: "Every first-born male is to be dedicated to the Lord." They also went to offer a sacrifice of a pair of doves or two young pigeons, as required by the law of the Lord. At that time there was a man named Simeon living in Jerusalem. He was a good, God-fearing man and was waiting for Israel to be saved. The Holy Spirit was with him and had assured him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah. Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the Temple. When the parents brought the child Jesus into the Temple to do for him what the Law required, Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God: "Now, Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace. With my own eyes I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at the things Simeon said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart."

There was a very old prophet, a widow named Anna, daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She had been married for only seven years and was now eighty-four years old. She never left the Temple; day and night she worshipped God, fasting and praying. That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free.

The Return to Nazareth

When Joseph and Mary had finished doing all that was required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown of Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom, and God's blessings were upon him. Thanks be to God. Amen

Lord's Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;*

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*on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who 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.*

Luke, we know was a doctor, in the very nature of the work that doctors do they need to have a good bedside manner, don't they? Thinking about that caring side of Luke's nature he may have been tempted to leave out the rawness of what the reality of the world that he lived in and that of Jesus, who was brought into that same world, was like. He could have spoken about all of the 'nice' people who lived at that time and the people who he had met and even heard about but in all honesty he had a gospel to write and everything was important for others to believe and understand about what he knew, truly, about Jesus' life and the world that he was brought into; the people who were an important part of Jesus' life had to be a part of that too. In this part of the gospel, remembering that it was written approx 60 years after the death of Jesus, I somehow feel a warmth as he spoke of Mary and Joseph. The young couple were given the task of bringing God's son into the world, to love and to cherish until the day he died. Luke shows us Jesus was like any other human baby. There were certain rituals that Jesus would go through, purification being one of them. The picture he paints of Simeon and Anna, for me shows that they understood the importance of who Jesus was and their role on this day as Jesus was consecration to God. Like Luke, Simeon also knew that the world that Jesus was brought into was anything but perfect, it was his wish for everything to be made right between God and Israel, Simeon longed for it. But this day was special, special to Simeon, and he fulfilled personally something that would give him the peace of mind that the task he had come to do had been done and, that if his time to die came now, he would die a peaceful man. But Simeon had done right by welcoming Jesus' parents into the temple. As Simeon sang the song he did and Mary and Joseph marvelled in all that he said and sang about the child, that was such a special moment for him and for them. Then almost as if Simeon took Mary to one side, he did take her to one side to prepare her for the fact that the task that Jesus had been sent to do wasn't going to be an easy thing for Mary to endure. Like the sword that the soldier pierced Jesus' side with on the cross, the soul of Mary would also be pierced by a sword. Not something that was easy, I am sure, for Simeon to share with a new mother.

Anna, an elderly prophetess, spoke to them with kindness, affirming the positiveness and the hope for the world that this small child brought for the people as they looked forward to the redemption of Jerusalem through this new born King. Even after Jesus' death it must have been difficult for Luke as he left



his home each day or whenever he did, to continue to live in a world controlled by Caesar. A person who controlled his kingdom hard and cruelly and with his own self-interest at the heart of all he did. This was not dissimilar to previous kings and nor would it be any less so for future kings. But as we saw with Simeon and Anna there were good people in the world too. People who would keep their ears to the ground so that they knew what was going on. Anna would know which people and situations they needed to bring before God in an effort to bring comfort and healing to their lives. In doing their part for God Simeon and Anna would have brought a certain amount of peace into people's lives simply by doing what God asked of them. Can you recognise areas in your life that you sort of know that you are at peace with who you are and what you have managed to achieve for God and that you know you can rest easy? Mary would in her lifetime have to look at her son, the Son of God and endure looking on, being there when he needed her – if he needed her. She would try her very best for him even knowing that no matter what she does for him she cannot take away or interfere with God; because it was God who sent Jesus into the world. Mary would stand by him to the very end when he would eventually be rejected by the very city that he had come to rescue, Jesus came to offer them peace but was rejected. He was placed, as Simeon says, 'placed here to make many in Israel fall and rise again', Jesus himself had to go through death before he could rise once more in his resurrection but Israel at this point in time would not, could not, know this as yet. As we begin to look ahead to the new year, I know for some of us, we won't be able to take a glimpse back, and may not even want to take a glimpse back, to all that they have come through. Some people may feel that they have had their soul pierced like Mary's soul was and I understand that. There were so many happy events that we were looking forward to last year. Some things that we may be able to move forward into this coming year - 2021. Some things we sadly won't be able to because we simply can't, that moment has gone even although our memories will be able to live on. I have been in the manse for two days now with the rain pelting down outside. Even Millie, our dog, looks at me when I open the back door to let her out as if to say, "there is no way on earth that you are getting me through that door". I too do not want to go through the door looking at the dullness of the day but because of her resistance I know I need to give her encouragement if only to go for a short walk around the block. When we do go out, with what I call the BIG rain not giving up and Millie's head dipping down to the ground and her big eyes looking up to me huffily, I begin to walk quicker and begin to give her even more encouragement and soon we are enjoying the walk together even if we both need to dry off for a wee while when we get home. I am sure that there is a glimmer of, "thank you I really enjoyed that walk" in her eyes when we do get home and dried off. We all like happy endings and if it was in my power to give you a happy ending to this year, you would open your window on the 1st January 2021 with the birds singing, with the blue skies and sunshine. I would give you the time and everything else 2020 took away from you and from me. But I can't. In 2020 for us as a family we welcomed little Hattie, our granddaughter, into the world. Hattie was born on the 24th March 2020, literally as our first lockdown happened. Our grandsons now are 4 and 3 and are active



