

SERVICE TRANSCRIPT

14th June 2020

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Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father we want everything this morning to be for your glory. We want our thoughts, our words, our songs, our church, our community, our resources, our time and our lives all to be for you Lord, Everything that is ours is yours Lord, and we come together this morning to declare this to be true, so on this Sunday your holy day bless our online time together with your holy presence – Amen

If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth, and truth will set you free. John 8:32

Opening Declaration

At all times I will Bless the Lord!

God's praise will be in my mouth continually, I will shout 'ALLELUIA' !

Come celebrate the guidance and greatness of the Lord!

Let us exalt Gods truth, through his mighty word and name 'ALLELUIA' !

Prayer

Heavenly father your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Like a beacon you lead and guide us on a safe path. Thank you that your truth has set us free, you, indeed, rescue us when we are dreary and lost. Lead and guide us during these uncertain times to serve you more faithfully as we are each called to do your will here and beyond this place- Amen

Intercessory Prayers

Thy Kingdom Come Wrap

We were involved with Thy Kingdom come this year that formally ended on Pentecost Sunday. Here is a video that has been produced to mark its conclusion and to continue to encourage us to pray.

VIDEO

Father we thank you for Thy Kingdom Come and for an opportunity to pray regularly for people you placed on our hearts. Lord may you give us the presence of mind and the perseverance to keep praying for them. May you give us opportunities to show your love to

them and to speak with them about spiritual things. Lord, by your Spirit, move in their lives that they may know Jesus for themselves. We ask this in Jesus' name . *Amen*

World Events

There are two issues that dominate the news, coronavirus and the Black Lives matter issue in America and about the racism that remains present in our society too. Let's pray about these. We are also going to pray for our fellowship. I am going to do this as short prayers that tend with Lord in Your mercy and we all say, *hear our prayer*.

Father, we continue to be concerned at the pandemic that is still with us. As lockdown measures are released a bit more this week, please help people to act responsibly as they start to do more things out of home. We pray for a continued search for more effective treatments and a vaccine. We pray for wisdom for our Government and Governments worldwide, that they may continue to work together to reduce the effects of the pandemic.

Lord in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

Father we have been horrified by the events in America over the past couple of weeks, which have also served to highlight racial injustice in our land too. Father, we pray for men of peace to be raised up who will bring peace to the huge racial divisions that have never been fully healed in the United States. May Your church there be healed of those divisions too, as in Christ, your people are all one and there is no distinction. Thank you that Jesus is the one who heals broken hearts, sets free captive and restores the ability to see things as they really are. May that be the case in America and in our land too.

Lord, in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

O God who created all people in Your holy image, who loves the stranger, who cares for the downtrodden: walk with those who face discrimination, protect them from harm, help them to trust You. Open the eyes of those who fan the fires of discrimination, to the beauty of all your creation and respect the human dignity of all people.

Lord, in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

Open our hearts too to those who face hatred and injustice because of their race, their background, their ethnicity, that we might know better how to help them. Forgive the blindness that causes our eyes to notice and magnify those things we regard as different from ourselves in others. In Christ, we, your children, are far more alike than we are different, so help us to put aside any racial prejudices embedded within us, as you are a God who creates all people equal and in Christ makes all your redeemed people one in Him. May we reflect that in our lives and actions.

Lord, in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

Father we bring our fellowship before you. Thank you for the opportunity we have to be able to do church in a different way. Please help us to take our opportunities to grow spiritually through doing things differently. We pray for those who are finding fellowship different at this time, particularly those isolated, that You will be close them. We also pray for those who are unwell at this time that you will bring healing. As we start to look into how we will need to change and adapt in the post-coronavirus world, please give us wisdom to do that which honours Jesus, proclaims Him and draws us closer to you.

Lord, in Your mercy

Hear your prayer.

For the sake of Your Son, who died, who rose again and is now ascended.

Amen.

Sermon

The song we have just heard is an Irish version of the Zoom choir blessing we heard a few weeks ago. It is different in two ways. Firstly, they used a traditional Irish hymn, and secondly they did something that has never been done before. 300 churches of all denominations came from all over the island of Ireland to contribute to it. That's amazing as there has been so much enmity between Christians there in the past and is a mark of the healing has been throughout Ireland, after many centuries of division and hurt. We pray that it will continue and that it will be reflected in a healing of the land in both North and South particularly in the post coronavirus world.

