

Salford Methodist Circuit



3rd Sunday in Lent - Meek and Mild... As If! - 7th March 2021
Rev Clare Stainsby

Hymn: As We Are Gathered

*As we are gathered, Jesus is here,
one with each other, Jesus is here,
Joined by the Spirit, washed in the blood,
Part of the body, the Church of God,
As we are gathered, Jesus is here,
one with each other, Jesus is here.*

Welcome everyone, from wherever and whenever you join us for worship. God is here, sharing in this time we share with one another, and sharing in every moment of our lives of course.

Today is the third Sunday of Lent, and I want us to focus today on Jesus, the man, as he walked through this world 2000 years ago, offering ministry, in stories and teaching, in compassion and caring, in healing and helping, and as he pointed the way to God's Kingdom here on this earth. 2000 years is a long time, and the details we have of Jesus are just snapshots of a man and his work. But through those snapshots, and through 2000 years of faith, we have a picture of Jesus that can inform our lives, and transform our existence here and now in this century.

Hymn: Jesus Calls Us Here To Meet Him

*Jesus calls us here to meet him
as, through word and song and prayer,
we affirm God's promised presence
where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.*

*Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of life and Lord of all,
sharer of our flesh and frailness,
saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story;
tell his tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory
came to earth to meet us here.*

Jesus calls us to each other,

Salford Methodist Circuit



*vastly different though we are;
creed and colour, class and gender
neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter
in their common search for truth.*

Prayers

It's strange that we think about Jesus, a man of 2000 years ago, and then in the next breath talk about Jesus here with us now. But we believe that you, Jesus, are God and that you are with us by the power of your Holy Spirit. We can look at all you did so long ago, and it can inspire, encourage and direct our lives. But it is your living presence that we worship as we share with you now.

We bring our praise for all that you are, Lord of all, power and majesty, compassion and patience, giver of love and bringer of peace. And we bring our gratitude for all that you mean for our lives now - guidance, purpose, meaning and direction, all made possible through your death on the cross long ago, your rising to new life, and your sharing of your Spirit with us all.

We bring our confession, that we often fall short of your ideal for our lives, but we do so in absolute confidence that no amount of failure or neglect can ever take us away from your loving presence and endless accepting peace.

We bring our concerns to you, for this world, for its people, for ourselves and for those we love. We bring our anxieties and struggles. We bring our joys and hopes. We bring ourselves and offer everything in worship to you. Draw us close to yourself and feed our minds and hearts with all that is good, this day and every day. Amen.

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.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen.*

As we wander through Lent this year once again, we walk with Jesus on his road that ultimately will lead to the cross. This morning I want to pause for a moment and to think about Jesus the man. What was he like? How would it have been to be a companion and a friend of Jesus? What might we have seen if we walked at

Because there is no doubt about it, those who walked alongside Jesus saw and heard and experienced amazing things; things that changed the direction of their lives; things that taught them a new way to be. Things which they remembered, and shared, and perhaps even wrote down, though others may have done the writing quite a bit later I think. They were being constantly shaped for new purposes as the leaders and spreaders of the early church. And we hear about them and their experiences regularly in worship. More importantly we hear about the central character, the central companion of their lives, Jesus himself, as he steered them on a path through Galilee and through a myriad of new experiences.

Do you ever watch Pointless? If you do, then you will be aware of the phrase “we gave 100 people 100 seconds to name as many... whatever it is.” I’ve never met anyone who has ever been one of those one hundred people - but maybe you have! Maybe you’ve been one of those one hundred people! I thought I’d conduct my own similar experiment. I didn’t ask nearly one hundred people, and I didn’t time limit it, but I did ask a few people from around the Circuit to give me some words that come to mind when they think of Jesus. And I’ve used those words to create a word picture - and here it is.

I guess these are the kind of words we all think of in relation to Jesus, and rightly so, because the human Jesus was all of these things, and he calls us to follow him by being these things too: gentle, understanding, patient, caring, compassionate, hospitable, kind, constant.



Jesus's followers tried hard to follow Jesus's example in the way they lived, but they often fell short of the mark. And so do we. We are not always as kind, as compassionate, as hospitable, as generous, as patient, as gentle as we know we ought to be. We, like the disciples, are fully human, and prone to getting things wrong. But there are always opportunities to try harder, and to work on these things.

But let's get back to Jesus for a moment. I seem to remember from my childhood, a song, which I now realise was written by Charles Wesley, though it's not sung too often these days, it went: "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child, pity my simplicity, suffer me to come to Thee." I'm sure we get the message from the gospels that Jesus was gentle with people. He got alongside some very challenging people, those whom others shunned, but he was intensely patient, and always ready to listen.

So I'm OK with gentle, but I think it's only half the story. Meek and mild implies to me submissive, easily pushed around, imposed upon, unwilling to stand up for himself. And I'm absolutely clear that none of those things apply to Jesus.



