

Please note that this is a written version of the video reflection rather than a transcript.

Call to Worship

Jesus said,
"If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves
and take up their cross and follow me. (Matthew 16 .24)

Welcome to my reflection for Sunday 30th August 2020. Last week we heard how Jesus gave Simon the nickname Peter, 'The Rock'. It was in response to Simon Peter acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, the long awaited leader of the nation. This week we'll hear how the Kingship that Jesus offered was far from Peter's expectation.

God the Father,
help us to hear the call of Christ the King
and to follow in his service,
whose kingdom has no end;
for he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, one glory. **Amen.**

*(from 'Additional Collects',
Common Worship, Church of England)*

I'm not 'on location' any further afield than my study this week, but if I were one place I could have gone was the village of Stoke Golding. That's in Leicestershire and it has a very interesting signpost when you enter the village.

Welcome to **Stoke Golding** Birthplace of the Tudor Dynasty

That is quite a claim. It's not factually correct because, of course, the Tudor family were in existence long before Henry Tudor, a Welsh farmer, became King Henry VII. It was in fact that latter event that happened at Stoke Golding.

Stoke Golding lies just to the south of the site of the Battle of Bosworth. Tradition has it that Richard III was killed just outside the village and his crown ended up in a thorn bush. It was there that, while Richard's body was being carted off on the back of a mule to a car park in Leicester, that Henry Tudor plucked the crown from the thorns, plonked it on his own head and was proclaimed king. The ruling Tudor dynasty was born from a Welsh farmer, through 118 years and five monarchs, until it was replaced by a Scottish king.

There's not much to see at Stoke Golding, apart from the village signs and a plaque on someone's gatepost. Not worth an 'on location' trip I'm sorry to say.

It was Henry VII's son, Henry VIII, that first used 'Majesty' as a title. It's replete with images of pomp, splendour and ceremony. It's very different from the 'kingship' modelled by Jesus.

In last week's reflection we heard Jesus asking the disciples who people thought that he was. Simon Peter had then piped up with confidence that he knew that Jesus was the Messiah. The word Messiah is Hebrew for 'anointed one'. In Greek its 'Christos' from which we get Christ. Whenever we use Jesus' name and title - Jesus Christ - we acknowledge him as King.

A king, had been long awaited by the Jewish people. Not a king like Herod, who was a puppet of the occupying Romans, but one who would reestablish the nation, boot out the occupying forces, and rebuild society and religion. Different people however had different expectations. I reflected on this a few years ago when I wrote the following as part of a series of reflections for Holy Week:

The Crown

Who had called you King?

The expectation of a nation had focussed on you, not of your choice, at least not at first. Everyone expected a leader, expected their leader.

Someone to push their agenda,
someone to support their ideals,
someone to underwrite their greed.

They had looked for a King – you would do, you would do.

Politicians wanted a figurehead.
A symbol of the nation,
a rallying point to provoke nationalistic fervour against a foreign power,
fervour they could harness for their own aims.

Priests wanted a man who would tow the line.
God's line – but invented by them, not God.
A man of ritual - but not a man close to God in prayer.
A man of sound teaching – but not of compassion.
A man like them with a heart of stone – when God should be a spring of life.

You - a focus of so much expectation.
You - a Jewish carpenter and part time teacher of Israel.
You – who the already powerful wanted to call a King.

But what of those who could not voice their hopes?
The Jew trod underfoot by occupying powers and ripped off by their religious leaders.
The foreigner looked down on by authority
and looked on with suspicion by those they lived among.
For them – for both ordinary Jew and outsider – for them you would be King.

You claimed your throne as you entered Jerusalem.

Scripture had promised that the king would enter riding on a donkey – who are you to disappoint.

You the agitator, revolutionary, heretic, even blasphemous.

The people to whom you wanted to be king greeted you with hosannas.

But your coronation was in other hands and already they were crafting the crown.

Mike Claridge (from 'Symbols of the Passion')

Jesus' kingship would be very different from what Peter expected. In today's Gospel reading Jesus tries to explain what it will entail, but Peter is having none of it. He tries to persuade Jesus that other paths must be possible. This is certainly a temptation that Jesus faces and he rebukes Simon Peter accordingly and then explains that what awaits himself may await them too:

Matthew 16 .21-28 (NRSV)

21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' 23 But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

27 'For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. 28 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

The phrase Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of Heaven, is at the heart of the Christian faith. All of us will have our own ideas about what kingship means in our national context. For those of a republican sympathy Kingdom may not be a useful term at all. But when we look at the Kingdom of God we are viewing it through the a first century lens. A king was expected by Israel - who would be God's anointed one. We've already seen how 'Messiah' in Hebrew meant 'anointed one'. In Greek the word is 'Christos'. The Kingdom of God is at the forefront of our thoughts very time we say Jesus Christ - Jesus the anointed one, Jesus the King.