Contrast that with America, where so many profess Christ, but where the church still reflects the divisions of the country. On paper, it is the richest country on Earth, but within it are huge pockets of deep poverty and deprivation, where justice can be thin on the ground for the poorest, where racism is common, and the population is desperate, disaffected and angry. The church too is divided on racial grounds, where church too often reflects the politics of left and right. Please pray for America, particularly that the church of Jesus Christ may be united and obedient to His word, and do what's necessary to bring healing to that land.

As I have read Isaiah recently, it all sounds too familiar. Things haven't changed in 3000 years! The people cried out to God in crisis when threatened by invaders, whilst tolerating the most awful poverty and injustice in their own land. Why should God help them when they were failing to obey Him in not caring for the vulnerable in their own society?

My new series comes at a strangely appropriate time. Let's have the same reading as last week with Carl reading it as it is the basis of my sermon this morning as well.

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendour.

God Himself was going to raise up an anointed one – the Messiah – who would address the problems that the Jews and the human race generally were not dealing with. Issues of righteousness and justice. And as we are the body of Christ, the Spirit of God is on us and in us too, so what is His commission is ours too. And what standards does Christ require of us? Car just read it. These are the aims and values of God's kingdom that we should proclaim as His people. We must act in the anointing that has been given us in Christ.

And what's at the top of the list. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me *to proclaim good news to the poor*. In the kingdom of God, the poor are top of the list, before everything else. In terms of social justice, it lies at the root because it is a product of human selfishness. Because of the greed of some, others suffer.

The poor are mentioned many times in scripture and played a big role in Jesus' teaching. He gravitated towards the poor and frequently condemned the rich. The common notion was that the rich were blessed of God because they were rich. The religious leaders were rich – the Pharisees and so on. Jesus reversed that so in Luke 6:20 He said: Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. He encouraged disciples to sell what they had and give to the poor. In return he was condemned by the religious classes for circulating with the "low life." His was a message of hope to the poor in practice in His ministry.

It only reflected the message of so much of the OT. It's clear. God has a bias to the poor as Bishop David Sheppard once called it. I took the opportunity to look at his book again this week. It's very dated in terms of the situations it describes, many things have changed, but so many haven't. We'll find the same story as we look at other aspects of this passage in future weeks.

Poverty comes in degrees. There are many parts of the world where people suffer ABSOLUTE POVERTY, where they have insufficient food, or shelter, or sanitation or lack of healthcare, or poor water resources that cause suffering and there is a high danger of

premature death. In our country, we tend to have RELATIVE POVERTY, where the poor are those who have inadequate financial resources to participate fully in accepted daily life. In Britain the definition is this one:



This is a graphic from the Child Poverty Action Group who have also produced this which shows the extend of child poverty in Britain today using this definition:



In Britain we rarely discover absolute poverty but relative poverty is common. Even more prevalent is the third sort which is known these days as social exclusion

Our own Government has described it as what "can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown". To that I'd add discrimination and racial tension. It's what David Sheppard described in his 1982 book. I'd like to think these problems have reduced in the intervening years, but they are still with us and have the attendant problems, many similar to what we find in America. The reason why the term social exclusion is the term used is that for the poorest in society, the cycle of poverty means that it is very difficult for individuals to get themselves out of poverty however resourceful they may be.

Of course, with political will, many of the problems of poverty can be greatly reduced and the cycle of poverty broken. However the experience of the past 12 years has been quite the reverse. Even though unemployment until recently has reduced, the plight of the very poor has worsened. Personal debt is at an all time high. Families are struggling. Food banks are now common, whereas a decade ago there were very few. Cuts in the social care budget means that support for those with disabilities, mental health issues, or long term physical health conditions and others with limited scope to work have declined

considerably, causing hardship. Mental health problems, particularly depression have risen dramatically at a time when there has been a decline in mental health services.

