

## **Worshipping God Together**

### **Call to worship**

Minister: Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my  
chosen one in whom I delight; I will  
put my Spirit on him

**All:** and he will bring justice to the  
nations.

**MP 162**

### **The Servant King**

#### **Opening prayer and the Lord's Prayer**

The Psalmist says: "My heart is glad and my soul rejoices; Because God shows me the path of life, And in his presence is fullness of joy"

Let us pray:

Jesus, you are the servant king.

When you lived as a man, Pilate and other people did not understand you.

You were the opposite of what they thought a king should be.

But you are God.

You were there at the beginning of all things.

Your love goes on forever.

Help us to understand the way you want to be king of our lives.

Help us learn how to serve you by serving each other.

We ask this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray:

**ALL:** 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 this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever.

Amen.

#### **Reflecting on God's Word**

Reading: Isaiah 42:1-9 (OT page 727)

Reader: Chris Graham

#### **Background to the reading**

Our reading is part of the second section of the Book Isaiah that runs from chapter 40 to . The background of the book of Isaiah is the people of Israel and its relationship with God. God made a covenant with his nation Israel whereby they agreed that He will be their God as long as they follow him. Israel did not adhere to the will of God despite all the warnings from God's prophet Isaiah. SO in the second part, a few centuries later, the people of Israel find themselves in a very peculiar situation, as captives in a foreign land Babylon, today's Iraq.

Our reading is all about God's expectations of his ideal servant Israel. God expects his servant Israel to obey Him and to be a witness

of humility, service and devotion. They must be a light for the Gentiles, open the eyes of the blind, free captives from prison and release all those who dwell in darkness.

But there is also the unspoken hint of someone else who might be the Ideal servant in the case of Israel not being able to be a witness to the nations.

The Gospel writer Matthew later took this reading from Isaiah and applied to the coming of Christ in Matthew 12 verses 17 to 21.

The message of Isaiah was clear. Israel was chosen by God to follow Him but they could not manage. So God had to act in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ who indeed was a light to the Gentiles, who made the blind see, who healed those with illnesses, who released all those who were imprisoned by evil spirits, and brought hope for those who are in the darkness of life.

The apostle Paul understood what it meant to be a "servant" by the grace of God, following Christ hence the reason for my second reading on which the sermon will be.

Amen

Reading: 2 Corinthians 2:12-3:6 (NT page 1159)  
Reader: Chris Graham

### **Sermon**

**The text verses for the sermon are <sup>15</sup> For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.**

**And**

**3:<sup>3</sup> You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.**

Most researchers suspect that Paul's second letter to the Corinthians are not the second but the third because in 2 Corinthians chaps. 2 and 7 the apostle refers to an earlier letter he had dispatched to Corinth, written 'out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears' (2:4).

In this second or third letter that is recorded in our Bibles Paul defends his apostleship and his ministry and emphasized that Christian ministry is the service of the gospel of God's reconciling love as present in Christ. God called them to minister to them and they are made adequate for this service by God alone. Against the rival apostles who would have the Corinthians believe otherwise, Paul insists that special religious knowledge, ecstatic experiences, or miraculous powers do not certify one as a true apostle. The important question is whether, in one's serving of the gospel, the saving death and resurrection life of Jesus are evident.

He does not boast but give God all the credit. He says that because God leads them in the triumphal procession they are able to spread the knowledge of His salvation like a fragrance. He is referring to the practice whereby Roman conquerors would lead their shamed captives in a "triumphal procession." Christ had triumphed and now led believers in him as his captives or "servants". The Roman senate normally decreed public thanksgivings before the triumphal processions, so they were great celebrations for the victors and great humiliations for the defeated. But Paul glories in the image of Christians as peoples taken captive by Christ.