Compared to the traditional ideas of kingship, both at the the time of Jesus and now, the Kingdom of God is an upside down model. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans picks up this theme:

Romans 12 .12-18

12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

What do we need to do to make our churches reflect the model of the God's Kingdom being one is one where human values are overturned, barriers of partiality are broken down, and love is unconditional? As we reopen our buildings after the long closure, what needs to change in how we use them? What we proclaim from them in word and action?

Turning the values of the world upside down came at a cost for Jesus. Maybe it will for us too. We are called to take up our cross for the Kingdom of God.

Becoming your Kingdom

Valuing others -
that is at the heart of your call, Loving God.
Valuing others,
and opening ourselves to risk and ridicule.
You invite us to experience the different,
to cultivate relationships on the edge,
emulating the ways of Jesus
as we serve our communities.

Opening our eyes, our minds and our hearts
with your unconditional love,
you nudge us beyond the confines of our normal,
towards the bigger picture -
the all encompassing world of your creation.

This is life,
here and now;
eternity mixed with the everyday.

Eternal God, daring us to be different -
offering generosity in place of scarcity -
you encourage us to journey out
and join with the voices on the edge
to create a place of love and hope,
of light and justice;
a place where all can grow
and become the fullness of their humanity.
You invite us to become your kingdom.

By Heather Whyte, a URC minister.

Closing remarks

There's a written version of this morning's reflection on the resource site where you'll also find my meditation 'The Crown' as part of a series called 'Symbols of the Passion'.

For now, take care, stay safe, and best of all God is with us!

Please note that this is a written version of the video reflection rather than a transcript.

Call to Worship

O come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise
to the rock of our salvation.

Psalm 95, verse 1

Welcome to my reflection for Sunday 23rd August 2020. In the video version I'm starting off in Cotteridge Park. Alongside the two 'glacial erratics' - large stones deposited by a glacier in the ice age. We will be hearing about rocks in our readings today. And in our opening prayer:

Firm is the Rock

Firm is the rock
unmoved from generation to generation:
Lord, we praise you for your faithfulness.

Hard is the rock
born from the heart of the earth:
Lord, we praise you for your majesty.

Warm is the rock
heated by the sun's rays:
Lord, we praise you for your love.

Enduring is the rock
resisting the wind and rain:
Lord, we praise you for your patience.

Sturdy is the rock
standing tall above the moor:
Lord, we praise you for your strength.

Great is the rock
sheltering all from storm and gale:
Lord, we praise you for your care.

(By Simon Taylor, a Baptist Minister who lives on Dartmoor and is Minister at Christ Church, Estover - an Ecumenical Partnership in North Plymouth)

Exams, and exam results, have been in the news over the last ten days or so. Back in the dim and distant past I took, among other subjects, Geography at both 'O' and 'A' Level. We studied glaciation and, while on a weeks field trip to The Gower, I think we thought that every small hillock we saw was a drumlin and every pile of stones was a terminal moraine. We also learnt about 'erratics' - and here are two of them!

11th Sunday after Trinity

23rd August 2020 (Number 023)

Here in Cotteridge Park are two large glacial erratics and several smaller ones. An erratic is simply a stone that is 'out of place' after being carried by a glacier. These would have arrived here up to 400,000 years ago. Geologists even know where they came from - near the village of Arenig, in the mountains above Lake Bala in north Wales.

These rocks would have taken centuries being carried the 100 miles or so from Bala to here. On the way they would have been broken, eroded and scraped - becoming what they are today and, when the glacier retreated, where they are today.

In our lives we also make journeys. Journeys of distance and journeys over time. We are shaped and marked by the our experiences and encounters. Life shapes us as personalities and shapes our faith. The prophet Isaiah reminds us to remember that our origin is in God, but that God still carries and protects us:

'Listen to me, you that seek the Lord.
Look to the rock from which you were hewn
and the quarry from which you were dug.
Look to those that bore and carried you ...
do not fear the reproach of others ...
Awake! Put on strength ...
I am the one who comforts you,
I have put my words in your mouth,
and hidden you in the shadow of my hand.
You are my people.'