There was an image around a few years ago with the strap line: 'Meek and mild - as if'. The image is of Jesus in the guise of the revolutionary, Che Guevara. Jesus came to bring about change - he was revolutionary in a very peaceful and kind sort of way. He was radically different from other teachers of his day. And his message turned a great deal of people's expectations about God and about the way they should live on their heads.

Let's sing a song now, then listen to today's Gospel reading which shows us Jesus being anything but meek and mild.

Hymn: Jesus Christ is waiting

*Jesus Christ is waiting, waiting in the streets;
No one is His neighbour, all alone He eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I am lonely too:
Make me, friend or stranger, fit to wait on You.*

*Jesus Christ is raging, raging in the streets,
Where injustice spirals and real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I am angry too:
In the kingdom's causes, let me rage with You.*

Jesus Christ is healing, healing in the streets,

Salford Methodist Circuit



*Curing those who suffer, touching those He greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I have pity too:
Let my care be active, healing just like You.*

*Jesus Christ is dancing, dancing in the streets,
Where each sign of hatred He, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I should triumph too:
Where good conquers evil, let me dance with You.*

*Jesus Christ is calling, calling in the streets:
'Who will join My journey? I will guide their feet.'
Listen, Lord Jesus, let my fears be few:
Walk one step before me, I will follow you.*

Bible Reading: John 2 : 13 - 22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.

He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

This is the word of the Lord, Thanks be to God.

John places this event right at the beginning of his Gospel. We don't generally believe that John wrote about events in any kind of chronological order - not like the other gospel writers. John instead picked out moments, events and happenings alongside matters that Jesus talked about - powerful illustrations to help people understand his message. And here in the second chapter of John's gospel, he describes an event that the other writers place right at the heart of the final week of Jesus's life. It may well have happened then of course. And it may well come up for us as we get closer to the remembering the events of that final week. But here in John's gospel it's an early indication of an important message or two about Jesus himself.

Salford Methodist Circuit



The temple that Jesus was visiting was the third temple on that site. The first temple was built by King Solomon, almost 1000 years before Jesus, but it was destroyed by the Babylonians, as the city's citizens were taken into exile. It was rebuilt after the exile was over, but it was quite a modest structure. During the reign of Herod the Great, about 20 years before Jesus was born, the temple was renovated and expanded, into an impressive structure, and this was the Temple that Jesus entered on that day with his disciples, alongside dozens of other people who had travelled to Jerusalem from all over the nation, and from many places across Europe, Asia and Africa, for the purpose of celebrating the Passover.

At this time, the Temple was the beating heart of the Jewish faith. It was much more than a significant church or cathedral. It was the centre of worship and music, of politics and society, of celebration and of mourning. It was the place where God had promised to dwell at the heart of his people. It was the focal point for the whole nation and for their way of life. It was the focal point of their religion. This building mattered to the Jewish people in a big way!

It still does, though this building was destroyed by the Romans some 40 years after the death of Jesus. The nearest you can get to it, is a single remaining wall - the Western Wall, often called the "Wailing Wall", where Jews go to pray and to plead with God for the restoration of their temple. Beyond the wall, the hill on which the temple stood, the Temple Mount, is a sacred site for Muslims and dominated by their holy buildings.

On that day long ago, Jesus came striding into the temple as part of his religious duty during Passover week. And he saw so much in there that felt all wrong - so much corruption. It was like a market place - poor people being fleeced on every side. Noise. Irreverence. Money changing and greed. None of it anything to do with the real purpose for this building. And Jesus lost the plot and turned the place upside down.

Or did he? Was this a moment of reaction and "out of character" anger? Or was it something much more significant? Was it actually Jesus doing what he came to do - to point out injustice and cruelty and abuse, and to say "Stop! This is not acceptable!"

Jesus could not just stand by as people were being abused by the system. He stood up to the system in a way that no one could miss. He wasn't thinking about the consequences or his personal safety. He just ripped into them. He ripped into the money changers, who were demanding that those who came to make their financial offering in the temple swapped their coinage for what they were calling acceptable temple coinage - and charging a good bit of interest to line their own pockets at the same time. He ripped into the animal sellers who could spot the smallest of blemishes on a creature brought there for sacrifice, and insist that the person who had brought it swapped it for something more appropriate, that would of course cost them a packet! Jesus tipped over the

Salford Methodist Circuit



tables, and he burst open the cages of pigeons and the pens of lambs and oxen. There was squawking and squealing and a flurry of fur and feathers. There was confusion on every side.

Jesus came to teach gentleness and care, and peace. But he also came to free faith from the trappings of religion: the rituals that had somehow become more important than the message of hope at its heart. He came to stand up against injustice and to speak out for those who had no voice. He came to reach out to the marginalised and the poor - those who were not respected because they didn't have wealth or influence. He came to overturn the values of this world that had somehow become acceptable when they were clearly causing suffering and poverty. Jesus came to revolutionise this world from the inside out. And he demonstrated it here in the temple, in one loud and dramatic moment, that has never been forgotten.

