

St Stephen with St Julian

Together in Prayer



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19th Sunday after Trinity - 18th October 2020

This week's Together in Prayer is written by Netta Gibbs

Reflection — based on this week's readings: Isaiah 35:3-6, 2 Timothy 4:5-17, Luke 10:1-9

"God's kingdom come"

The people will return to their homes in security; God himself tending all their hurts, physical, mental and emotional. The land free of occupation, safe and prosperous, the desert fertile and full of flowers, the blind, deaf and lame healed from all that prevents them from flourishing, and all the people praising God. Today's reading from Isaiah is part of his wonderful vision of God's kingdom awaiting those returning from exile in Babylon, a hope that can be echoed by refugees the world over.

And what of their enemies who defeated them and took them off as exiles into Babylon? Oh dear! Their land will be desolate, and the people will be killed. I don't know about you, but it grates on me that a vision of perfection for those returning, requires vengeance on the people whose leaders made war against Judea. It's worth remembering, though, that the people of Judea are not themselves being invited to bring this devastation on their enemies, that is to be the action of God, and only God.

In the end it didn't happen quite like that, they returned joyfully, yes, when the Persians had marched into a tired, disillusioned Babylon and added that empire to their own. The Persian king Cyrus sent them home with wealth and orders to rebuild Jerusalem, but they remained a nation subservient to Persia for many years to come, crops failed and by no means all the people worshipped Yahweh, their God.

The vision, though, never fails to raise our hearts – the Kingdom of God, with justice for everybody, prosperity all round, crime absent, rulers wise and fair, people obeying God's law because it's written on their hearts, not searching for loopholes to avoid punishment. A look through the book of Leviticus has me longing for such a world and it's no wonder that the Jewish people have always thanked God for the law.

So what about those who can't see the vision? Who aren't interested? It's understandable if we feel resentment and anger towards those who cause the innocent to suffer, but God knows that hate and resentment only harm ourselves and push further away the love and peace that we seek.

Our Gospel reading today shows Jesus sending out a whole load of unnamed disciples. All the Gospels tell of his sending out his picked twelve to spread the gospel, but only Luke shows Jesus commissioning this larger group. I have heard this event called the first ordination, but surely what we have here is the Church, doing the work of the Church. They are to go to all the towns and villages Jesus plans to visit; and provided they are welcomed in the town they are to go to a house and greet the occupants, praying God's peace upon them. If those people are seeking God's kingdom, longing for his peace, the visitors must stay there. They mustn't be picky about food, but eat whatever they're given, and base themselves there for the whole time they are in the town. If, though, the people in the house are not interested in God's kingdom, the visitors are not to get resentful or angry, however 'righteous' their anger might be.

Jesus urges them in those circumstances to 'take back your greeting of peace'. God's peace is not so cheap that it can fall to the ground unwanted. If taken back it will fill the visitors even more, perhaps to help them to simply leave that house alone and go elsewhere with no negative feelings. What excites me about this passage is that it's not about 'doing mission' of our own accord. God's kingdom fills them, something almost tangible, and when they leave an unbelieving town there are to tell the people there that 'God's kingdom has been near you', in them. What a thrilling thought!



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Prayer

Lord, we long for your kingdom to come on earth as it is in every place that you are. Help us to live your kingdom all our lives and spread it to those around us. Work through us to reach others, and remind us, even while we rejoice in being useful to you, that the power is not our own, but yours.

Send us, Lord, to those you want us to go to, however we can do that, whether in person, by e-mail, post or phone. You know that we need to protect others as well as ourselves in these frightening times, and we believe that what you want us to do, you will make possible.

We pray for those who are sick, for those struggling with mental illness or addictions, and those who are lonely or feel abandoned; for those who have lost their jobs or homes or who fear for the future, and for those struggling with poverty or debt.

We pray for all who feel anger. Lead us all away from those feelings that destroy, and help us to trust you to do justice – you who understand the hearts and minds all people.

We pray for those throughout the world who are suffering, for those in refugee camps and crowded shelters, in countries with poor medical provision, those who cannot get their goods to market and those who cannot obtain or afford the food they need.

Give strength and compassion to all who are working to provide or care for others, for all NHS staff, for paid and unpaid carers and for those working extra-long hours to keep others safe.

Fill your people, Lord, with your Holy Spirit, to do your work and delight in your company.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.