



Trinity Sunday - 7th June 2020

Rev Kim Ratcliffe

Transcript

Service for Sunday 14th June 2020

Good morning everyone. Good to be with you again.

I'd like to begin today with some words from today's Gospel reading, from the end of Matthew 9 and into chapter 10.

Matthew 9 : 35 - 10 : 1 & 5 - 8

Jesus travelled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. And He said to his disciples, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. Pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields." Then Jesus called his twelve disciples together and gave them authority to cast out evil spirits and to heal every kind of disease and illness. He sent them out with these instructions: "Go and announce to the people that the Kingdom of Heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons. Give as freely as you have received!"

Christ's kingdom was at the heart of his message to the people of 1st century Galilee. And it is at the heart of our lives still as God's people here and now. So let's begin with a song that reminds us of just that: Hear The Call Of the Kingdom.

Song: Hear the call of the Kingdom

*Hear the call of the kingdom,
lift your eyes to the King;
let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.*



*Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ may shine through us.*

*King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
salvation in Jesus' name.*

*Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,
and a hope yet to come:
let the nations put their trust in him.*

King of heaven, we will answer the call ...

Now a prayer: let us pray.

Loving God, you came to your people in Jesus, calling them to be alert to your Kingdom here on earth. And you come to us now, through your living Spirit with that same to call to be alert to your Kingdom. We will see the potential of that Kingdom when we fix our eyes on you, and make you the focus of our lives and the centre of our being. As we meet together in this virtual way today, we meet in worship. Your song of hope rises within us, and we offer our praises and our gratitude to you. You love us with an unfailing love, and in Jesus Christ you came to live and die amongst us, that we may know your ways and see for ourselves your utter commitment to us. His death was not the end. He rose again to a new beginning, with a call for people to follow His way, to trust in his love, to accept his endless hope, and to live his kingdom, wherever and whenever they find themselves. This is your call upon us now. It's a message of truth in which we can trust. It's a message of peace in which we can exist. It's a message of love which embraces all people. And it is a message that requires action - the action of following, of proclaiming, of sharing and ministering in Christ's name. Loving God, present with us now, we offer our time of worship to you, and we ask you to inspire us to trust and to action for the work of your Kingdom here. In the name of Jesus and by the power of his Spirit. Amen.



To be a little alternative today, let's share together in the Lord's Prayer, as it appears in the Message version of the Bible:-

*Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.
Set the world right;
Do what's best
as above, so below.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving of others.
You're in charge!
You can do anything you want!
You're ablaze in beauty!
Yes. Yes. Yes. Amen.*

For our reading today, I'm using the epistle, and I'd like to ask Matt's wife, Rachel, to read it for us. Rachel is known to some of you as she has preached in our circuit. And she will begin her training as a presbyter this autumn. Thank you Rachel.

The reading is from Romans, chapter 5, verses 1 to 8 and is taken from the New Living Translation.

Romans 5 : 1 - 8

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love. When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

The letter to the Romans was written at a time when Christians were being actively persecuted and killed for their faith. In some places the church was in



hiding, especially in Rome itself where the emperors were vicious and the lions were hungry. The people of God's church were enduring struggles of many kinds, as we have been enduring struggles of many kinds through this time of pandemic. There is a kind of parallel with our situation. We are not the church in hiding but we are, in a sense, underground, and out of sight. However, we are no less church for that. We are praying, and we are meeting virtually like this, which was clearly not an option for the first century Roman church. There is a killer out there, and we have had to take particular care. And this way of life in which we have found ourselves is full of trials. We have needed to find inner strength and endurance in the face of uncertainty. And we have looked to God in whom our hope is found.