(Based on verses from Isaiah 51)

If you want to learn more about rocks there's an excellent opportunity just a couple of miles away from Cotteridge Park. On the campus of the University of Birmingham you'll find 'The Lapworth Museum of Geology'. It's currently closed but I'm sure will reopen soon. It's regarded as one of the finest geological museums in the country - and is named after Charles Lapworth who founded it in the late 19th century. Through exhibits and displays it tells the story of the earth's formation, the evolution of life, the wealth and variety of minerals and how the earth is still being formed and reformed through volcanic activity. They even have their own dinosaur! Admission is free and I'm putting a flier on the resource site.

One of the things that's explained at the Lapworth Museum is that rocks come in different types. There are sedimentary rocks, where over millions of years sand or other particles have been laid down layer by layer. Limestone and sandstone are examples. There are igneous rocks, formed from molten lava in volcanic events. Granite is an example. There are also metamorphic rocks, whose character has been changed by immense pressures or heat. Marble, for example, is metamorphosed limestone.

What can this teach us about ourselves and our faith. Let's hear first of Jesus giving his disciple Simon the nickname 'The Rock' (Petros, Peter)

Matthew 16 .13-20 (NRSV)

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' 14 And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 15 He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' 16 Simon Peter

answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' 17 And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' 20 Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Simon Peter has recognised and Jesus as Messiah, the long awaited leader. The full implications of what that meant - very different to Simon Peter's expectation and the expectations of many others - we'll look at next week. But in response to Simon's affirmation Jesus gives him a nickname: In Greek 'Cephas', in Latin 'Petros', in English 'The Rock'. We might say today that Jesus is saying that Simon Peter will be a brick - someone who is dependable. That at least was the plan. Instead ahead lay trials, temptations, denials and betrayals. But Peter would endure and he would be a rock on which the Church would be built.

Think back to those types of rock I mentioned. Sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic. I was thinking the other day about those terms in relation to faith.

- Many of us, at least in our origins are sedimentary Christians. A layer of upbringing in a Christian, church-going family, a layer of instruction at Sunday School, layers of exploration our faith through the years, together with layers of experience and reflection.
- Others might be igneous Christians. St Paul is a superb example of this. An unbeliever, even enemy of Christianity, who in a sudden, blazing, fiery experience encountered the Risen Christ.
- Others might be metamorphic Christians where faith has been formed or reformed by pressures of life. Those who've come to a new understanding of faith in prison, or during illness.

In reality there's probably a little bit of each of those in all of us. John Wesley's origins were certainly sedimentary, then a blazing igneous moments when his heart was strangely warmed. Then his faith later changed again and again as he faced pressures, opposition and challenges.

Any type of rock has its fault lines and its weak points. That's true of all of us too. But we're in good company. Peter, the solid reliable brick, failed Jesus time and time again. There are many times that Jesus must of looked at Peter and despaired. But just as Peter had faith in Jesus, so too Jesus had faith in Peter and must have told himself:

"This is Peter, and on this rock I WILL build my church"

He has faith in us too.

Let us pray:

Closing Prayer

Lord, you quarried us many years ago,
shaped us and formed us.
You have transported us
and placed us where you want us to be.
Make us your living stones,
rebuilt into your Church today,
equipped to support and shelter others.
In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mike Claridge

Closing remarks

There's a written version of this morning's reflection on the resource site where you can also download the brochure about the Lapworth Museum of Geology. Make sure that you visit it soon. The dinosaur is waiting!

For now, take care, stay safe, and best of all God is with us!

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Call to Worship

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations.

Psalm 67 verses 1 and 2

Welcome to my reflection for Sunday 16th August 2020. I've travelled a little further afield this week to find a place with a view. Today we will be hearing about Jesus, also travelling a little further afield than usual, and how an encounter he made there challenged his own thoughts and shaped his emerging ministry.

Let us pray

Opening Prayer

Lord God,
you encounter us in so many ways.
In familiar places and people
when we are close to home.
In unfamiliar journeys and faces
when we venture further afield.
You challenge us to let go of our presumptions,
our prejudice and fear.
Help us to proclaim with thanksgiving
that your love is made known upon earth
and your salvation for all nations. Amen

Mike Claridge

This is Barr Beacon and it gives fine views over the West Midlands and beyond. To the south is Birmingham, with the Post Office Tower, and Old Joe, the University Clock Tower among the buildings visible. To the west is the Black Country with Dudley Castle among the places visible. The Black Country and Birmingham have separate identities and histories, with the Black Country having been industrialised long before Birmingham.

