**Morning Praise @ Home 22nd January 2023**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Readings Isaiah 9: 1 – 4 Matthew 4:12 – 23

**Reflection from Sue THE LIGHT HAS COME**

**1. HERE’S HOPING**

I wonder if, like me, four weeks ago you watched the new King’s Christmas broadcast for clues, wondering what his reign might turn out to be like? For Charles himself, it’s been a long time coming – but now, finally he is our monarch. How will he live up to our expectations?

For centuries the Jews had been on the look-out for a long-promised Saviour, particularly needed after they were subject to repeated invasions and foreign oppression. At the time Matthew was writing, Israel was a colony of the hated Romans, desperately looking for a liberator.

But now, says Matthew, he’s arrived! He deliberately quotes an excerpt from the OT prophecy we heard in Isa 9, a passage as familiar to Jews as our National Anthem is to us, the passage that everyone clung on to as a promise that salvation was on its way.

**2. WHAT’S THE GOOD NEWS?**

How is this great news of salvation described?

* For a people who have been plundered and are living in darkness, it is portrayed as light. Imagine what it must be like for Ukrainians going days without electricity in these grey winter weeks, or having frequently to cower in bunkers, fearful of the devastation being wreaked upon their towns? Whereas instead light offers hope, enables growth, shows us the way to go. With the arrival of Jesus, the Jews now had the way forward illuminated, the path to restoration.
* For a people oppressed by discriminatory laws, taxes and military might, the descendant of King David brings freedom. It’s no good having light flooding through an opened prison door if you are still chained to the wall, but Isaiah points to a future when the burden of the oppressor is shattered. The Jews can anticipate standing tall once more, restored by - and reconciled to - their Maker.
* And how is this blazing light and liberation conveyed? Through the teaching and ministry of Jesus the carpenter. Verse 23 tells us that Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and illness among the people. Starting in their places of worship, he then moves out to crowded market squares, illuminating familiar scriptures in a new and compelling way. He clears up misunderstandings and explains what God’s kingdom is really like, then he demonstrates its reality by healing those who were diseased or suffering the bad effects of bad lives.

He's the real deal, says Matthew, the one who really can save us. So convinced are some of Jesus’ early listeners, that, when he invites them to leave behind their regular occupations and follow him, they do not hesitate.

**3. REALLY THE GOOD NEWS?**

Jesus is the promised Messiah, stresses Matthew – but the way he operated wasn’t at all what the Jews were expecting. He wasn’t focusing on the powerful, or the most religious, or educated, but on a set of, to Jerusalem eyes, uncultured Northern ‘oiks’ who had been subject to so many invading influences that they were hardly considered proper Jews.

Then, instead of military resistance, his message was about love, about grace rather than retribution, healing in place of division. In bringing light to the world, Jesus refused to fight darkness with more darkness. This was painful to those who had a fixed concept of what the Messiah should be like.

When we get settled into our religious habits, it is always disconcerting to be shown that there is a

God-inspired alternative. Yet if we insist on only operating as Christians in the way *we* find comfortable, in fact we can end up standing in the way of the true light. That’s why Jesus tells folk that they need to ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Might that command apply to us?

**4. RESPONDING TO THE GOOD NEWS**

So Jesus sets out his stall, and invites people to invest. Like any entrepreneur with a new start up, the enterprise involves Risk, Hope and Trust:

* On a human level, there is huge risk for Jesus. In Iran right now, protestors are being imprisoned and killed for proclaiming a message the authorities don’t want to hear, yet as they are removed, others take up the baton, knowing full well what might happen. Jesus’ cousin John the Baptist had just been thrown into jail, so it was extremely risky to *develop* his uncomfortable message, yet that’s exactly what Jesus does.
* For Andrew, Peter, James and John, the risk is whether their economic needs will still be met as they abandon their family businesses. What’s more, Jesus is a newcomer to the area – can they be *sure* he’s not a quack?
* In calling the 4 men, Jesus surely had hope that, with them alongside, his ministry would flourish.
* The alacrity with which the fishermen responded suggests that, as 4 energetic men living in an oppressed backwater, they longed for so much more from life, from God. On meeting him, they placed their hope in Jesus.
* Matthew is describing Jesus’ first foray into public ministry. From the start he has to trust his Father’s voice, that God is guiding him to call the right people, that these men who, on a human level, he hardly knows, will respond and grow and ultimately help build his church.
* Meanwhile his followers must trust that Jesus has the answers they seek, that the adventure will be worth it, that their families will understand as God provides for needs that they no longer can.