John places this event close to the beginning of his gospel. And it seems to say, this Jesus we are following came to turn everything upside down, and revolutionise his nation and his religion. He came to go against the tide of cultural acceptance, and to make a statement about God's championing of the underdog, and the weak, and the abused and the damaged.

I want to ask the question this morning: Was this Jesus doing something he calls us to do too - not to meekly accept things, but to stand up for what is right? Is that what his followers need to do and how we need to live? Yes we need to offer a hand of care, and to be hospitable and welcoming. Yes, we need to show patience and compassion. Yes we need to be gentle and loving. But is it just as important for us to stand up for what is right, when we become aware of injustice?

Do we need to become those who stand up against injustice, when it hits us in the face?

Are we called to take our place in declaring that Black Lives Matter, just as much as white?

Are we called to stand up against everything that is destroying our planet, bit by bit?

Are we called to shout out against systems which lead to poverty and homelessness?

Are we called to support foodbanks and help All We Can, but also to challenge the injustices that have made them necessary over the last twenty years?

Are we called to encourage our rich nation to consider the needs of the poor around the world, whether it's in terms of fair trading, or help in crisis, support in their development, or maybe matters relating to the fair sharing of vaccines?

Have you ever considered that turning the tables on injustice in this world might be a responsibility in which we all share? You can see things that make you angry on behalf of others who are suffering, And you can stand by meekly and let it continue, because it doesn't affect you personally. Or you can write your

Salford Methodist Circuit



anger on a Facebook post or a tweet, or even in a letter to your MP and then forget about it? Or you can challenge it, or stand alongside others that are challenging it?

I'm not throwing out instructions here. I never preach a sermon unless it's one I need to hear too. We all need to ask the question, what can I do to stand up for justice in this world today? It may be that God will lay different matters of injustice on each of our hearts. We are not all called to do the same thing.

But let's not see Jesus simply as kind and gentle, meek and mild, lovely but ineffectual, but rather recognise the revolutionary at the heart of all he came to do and say. And let him turn your kind and gentle faith into something that has teeth to make a real difference in this world for the victims of injustice. Where there is misery, struggle, hardship, hunger, suffering, isolation, fear, persecution - that is where Jesus would be, turning things upside down and saying, no more! Can you play a part in that too? Think about it. Pray about it. Invite God to open your eyes. And then have the courage to make a stand. With Jesus right there by your side!

Hymn: I am Jesus

I am Jesus, the star of morning, I am Jesus, the Lord of day,
I am Jesus, come child from darkness, bathe in my light, live in my way.

I am Jesus, the food of living, I am Jesus, the power to heal,
I am Jesus, come claim my water, drink deep in me and bear my seal.

I am Jesus, life of the Father, I am Jesus, the human touch,
I am Jesus, who lives among you, bringing eternity within your clutch,
I am here placing my life within your hand.

For our prayers, I want us to pray this morning, using the words of the prayer of St. Francis, with some silences. Let us pray.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Salford Methodist Circuit



Where there is sadness joy.

O Divine master, loving Saviour, closest friend,

May I not so much seek to be consoled as to console.

May I not so much seek to be understood, as to understand.

May I not so much seek to be loved, as to love

For it's in giving that we receive,

It's in pardoning that we are pardoned.

It's in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen

And so we sing our final hymn, which invites God to kindle a flame of passion in our hearts for his work and his love in this world.

Hymn: O thou who camest from above.

*O thou who camest from above
the pure celestial fire to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart!*

*There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise.*

*Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work, and speak, and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up thy gift in me.*

*Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make the sacrifice complete.*

Lord of overturned tables and righteous anger,
Fill our hearts with a desire to stand for what is right and just.
Call to our notice the things which need to be challenged.

Salford Methodist Circuit



And give us a safe place, a strong place from which to stand alongside you for those things that matter to you in this world.

Bless us today and always, in all that we are and all that we do in your name.

Amen.

CCL: 30925

As We Are Gathered - John Daniels

Words and Music: © 1979 Authentic Publishing,

administered by Song solutions CopyCare, 14 Horsted Square, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 1QG, UK. info@songsolutions.org

Jesus Calls Us Here To Meet Him - John L. Bell & Graham Maule

Words: From Love From Below ©1989. WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow G2 3DH Scotland. www.wgrg.co.uk

Jesus Christ Is Waiting - John L. Bell & Graham Maule

©1988 WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow G2 3DH Scotland. www.wgrg.co.uk

I Am Jesus - Clare Stainsby

Performed by Chapter and Verse

O Thou Who Camest From Above - Charles Wesley