One of the people who knew about this difference was the author J R R Tolkien. At the age of three Tolkien, with his widowed mother, went to live in what is now Hall Green. In the early years of the twentieth century that part of Birmingham was still rural Worcestershire. Tolkien roamed widely. Sarehole Mill, The Lickeys and the Malvern Hills would all inspire his writing. It seems though he had a dislike for industrialisation and he knew that The Black Country with its fiery furnaces, noisy steam hammers and pungent smoke wasn't far away.

The boundary of The Black Country isn't defined but, in that direction lie two prominent landmarks. Tolkien would have known about Perrots Folly and the tower at Edgbaston Reservoir. Did these inspire Tolkien to write about "The Two Towers" in The Lord of the

Rings? Were the noises and fires of The Black Country in Tolkein's mind when he created Mordor?

In today's Gospel reading Jesus has crossed a boundary. As a Jewish Rabbi, up to this point his ministry has been within Jewish territory. He's just had an encounter with other Jewish leaders who challenged him about his disciples not keeping the rituals of washing. Jesus countered this by saying it is what comes from within our heart and mind that makes us clean or unclean.

Seeking time to reflect Jesus and his followers have journeyed outside Jewish territories and closed the border into the territory of Tyre and Sidon. Here, while he is seeking time alone, Jesus is pestered by a Gentile woman, a non-Jew, who wants him to do something. It's a short and powerful encounter:

Matthew 15 .21-28 (NRSV)

21 Jesus left (Gennesaret) and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' 23 But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' 24 He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' 26 He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' 27 She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' 28 Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

There are some hard words spoken by Jesus in that passage. Let's explore it a little. What's going on?

The location is the territory of Tyre and Sidon. This is the furthest north that the Gospels portray Jesus as having traveled. It's about forty miles from where the encounter with the Pharisees had taken place - hardly a day trip and, as the next action in the Gospel is back at Galilee - Jesus and his followers must have been away seeking solitude for a while.

Whenever a border is crossed there are often undercurrents of prejudice, suspicion and even hatred. Intolerance of the differences between races and religions takes time and effort to break down. This is the context in which this encounter takes place.

The woman who approached Jesus, seeking healing for her daughter, is a Gentile - a non-Jew - a Canaanite. Jews and Canaanites historically were hostile to each other. The woman is taking a risk approaching Jesus. He's a prophet of Israel, a Jewish rabbi, and although she tries to reach across the cultural gap by addressing him with a thoroughly Jewish title of Son of David, she's initially ignored by Jesus and shooed away by his followers. But she's persistent - her daughter's life depends on it - and she sticks at it.

Jesus explains - to no one in particular but everyone at the same time - that his ministry is to the Jews. Again she pleads with him and then we have it:

*Jesus answered,
"Its not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs". (15. 26)*

This phrase is replete with the history of animosity between Jews and Gentiles. The children are the people of Israel - the Jews - the dogs are virtually everyone else. It's a harsh phrase. The fact that the Greek word used is 'kunarion', little household dogs rather than the scavenging strays 'kyon' hardly softens it all. Dog was a term used for Israel's enemies (see *Psalms 22 .16*) and a term of ridicule (see *1 Samuel 17 .43*). The early Christian Church used it too when talking about unbelievers (*Philippians 3 .2f*). If we're shocked at Jesus using the term we need to remind ourselves that Jesus carried with him all the weight of tradition and history of his people.

But the Canaanite woman is more than a dedicated and loving mother. She's also a good theologian. She knows about Jews and that in Jewish scripture 'bread' represents salvation - God's rescue plan for his people. She counters Jesus' rebuttal with:

"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table" (15 .27)

The implications of this are enormous. She speaks of bread spilling over onto the floor where even the dogs can eat it. Salvation will not be limited to Israel but spills over even to its enemies. It seems she knows her Jewish scriptures too that, in many places speak of God's salvation being for all people. God will prepare for all people a banquet of rich foods (*Isaiah 25 .6*)

Jesus response loses a little in translation. He acknowledges her sound theology

replies "Oh woman ... great is your faith" and we are told that her daughter was healed instantly.