When sacrifices were offered in the OLD Testament and elsewhere in the ancient world, incense was burned to offset the stench of burning flesh, and the same would have been true at Roman triumphal celebrations. Paul says they are the aroma of Christ - to some they are the smell of victory/life, and to others the smell of dying. What he means is that the Gospel can mean the difference between life and death for anyone who wishes to listen.

He then goes on to say that he does not preach the Gospel for any gain but speak with sincerity and genuineness. He says that he does not need a letter of recommendation because they are his letter.

Jewish travelers often carried letters of recommendation indicating that Jewish householders could trust them and give them lodging on their journey. In Greco-Roman society, higher-class patrons would write letters recommending their subordinates; such recommendations naturally carried more weight than the person's own claims. Anyone who was trusted could write letters on someone else's behalf, and by such letters a sender could also authorize a messenger. Self-commendation was considered acceptable when necessary to defend oneself or to make a point because in ancient culture, self-commendation was generally offensive.

Paul says that their lives are a testimony that they are letters from Christ, written not with ink on tablets of stone but through the Spirit on their hearts. They are the witnesses of Christ in their following of Him. And Paul is confident about this through the grace of God. God called them as ministers of the new covenant, the covenant that is not dictated by the letters of the Law of Moses but through God's Spirit.

The old covenant was replaced by the new covenant of grace, where Christ obeyed God on our behalf.

Dora read this reading last Wednesday at the Praise and Prayer meeting and all of a sudden I realized what Paul tried to say to the people of the city of Corinth. He was telling them what it meant to be a servant of Christ and that the believers must be a living testimony of it.

We too must be "the letters" of Christ. People ought to read the Gospel through how we speak, act and think in this world. In our

context, I think it is safe to say that most of us do not write letters anymore. Instead we use the internet to write emails because it is so efficient and quick. Within minutes, sometimes seconds you can get a reply. We also use Facebook or twitter to post our comments or use our mobiles to text other people. So to some it will mean that we must be "an email of Christ" or "facebook comment of Christ" or a "text message of Christ".

Then it got me worried because emails, postings on facebook and text messages are renowned for miscommunication, bad communication, rude communication and more than often opens the door to misunderstanding. Why? Well because there is often no context and because of the fact that people can react so soon, no time to rethink or restructure the words or to explain the context of either your emotions or your agenda.

So if we are to be emails, postings or messages of Christ it leaves a lot of food for thought. I mean translated it will mean that people ought to read the Gospel through how we speak, act and think through our emails/text messages/postings while we know that sometimes we do not think at all when writing some emails/postings or text messages. Paul was making the valid point that followers of Christ will have hearts that are changed by God's Spirit and belong to Christ. So this change of heart must be evident in all our communication, in our emails, what we say on Facebook, Twitter or any other media and in our text messages.

So maybe we must truly think what it means to be a servant of Christ. We should do what Christ did when he was on earth. We should help the needy, those who are ill, those who are blind to see the Glory of God and those who are trapped in any form of darkness. And our servant hood of Christ must be evident. Other people need to see and hear it.

SO I can honestly say that I am ashamed by some of my emails written on the spur of the moment without thinking. I am also ashamed of some of the postings I read on Facebook or Twitter and some of the text messages I heard other people speak about.

If we are followers of Christ we need to show it in all our dealings with the world. Let us use all the communication we can find to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and let us do it wisely to the Glory and advancement of God's kingdom.

May we as servants of Christ in Kirknewton and East Calder be a true witness of the Gospel of redemption and hope, May we be known as people who care about those in need, those who need our helping hands, May we be a light to those who are living in the darkness in the way we write our emails, post our comments on Facebook or text our messages through our mobiles!

AMEN

**Responding to God's word**

Our offerings are given for the ministry and mission of the church while we sing **MP 857 "I the Lord of sea and sky"**.

Prayer of thanksgiving: Janice Anderson

**MP 624**

**Take my life and let it be**

**Benediction Receive the blessing of God and go in peace:**

The blessing of God almighty,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Be with you all

Now and for evermore

**Sung Amen**