Responding as servants in God’s Kingdom involves Risk, Hope and Trust for us all.

**5. RESPONDING TO THE GOOD NEWS**

What about here on the Wirral? Can *we* do this – take a risk and place our hope in the light of Christ, trusting that he will provide?

Sharing the Good News that a light has dawned whilst we live in a Britain ‘shadowed by darkness and death’ may not end up as dramatic as this account of Jesus’ early ministry, but these verses contain lots of practical guidance if we’re feeling daunted:

1. Jesus was an ex-carpenter, talking to ordinary people - we don’t have to have special status or gifts to reach out to *anyone* we meet; and it’s not for us to judge who might respond, because each is loved by God and invited into his kingdom.
2. Jesus deliberately moved from isolated Nazareth to the densely populated northern shore of Lake Galilee, situated on an important trade route. We need to embed ourselves wherever people gather, be it in sports or social get-togethers, online forums, at the school gate or where we work.
3. John the Baptist’s arrest was clearly a sign to Jesus to commence his own ministry. We need to ‘read the signs’ in our culture and community so that we can shine Christ’s light in the most effective way at the best time.
4. Knowing the Jews had become *familiar* with John the Baptist’s message, Jesus consciously uses the *same* language and imagery. The language we use both inside and beyond the church needs to make sense to our hearers. I used to teach Shakespeare for GCSE and A Level, but could you imagine me asking an assistant in Aldi: ‘Fair maid, I am in want of teabags. Would’st thou serve my lack?’!! Then perhaps we shouldn’t expect a new worshipper to easily grasp the centuries old phrasing of older Bible translations or rites of worship. Christ’s message has to engage people in today’s world.
5. I don’t think Jesus knew exactly *who* was going to be on Galilee beach as he walked along, but he obeyed the Holy Spirit’s prompting when he called out to Andrew, Peter, James and John. We are promised that that same Spirit is working inside believers today – let’s consciously tune in to Him … and then do what He asks!
6. Finally, although Jesus engaged people’s attention through what they *already* knew, he didn’t leave them there. God’s light beckons all of us forward, whether it is in the first steps of understanding or with challenges to a mature faith; we’ve been set free to share in the excitement that the Messiah has arrived and can transform us into his likeness.

**6. OUTCOMES OF THE GOOD NEWS**

When the first disciples responded to Jesus’ call, they didn’t know where it would all end up; that, from the work of their teacher and their own subsequent ministry, a world-wide church would develop. All they had to go on was the compelling message of this carpenter.

Today, all Jesus has to go on is *us*. He is taking a risk with us, he is putting his hope in us, he is trusting that we will respond to his Spirit in us and shine his light in the darkness.

**AMEN**

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession**

Heavenly Father, as we come to the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian unity help us to listen to your voice calling us still to unity in our diversity. We pray for church leaders everywhere that they may work together and promote unity among Christians

Everlasting God, you choose people to send forth as workers into your vineyard, the world that you trusted to us as stewards.  You spoke to awaken Samuel with Your call, and so we ask you to open the ears of your chosen ones.

We especially pray for all those attending Synod. Help them to become the Church that you are calling us all to be and may your Holy Spirit be powerfully at work among all who attend.

Lord in Your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Compassionate God, you hear the cries of all who are in trouble or distress; accept our prayers for those whose lives are being affected by global warming and climate change here and further afield: strengthen them in their hour of need, grant them perseverance and courage to face the future and be to them a firm foundation on which to build their lives.

Lord in Your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Creator God, you called Abraham to be the father of many nations, and so we pray for the nations of our world and their leaders.  We continue to pray for peace in your world, and especially for those involved in the process of reconciliation and bridge-building between peoples, cultures or nations.  Help us wherever and whenever we can in our everyday lives to be instruments of your peace.

Lord in Your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Father God, you called Moses to be the shepherd who led the Israelites from Egypt. Help us all to be worthy pastors of your flock here in our church.  We pray for our families, our friends and our neighbours.

Lord in Your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Loving God, you called the Apostles to be ambassadors for Christ and gave them the power to heal.  Help us to bring healing by our visits, our care and our prayers that we may strengthen the spirits of those we love, especially in times of sickness or distress.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**