The response of the Government when challenged was that because of austerity we could not afford to fund the poorest in the way we had done in the past. It was only 12 weeks ago that we were studying I, Daniel Blake, which charted the plight of ordinary people driven to destitution by the system that was supposed to help them. Part of the whole principle of the post-war safety net was to make sure we as a nation supported our weakest members.

Maybe you think that I might be overstating my case. Sadly I'm not. This is real stuff. It is happening in our society now. It is happening in the deprived areas of our town now and the coronavirus crisis has worsened it. I don't know any others in Ministry or in the Clergy who have not encountered the problems of those trapped in a cycle of poverty who will not get out of it unless someone gives them a break.

If we think things are bad here or even in America, in countries where absolute poverty is common, events like coronavirus are an absolute disaster. Apart from the poorest having little access to good healthcare, lockdown means, unemployment, debt, vulnerability to crime, even starvation. This is unfolding into a tragedy of global proportion as the global economy slumps in the aftermath of the pandemic.

We are the people of God. Our call, our anointing is to bring good news to the poor, to be good news to the poor. Despite the divisions between Christians, the church has always been in the vanguard of helping the most disadvantaged members of our society in every century. Now it's our turn to answer the call in the 21st century: to continue to proclaim the good news that Jesus brings in our generation by addressing the issues of poverty, inequality and injustice. It is for us to usher in the kingdom, by bringing good news, being good news, speaking good news and living kingdom values. Jesus both spoke and brought good news to the poor. What should we do. I'd suggest four things.

- Through prayer. We intercede and we ask guidance (that's what the first part of our service covered this morning). What can we do to bring good news to the poor? Jesus spend nights in prayer to His Father and then went out, healed the sick and proclaimed the kingdom.
- By addressing urgent need. Christians have a long history of mission organisations bringing aid. Ministries need money now to help the poorest, both for natural disasters and war and to deal with the very present issue of poverty, unemployment and starvation in most developing lands hit by the coronavirus crisis.
- By addressing structural needs. We don't just bring relief to the poor, we enable them to break the cycle of poverty by equipping them with the tools to do so. One way ministry we do this in Felixstowe is through CAP. Debt is one of the prime ways people are locked into poverty in the UK. By helping people become debt free is an important first step in freeing them from poverty. In another local context, TWAM help people have the tools literally to bring them out of poverty by refurbishing our old tools. Both are examples of how being good news mean

that many accept the spoken good news and find the ultimate prosperity of knowing Jesus for themselves. Finally we can make a difference

- By dealing with the issues involved. The more I read the whole of Isaiah, there is a clear message that as God's people we stand up for justice for the poorest in society. We face up to the fact that most poverty is caused by the unequal distribution of resources and that the greed of the haves make the plight of the have nots much worse. In our modern democracy, particularly with the advent of the internet, we can communicate directly with our leaders. We live in exceptional times. A time when we see the greed of some not only causing poverty, but destroying the very environment of the world in which we live. The coronavirus pandemic has given our society the opportunity and to consider and reflect on where our future should take us.

As many of you will know Tearfund is not merely a relief organisation, but they have been campaigning on issues of poverty and the environment for some time. They have just issued a new challenge called Reboot and there is some information about it about how we as God's people can pray and act and encourage our politicians to think and act sustainably and with equity in the coming years.

What can we do practically now?

We pray.

We give. We are a church that actively takes an interest in mission. We have a month of missions in September. Let's not become weary in being generous.

We act. We have so many opportunities in our own town to alleviate poverty. We have CAP, we have BASIC's Pop-UP Shops, we can be involved in Parish Nursing which helps many on the fringe of our community.

Let's be Good News to the poor – it's our calling, it's our anointing. Let's ask God to fulfil that in us.

Prayer

Father, as we look at the huge problems and consequences of poverty in our society and throughout the world, we see the huge task of bringing good news to those who suffer the injustices of poverty. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit to be salt and light in our community here in Felixstowe and the wider church to bring challenge and change throughout the world. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

Closing Blessing

May God's word be in your heart, may God's word be on your lips.

May God's word be in your touch, may God's word direct your feet.

May the love of Jesus Christ bring you wholeness, the grace of God the Father grant you peace, the breath of the Holy Spirit

instil you with passion and the unity between them

give you strength during these times and

for this and every day. Amen