Since lockdown began, we have followed the events of the last week of Jesus's life. We have witnessed his horrifying death, and we have mourned. We have rejoiced in his resurrection, and recognised that our faith is not in a dead prophet but in a living Saviour. And we have waited with the disciples, and seen that moment of the coming of the Holy Spirit in power, that revitalised them with energy and brought about a movement for change that is still reverberating around this world. We have connected with that same Spirit and recognised our God in Christ with us in every moment of our lives. Paul could just as easily have been writing to us as he was to first century Christians in ancient Imperial Rome.

The first century Christians didn't know what was coming next, and neither do we; not precisely; not yet. We need to be alert to many things in the days ahead. I'll pick up some of those in a moment. But first let's focus on just how incredible is the God's love for us in Christ. As Paul reminded the first century Christians in Rome, and as he reminds us too, Jesus Christ died for us, way, way before we existed on this earth. He died without asking the question as to whether we were worth dying for. He died, for us, and for the whole of humanity from that day to this and beyond. And through that death, we have life now and forever. It is the hope on which our faith is built; the key moment in history of humanity; the pivotal point in God's relationship with people; and the starting point for everything in our lives as God's church here and now. God loves us, and Jesus died for us, whoever we are, and wherever we are, and whatever our mindset might be right now.

Let's remind ourselves of that fact, as we listen to, or join in with the song, How Deep The Father's Love For Us, sung by my niece, Hannah.

Song : How Deep the Father's Love for us

*How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss –*

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*The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory.*

*Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life –
I know that it is finished.*

*I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart –
His wounds have paid my ransom.*

Thank you Hannah.

The phrase of the moment is Stay Alert! But stay alert to what? The virus presumably!

It crossed my mind recently that if the coronavirus had a similar effect to the effect that the advert suggested came from eating Readybrek for breakfast, then staying alert to it would be easy - we'd just stay well away from all those who are glowing with a kind of sinister orange halo. But it's not like that - the virus is invisible, as are some of its symptoms. The only thing we can stay alert to, is to do with the way we are alert to other people - socially distancing - avoiding busy places - minimising our escapades outside our own homes. And when we do have to go out, being very alert to where others are, and staying apart, in a friendly and respectful way. "Stay alert", say the government. We've been doing that all we can over recent weeks. I asked myself the question, to what extent is that about me? About ourselves? Keeping ourselves safe, whilst also keeping apart from others, so in that sense, keeping others safe too.

I want to suggest today that staying alert for us, as God's people needs to be far more than this "stay alert" slogan implies. Remember as we heard and considered earlier, Jesus Christ died for us, way, way before we existed on this earth. He died without asking us the question as to whether we were worth



dying for. He died and we have life now and for ever because of that. So what should be our response in being alert?

First I want to reiterate what I said at Pentecost. God is alive in Christ by the power of his Holy Spirit. And we need to be alert to the Spirit's prompting. We need to listen for the voice of Christ in our minds and in our hearts, offering us guidance on the way forward for his church in the new reality of today's world. What is God calling us to be and do in the days ahead - short term and long term? Being alert in this situation requires us to invite the Spirit to speak to us, and being willing to listen, to receive, to share and ultimately to take action.

To take that a stage further, I was interested in a short video created by the Joint Public Issues Team, this team represents Methodists, Baptists and the United Reformed Church all working together to be a voice of the church in relation to world issues. Their heading is "Stay Alert to Justice". I'll ask Matt to play that video for us now.

Video: Stay Alert To Justice

Stay alert to poverty.

We know that families locked in poverty are under increasing pressure and foodbanks tell us more children are going hungry.

Low income families are more likely to become seriously ill with Covid-19 and even die of it.

We must stay alert to poverty, tackling the pressures it puts on families today, and as the crisis passes making the right decisions to build an economy where families thrive and foodbanks can close.

Stay alert to racial justice.

We know that people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds have been hit hardest by Covid-19 and are more likely to have become seriously ill or died from the virus.

People from BAME backgrounds are over-represented in vital, low-paid but high-risk jobs like health and social care.

We must stay alert to racial justice, sharing the risks and rewards of reopening the economy fairly, making the right decisions to create a society where every person can flourish.