Does this change the course of Jesus' ministry? Matthew would certainly have us believe that. A couple of weeks ago we looked at the Feeding of the 5000 - replete with Jewish symbolism. A few verses after today's passage we have the Feeding of the 4000 - replete with Gentile imagery. In both there are abundant baskets of bread - of salvation - left over for all.

A Poem

Beware of what you think or say,
our actions give the lie,
or offer evidence of faith
for which we sing, or cry.

When challenged by a foreigner,
a woman in her need,
see Jesus shamed to change and act,
her challenge sowed a seed.

Yes, Jesus heard her call for help
and recognised her prayer,
her faith was evident to him,
as was his need to care.

If even Jesus changed his mind,
when will we grasp the fact
that scruples that we hold and guard
mean less than how we act.

But faith depends on depths of love,
compassion, care and grace;
to see in those we disregard
a sister's, brother's face.

Andrew Pratt 26/7/2011

In the passages we've heard in the last few weeks Jesus has often been portrayed as seeking solitude, to be alone with his thoughts. His ministry is depicted as still being defined. In the encounter with the Canaanite woman it is defined as being wider than just to Israel. But it will be at a cost. In the readings over the next couple of weeks we begin to see The Cross looming ahead.

What encounters redefine us? Who challenges us to look at things in new ways? How do we react when we travel outside our comfort zones?

Let us pray:

Closing Prayer

Lord, when he was far from home
Jesus met a woman whose faith challenged him.
Challenge us in our encounters,
with those we know and those who are strangers,
when we are far away and when we are near to home.
Break through the boundaries of our fear, hatred and suspicion.
That we may know and proclaim your love,
a love that knows no borders,
even that of life, death and life eternal.
Amen

Mike Claridge

Closing remarks

There's a written version of this morning's reflection on the resource site. There are links also to worship there too along with a whole host of other resources.

Please click "Like" if you've enjoyed this video and also subscribing by clicking the red box below.

For now, take care, stay safe, and best of all God is with us!

Please note that this is a written version of the video reflection rather than a transcript.

Call to Worship

O let me hear you speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self will;
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
Lord, speak, and make me listen,
O guardian of my soul.

*(From the hymn 'O Jesus I have promised'
by John Ernest Bode)*

Welcome to this week's reflection for The Cotteridge Church and, for those further afield too you're very welcome as always.

We're back at Bartley Reservoir for today's reflection, again involving a lakeside narrative. Last week we heard how Jesus, in a time of his own personal turmoil of rejection and bereavement, sought solitude - unsuccessfully - but was then able to feed over 5000 people with bread and fish. God's grace abounding.

Although we were reminded of God's plenty last week, there are times that we feel separated from God. That God is present, even when we feel separated, is the theme in our two Bible readings today.

Let us pray

Opening Prayer

Lord God,
you speak to us in so many ways,
in your word, and in our worship,
in the bustle of our daily lives
and in the silences.
You speak to us in the ordinary
and the extraordinary,
in the expected and the unexpected,
and always with love.
Help us to listen for you,
so that we may respond to your call
whenever and wherever it comes.
Amen

*Catherine James, Local Preacher, Derby Circuit
(Taken from 'Responding to the Gospel', Methodist Prayer Handbook 2019/20)*

We live in a time that hold more worries and concerns than 'normal time' - if there is such a time. Today we'll hear two readings that speak of turmoil, both within and around individuals. We'll hear of Elijah fleeing threats of death. We'll hear of Peter and the disciples, separated from Jesus and adrift on the lake as storms approach. In both cases they find that God is still present in unexpected ways.

The prophet Elijah had done what he believed was right in putting to death by the sword the prophets of the false God Baal. This had incurred the wrath of Queen Jezebel who threatened to put him to death in the same way. He fled for his life and, in the reading we're about to hear, has sought refuge in a cave, seemingly separated from God and not sure what the future might hold.

1 Kings 19 .11-13

11 (God said to Elijah), 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Elijah's realises he isn't separated from God. God is not always a mighty powerful force sweeping all before. God can also be in the still small voice or sheer silence.

Last week's Gospel reading was The Feeding of the 5000. At the beginning of that text Jesus was seeking somewhere to be quiet and away from everyone. He's been rejected in his home town of Nazareth and then he'd heard about the death of his cousin John the Baptist. His depth of inner turmoil is emphasised that, in matthew, only here and in Gethsemane, is Jesus portrayed as praying. This is where we today's Gospel, set immediately after the Feeding of the 5000.