wee boys and when we are able to see them, they are both little live wires, and I love it. Although everyone else in the family have been able to work all the way through the pandemic, Mark was furloughed and Jess is a self-employed hairdresser so couldn't work. Of course, schools were closed too so Mark, Jess and Louie were given the time to get to know little Hattie in her first months, and for her to spend time with them she would never have had that time with her brother and her parents had she been born in what we may call 'normal' times. When you look in Hattie's eye's she doesn't look away from you, she looks right into your eyes as if she's figuring out what you're all about. I am sure that lots of grandparents have thought the same as me even without a pandemic happening, for me it has been something special with Hattie and I will hold onto that as a precious and warm memory that I will always have of 2020. We do need to find those joyous times again. They may not happen on the 1st January, but they will happen. I have a little card in my office that says, "if you believe and I believe and we together pray, the Holy Spirit will come down and set God's people free". One day we will be free again, not tomorrow or the next day but at some point, in the coming year - I truly believe that. We are encouraged to pray in scripture, perhaps even for some people to pray without ceasing. Keep praying, as Simeon and Anna did, as so many other people have done throughout time, including Jesus. If you are in a place that you cannot pray please don't beat yourself up. If you feel that you can, then ask somebody to pray for you and the situation that you are facing or have faced. If we cannot be together physically to pray, we can and have prayed with people over the telephone, we can and we have prayed with people online.

I do wish you all a much happier new year than we have had in 2020, for the majority of it, and I send you my love and my prayers for 2021. Amen.

Hymn: 'Into the darkness of this world'

*Into the darkness of this world,
into the shadows of the night;
into this loveless place you came,
lightened our burdens, eased our pain,
and made these hearts your home.
Into the darkness once again -
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

*Come with your Love to make us whole,
come with your light to Lead us on,
driving the darkness far from our souls:
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

*Into the longing of our souls,
into these heavy hearts of stone,
shine on us now your piercing light,
order our lives and souls aright,*

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*by grace and love unknown,
until in you our hearts unite -
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

*Come with your Love to make us whole,
come with your light to Lead us on,
driving the darkness far from our souls:
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

*O Holy Child, Emmanuel,
hope of the ages, God with us,
visit again this broken place,
till all the earth declares your praise
and your great mercies own.
Now let your love be born in us,
o come, Lord Jesus, come.*

*Come in your glory,
take your place,
Jesus, the Name above all names,
we long to see you face to face,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

Prayers of Intercession

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast."*

***I came to Jesus as I was,
weary and worn and sad;
I found in Him a resting place,
and He has made me glad.***

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
stoop down, and drink, and live."*

***I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in Him.***

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's Light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,*

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and all thy day be bright."

***I looked to Jesus, and I found
in Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk,
till travelling days are done.
Amen***

Hymn: 'Joy to the world

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.*

*Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!
Let all their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.*

I leave you with the blessing:
May the blessing of God
The Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Bless you today and every day
Until we meet again. Amen.

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See Him Lying On A Bed Of Straw - Michael Perry

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