Stay alert to the planet.

We know that before Covid-19, the climate crisis was already having devastating effects, from flooding in the UK to whole communities being destroyed in the Pacific.

We must stay alert to the planet. Together we can restart the economy in the right way that both protects the environment and enables people to thrive.

Stay alert to justice.

We know this is only the beginning, as we go through the crisis together we must stay alert to justice.

Covid-19 has brought huge changes to all our lives and inequalities mean some people have been hit even harder than others.

The world on the other side of the lockdown will be different. If we stay alert to justice we can make the right choices about how to move on.

Where everyone's story and experience is heard and helps shape our future together.

For God said "Let justice flow like a river and righteousness like a never ending stream."

Stay alert to poverty. Poverty now, and poverty in the future. It's not going to go away quickly. The economic impact on our country is yet to be fully felt, but there's no doubt about it - the poorest of our nation will be the hardest hit by the economic effects of this crisis. I love to think that one day there will be a day when foodbanks are no longer needed, and they can close. That will be a day to celebrate! But it is not now, and not yet. We will see real poverty in our country as we move beyond this lockdown into a new reality. And this increased poverty will be felt in so many nations, hit by the virus. It will also spread to the poorest nations of this world, already weighed down by poverty. As the richer nations divert funds to help their own people, those who would normally receive from the generosity of others will suffer even more. So stay alert to poverty, here and all around this world, and ask the question, what can I do? We can pray of course. We can give. We can be creative in seeking ways to help those who are suffering most. It's not just the responsibility of the church, but as the church we need to be part of this world's solution to the issues of poverty.



Stay alert to racial justice. How much has our attention been drawn to that in recent weeks? The vicious killing of George Floyd, a Christian and an active worker for God's kingdom, was filmed in a graphic way. The subsequent response across the cities and towns of this world has brought an issue that may often pass us by, right into the heart of our homes. Although the murder took place in the US, issues of racial prejudice are all around us in this country. And those of us who are of the majority ethnically white population can easily ignore them or pretend that they don't exist. We need to make this world a fair place for all to live, where the colour of your skin has no bearing at all on how you are treated or valued by society. We may not have chosen to go into Manchester and to stand as part of the recent demonstration. In fact we probably shrank in horror at the way social distancing seemed to be ignored largely, in order to make the point that black lives matter. In fact, some of us may have been among those who shouted back, "all lives matter". Of course all lives matter. One way of looking at this, among many, is to say that all houses matter. But it's the house that's on fire that needs the fire brigade! Unless we are part of an ethnic minority group, we will probably never have experienced prejudice, or the fear that comes along with it. We need to listen to the voices who know firsthand, and stand with them for racial justice in our nation, and across this world. As Christians, as Christ's church, we need to stay alert to racial justice.

Stay alert to the planet. While so many of this world's people have been in lockdown, the planet has had a chance to recover to some extent from the endless abuse with which we humans often treat it. We've seen the effects of climate change across our world, and in our own nation over recent years. And we've heard the voices, led by children and young people, crying out for a new attitude to the world that is our home. Perhaps the pandemic has been an opportunity for us as individuals to recognise that we can live very well, in spite of the things of which we have been deprived in these recent weeks. Perhaps the change in our habits of shopping, travelling, and generally existing over this time, may have influenced the way we live from here on. Perhaps the planet can recover further from the destruction we have caused it. Perhaps we can raise our voices among those who remind us that change is needed. Perhaps the church needs to be a voice that is heard loudly in encouraging respect for the earth that God gave us as our home. Stay alert to the planet.

Stay alert to justice, for the poor, for the marginalised, for the nations of this earth, for the people whose lives exist all around us. Coronavirus may have forced us into a place of self-protection, that is absolutely the right place. But let's also be alert to the need for a fairer world, a fairer nation for all. And let's

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play our part in whatever ways we can to see that happen, now and in the post-pandemic era.