Matthew 14 .22-33 (NRSV)

22 Immediately (Jesus) made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25 And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' 28 Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' 29 He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

On the face of it this is an account of Jesus calming wind and storm. But Matthew has already covered that nautical territory (Chapter 8 .23ff). The key to what is going on here is in the opening verses. Jesus has found the desired his quiet place to pray alone. Meanwhile the disciples are adrift on the stormy sea in fear and terror. Just as Elijah had encountered God in an unexpected place so too, in the midst of their distress, the disciples encounter Jesus in the most unlikely place - on the waves. How this happens neither they nor us can understand. But like the Feeding of the 5000 last week, how is not the issue. Instead it's about our relationship with Jesus.

On the waters you came

Ever-present God,
in Jesus, you have given us sure hope.
Yet when the waters are turbulent
and the wind is against us,
we become unsure.
At times we are rendered sightless
by our circumstances,
unable to see you for who you are,
so we mix you in as part of the turbulence:

Yet when we fear the waters are just too much
It is on the waters that you come.

Ever-gracious God,
when we reach out - even in our disbelief -
you are there to hold our hands.
You encourage us to be brave,
to step out on the waters -
for you are there, ready to walk alongside.
Though the waters may threaten to overwhelm us,
and the winds consume us,
and though sometimes we may doubt you,
grant us courage to step out on the waters
with our thoughts fixed on you:

For when we fear the waters are just too much
It is on the waters that you come.
Amen

*Mark Robinson and Tessa Henry-Robinson
URC Ministers in the South West Hants Group & the Southampton East Pastorate
(taken from 'Prayers from the Heart', URC Prayer Handbook 2020)*

Like the disciples adrift in the boat in stormy times we sometimes feel separated from God. Even when we turn our eyes to God and seek reflect and pray on the accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection - we sometimes fear we are sinking below the waves of life. But God in Christ isn't remote from us, God will not let the waters overwhelm us. It is on those very waves that he comes - holding his hand out to steady us.

Let us pray:

In the midst of the storm

Let us go out,
trusting in the love, faithfulness and power of Jesus.
May we know his peace
even in the midst of the storm.
And the blessing of God, Saviour, Lord and Friend,
be upon us now
and for evermore. Amen.

*Simon Taylor, Baptist Minister in an ecumenical church in Plymouth.
(in 'Acorns and Archangels' Ruth Burgess (ed.), Wild Goose Publications)*

Closing remarks

There's a written version of this morning's reflection on the resource site. There are links also to worship there too along with a whole host of other resources.

Please click "Like" if you've enjoyed this video and also subscribing by clicking the red box below.

For now, take care, stay safe, and best of all God is with us!

Please note that these transcripts will no longer be ‘word for word’ records of the spoken reflections.

They will be as close as possible to the video but may differ significantly in places.

Call to Worship

Lord, the eyes of all look to you,
and you give their food in good season.
You open your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing.

(Psalm 145 .15-16)

Welcome to this weeks reflection on behalf of The Cotteridge Church and welcome to those who are further afield as well. Today I've come down to Upper Bittell Reservoir because today's reading and the one next week are set at a lakeside. Upper Bittell Reservoir will have to stand in for the Sea of Galilee so you'll need your imaginations. Both the readings feature miracles. Events where seemingly the laws of nature are overturned. As we saw in the parables there is often something more in the miracle accounts rather than just a sense of awe and wonder and will be reflecting on what that might be.

Let us pray

Opening Prayer

God, we see you in creation,
so magnificent and wonderful,
we are in awe of you.
God, we find you in Jesus
so loving and generous,
we are devoted to you.
God, we are blessed by your Spirit,
so powerful yet gracious,
we are transformed by you.
May your love and glory shine through us
and may we share it with all those
you need us to help.
Amen

*Diane Wylie, Local Preacher, Tynedale Circuit
(Taken from ‘Responding to the Gospel’, Methodist Prayer Handbook 2019/20)*

Today's gospel reading and next week's are part of a block of text that follow on almost immediately from Matthews account of the parables. I say almost immediately because Matthew depicts two significant events occurring in Jesus's life between telling those parables and today's story of the feeding of the 5000. The first of those is that Jesus travels to his home town of Nazareth where he preaches in the synagogue, but his word and he himself are rejected. He and his followers then tramp the 20 miles or so to the Sea of Galilee and it's on the way, or when they arrive, that he hears some tragic news. His his cousin John the Baptist has been executed. It is at this time of turmoil, of

rejection and bereavement, that we encounter Jesus trying to find somewhere quiet, a place of solitude, to pray.

Matthew 14 .13-21 (NRSV)

13 Now when Jesus heard (about the death of John the Baptist), he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 15 When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.'

16 Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.'

17 They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' 18 And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' 19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20 And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

I always wonder what happened to the left-overs?

Consider then this context. Jesus has been seeking a place of quiet and solitude. He's been followed not only by his disciples but by an immense crowd. When he gets to the lakeside he manages to climb into a boat to seek solitude that way, to get to a different part of the lakeside where he can find some peace and quiet. But as Jesus glides across the lake in his boat, the disciples and all the others who were following him are legging it around the outside of the lake. When Jesus arrives at the shore and alights from the boat, the crowd are waiting for him. At this moment in the narrative there is no chance of Jesus finding a place of solitude. Instead he shows compassion for the members of the crowd we need healing. Then - presumably in the late afternoon or early evening - his disciples raise a question about the catering.

What follows is usually known as 'The Feeding of the Five Thousand'. But look closely it's more than that. It says "five thousand men, besides women and children". Matthew uses the Greek word 'andros' is used - the word for the adult male of the species. Elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel another word, 'anthropos', is used in the Gospels in more inclusive terms of all human beings. Yes, Jesus does really say to his disciples that he will make them "fisher's of people" (Matthew 4 .19).

This is the first of two miraculous accounts of the feeding of a multitude that Matthew gives us. The second occurs a few verses later in "The Feeding of the Four Thousand", again plus women and children (Matthew 15 .32-39). There are differences between the accounts.

The differences include:

This account has five loaves and two fish, the later one has seven loaves and a few fish. This account has twelve baskets of food left over, the later one has seven. This one speaks of 5000 being fed, the later one talks of 4000.

Are these numbers significant? There's a clue in the passages that separate the two accounts. Jesus is first challenged about Jewish Law and then encounters a Gentile woman, a non-Jew. In his encounter with the woman Jesus appears genuinely shocked that he should have a ministry among Gentiles too. That encounter is followed immediately by the "Feeding of the Four Thousand".

What then about those numbers? In "The Feeding of the Five Thousand" five represents the Jewish Torah, the Books of the Law, the first five books of our Old Testament. Twelve represents the twelve tribes of Israel. These are Jewish references and the desert location has echoes of the miraculous supply of manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16).

In "The Feeding of the Four Thousand" four represents the corners of the earth to which the Gospel of Christ will be taken. Seven could, by the time Matthew was writing his Gospel, be a reference to the Seven Churches of Asia (modern day Turkey) that were early Christian centres (Revelation 1 .4ff). It also represents in many cultures in Creation, good fortune and blessing.

There's evidence too in the Greek word we translate as 'baskets'. Different words are used in the two accounts. Today's uses a word that depicts a traditional Jewish basket. In the later account it a flexible carrying mat of more Gentile usage.

Thousands were fed. What is the message for us today?

In John's account of The Feeding of the Five Thousand (John 6 .1-14) the source of the five loaves and two fish is revealed. The words of a modern hymn make reference to this:

One boy brought loaves and fishes,
no other food was there,
but Jesus fed the thousands
and still had bread to spare.
The miracle of plenty
soon spread beyond that place.
That simple gift was offered,
then multiplied by grace.

*From 'A rich young man came travelling'
A hymn by Marjorie Dobson (Singing the Faith 243)*

A simple gift, multiplied by grace. The Feeding of the Five Thousand speaks of a simple act of generosity that God is able to use to do abundant things.

Bread is often a symbol of life and truth in Jewish scriptures. In today's Old Testament reading we find:

Isaiah 55 .2-3

2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

3 Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.

As in the reality that Isaiah is expounding, there is much more than physical sustenance on offer in today's reading. It represents God's grace and the knowledge of God's love and acceptance of each of us, a knowledge that brings love, joy and laughter

Closing Prayer (from a hymn)

Let us pray:

By the Galilean Lake
where the people flocked
for teaching,
the most precious Word of Life
fed their mouths as well
as preaching,
for the good of us all.

And he's here when we call him,
bringing health, love and laughter,
to life now and ever after,
for the good of us all.

*From 'In a byre near Bethlehem'
A hymn by John L Bell and Graham Maule (Singing the Faith 324)*

Closing remarks

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