So stay alert to the voice of the Spirit leading us forward.

Stay alert to the need for justice of many kinds.

Finally, as Christians, and as the people of God's church, stay alert to the love at the heart of God. It's a love that is there for you. It is a love that is there for the whole of humanity - but in not any way watered down because it is spread so widely. It is a love as powerful and intense for each one of us - and it is a love that wants us to know it, receive it, wallow in it and embrace it - a love that invites us to love back. You are loved more than you can possibly imagine. Not because of what you do or will do to help build Christ's kingdom, but simply for who you are! Nothing can change that. And in these days when "doing" is limited then "being" in the love of Christ is a vital lesson for each of us. God's love for us is not measured by what we do, but is simply there for us, now and always. However, our response to that love, as well as offering love in return, should be and must be to show love wherever we are, in whatever ways we can. Because love is a power that can change this world. Let's be part of that world changing movement that is Christ's church here on earth. May his Spirit lead us forward, one day at a time. Amen..

And so we turn to our Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray.

Loving God, we ask you to hear our prayers, and help us to stay alert.

Stay alert to the poor.

As the full economic impact of the virus is felt, we ask that you open our eyes and ears to the needs of the poor, and that you inspire our hearts with ways in which we can help to make a difference.

Stay alert to victims of racial injustice.

We remember all whose lives in this world are blighted by attitude to race and the colour of skin. We pray that we may have the courage to raise our voices against such injustice, and stand up for a fairer world.

Stay alert to this earth.

As we have learned to live differently in recent weeks, encourage us to see ways that we can continue to live our lives that benefits the earth that is our home.

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May we be part of the earth's healing, after the destructive impact human lives have had upon it.

Stay alert to those who are ill. We remember those people still sick with Covid-19, and those who are suffering its after effects. We remember those who are still in hospital, and their anxious families waiting and hoping for good news. And we remember that there are many people ill with other illnesses, physical and mental at this time. We lift them all to you.

Stay alert to grief.

We remember those who have lost their lives to this awful virus, and those who are struggling to come to terms with loss and sadness. We invite your loving touch of peace into the hearts of all who are grieving for loved ones.

Stay alert to the Spirit.

We ask you to speak clearly into our hearts, and to guide your church forward on the next stage of its life. We pray that prayer especially for our Methodist churches here in Salford, and for the churches all around us in our communities.

Stay alert to God's love.

Loving God, your love is endless and without measure. Help us to centre our lives in the midst of that perfect love, and from that place, lead us on to be your people, and to build your Kingdom here, we pray. Amen

Our last song reminds us to be alert, to listen for God's voice and to go where we are being led, today and every day.

Before we sing that song, I just want to comment on the statement made by the government that churches can re-open for prayer. That statement has brought much confusion. The position we are in that for the time being our churches will remain closed. Eventually we will expect to receive guidelines from the Connexion on what measures will need to be put in place in order for the life of our church buildings to resume in some way. That guidance is not expected until at least July, and when it does come we can expect that the instructions will leave us a long way from the normal we knew before.

One thing I am very clear about is that God's people - God's church does not need to be a particular building in order to pray. We may miss our church buildings very much, but we have learned that we can pray in our homes and in our gardens and God is no less present there than when we are together in a church building. The words we pray and the confidence with which we pray don't matter. Prayer is not just for the trained preachers and worship leaders - it for all people. And all of us can pray wherever we find ourselves, and whenever the



desire to do so comes upon us. Let's continue in that practice and remain patient for the right time to reopen.

So let's end with the song, **Have You Heard God's Voice?**, and may God bless you in all you are and in all that you do, today and in the days ahead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Song: Have you heard God's Voice?

*Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
though the way be rough and narrow?*

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?*

*Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground
when the crowds are turning violent?*

*In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
will you share your faith with the faithless?*

*Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
and believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?*

*We will walk the path that will cost us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to us
the disciples of tomorrow.*

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