



# St Andrew's



United Reformed Church  
Penylan Road, Roath, Cardiff. CF24 3PF

30<sup>th</sup> January 2022

## **Weekly newsletter - issue 99**

Dear friends,

The past week has once again been a turbulent time for our politicians and also, we have seen the very real threat of another war in Ukraine. We as Christians know that we are called to **"love our neighbour as our self."** If we want peace we must work for justice - and peace **does** justice. The way of the world seems to be to seek and hold on to power, to dominate the **"other."** The racial strife we are now experiencing is about superiority. One group has made another group a threat to its privileged status. One group is in fear of the other. This otherness can be culturally, class, or racially biased. That doesn't matter. If power is not used for the good of those under that power, peace cannot follow. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it,

***"Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."***

Power, if it is to be justly administered, must be done out of love. So, love is the answer. If we are to have peace in our communities, we Christians must be among those who are engaged in the struggle.

**"But how?"** you may ask. First and foremost, we must live our lives as though we believe in the Gospel. We must love one another as Christ loves us; love all of our neighbours as ourselves, regardless of our station in life, our race, our culture, or our religion. We must work with ministries and agencies which promote the equality of and equal opportunities for human beings. Be part of the solution. Be an **"accepting"** person. We live in a very culturally diverse society. We must accept this new reality. Intolerance is a learned behaviour. It is learned at a very young age. So, it is important that our efforts begin early on. Scripture is full of teaching on the merits of loving one's neighbour. As the faithful, we should lead the way, by example.

There are courses which teach us how to develop this quality. Recent studies have shown that acceptance education is most effective between the ages of four and nine years of age, and several courses have been developed to help educators teach students how to relate to others from different backgrounds and cultures.

For adults in ministry, ordained and lay, there are opportunities to obtain the skills to minister in a tolerant and loving manner to the diverse people of God. The Christian Church have developed courses

which fall into the category of living out our call to embrace the other and make them our brother and sister. The '***Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers***' course teaches the skills which are essential to bringing about peace and doing justice to all.

That is what our Lord has commanded of us: to ***"love one another as I have loved you."*** These courses and many more can assist us in living out our lives as witnesses to Christ, the Prince of Peace and the author of justice for the entire world. ***We can be part of the solution.***

## **NEWS**

As indicated last week, it is with great sadness that we have been informed of the death of Mrs Pat Alexander, the beloved wife of Mr Ken Alexander. Ken and Pat joined St Andrew's some time ago after worshipping at Tredegarville Baptist Church. Pat has been resident in a local nursing home for some time, due her failing health. We understand that Pat's funeral service is to be held at St Andrew's on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022, commencing at 13:00. This will be followed by cremation at The Briwnant Chapel, Thornhill Crematorium at 14.15.

A church lunch has been arranged to be held at St Andrew's on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2022, commencing at 13.30. The event will consist of a roast dinner, with a choice of up to five meats and a variety of vegetables. The cost of the meal will include soft drinks and by a section of desserts. Jill will soon be providing a proforma where people can indicate which meats that they require on the day. The cost of the meal will be £14.99, and the lunch will be provided in our

Church Hall, cooked by the chef and staff of Coffee and Cake in Birchgrove.

As you can see this is the 99<sup>th</sup> edition of our newsletter and we thought that it would be a good idea to make the one hundredth edition special. So, if you have any article, stories prayers etc that you would like included please hand them to me, send them by email or by post.

We have provided our weekly '**Thoughts and Prayers**' video, which, as always, can be found by holding down the Ctrl button and clicking on the YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/F8iZ0-M3gp0>. The video is also available on St Andrew's, and my Facebook pages.

May God bless and keep you all safe.

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**Minister - St Andrew's URC Cardiff and Penuel Nelson**

## **SERMON**

***Jeremiah 1: 4 – 10***

***Luke 4: 21 - 30***

As we have been fortunate enough to witness, twice, recently at St Andrew's, baptism is an amazing gift and an awesome responsibility. We Christians are set apart, commissioned, and ordained to boldly confess Jesus as Saviour, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to seek and serve the Christ in everyone we meet.

And we can see this theme reflected in both of the Old and Gospel readings suggested for this the fourth Sunday of Epiphany. Jesus picks up a scroll in the synagogue and reads from the Prophet Jeremiah:

***"Now I have put my words in your mouth.  
See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,  
to pluck up and to pull down,  
to destroy and to overthrow,  
to build and to plant."***

Now, that is living baptismally! As one whose job it is to help put the world to right.

Jesus, of course, will go on to preach good news to the poor, to heal the blind, to set many of the oppressed free, and to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of righteousness. He understood what it is to live baptismally. There's also another big piece of the journey for sacramental Christians: living what is provided to us in the meaning of Holy Communion

Living in this way means much, much more than just attending church and receiving communion. That's how we gain the sustenance to join around His table, but it is not living out the true meaning of Holy Communion. Living this way is to live a life of gratitude. Living a life of thanks, appreciation and positive reception to the world around us.

We know that it is really difficult to do this. We live in a world that is full of suspicion, full of hatred, and full of fear. And don't be confused: there are things of which we by rights are suspicious, things we should hate, and things we must fear. But there are also times

when our blindness to the truth prevents us from seeing the good in everyone and causes us instead to seek out what we see as evil.

We are not alone in this. We humans have been doing it for centuries. As we read in Luke 4:21-30. Jesus proclaims what must seem like a pretty harsh truth to the people in that synagogue. They don't like it, they don't agree with it, and they don't want to hear it. And so, they become filled with rage and they drive him out of the town, prepared to hurl him off a cliff. They are not living as we would expect them to. Instead, they are seeking to sort out the things that trouble them, the concepts that offend them, the words that they consider an affront. They had a choice, and they chose a path of destruction.

Living the true meaning of Holy Communion, on the other hand, would call for them to look for the signs of the coming of the kingdom of heaven, the concepts that inspire them, and the words that give them hope. Living this way would call for **us** to listen carefully for what resonates with us in a sermon, in a hymn, in a scripture reading — and then living into that truth from God. Living into that truth means putting aside our critical nature, leaving behind the things that upset us, and finding a way to be grateful.

This life of gratitude begins with a shift in how we see ourselves, others, and the world around us. It means no longer being content with fast-food spirituality that makes us feel good in the moment but leads only to chronic disease, discontent, and disappointment.

Instead, it means investing ourselves in the sustained taking of bread and wine, of authentic and attentive prayer, mindful and deliberate service, and careful and sensitive listening. As the late Alex Haley,

the author of *Roots*, once said, he strove to live his life by these six words: ***"find the good and praise it."***

***"Find the good and praise it."*** And, sometimes, what is good for us, what we really need, what we have to confront: sometimes, this is something painful. Paraphrasing Martin Luther King, Jr., for instance when he said, ***"racial justice requires the complete transformation of social institutions and a dramatic restructuring of our economy, not superficial changes that can be purchased on the cheap."*** That is a truth that hurts. But accepting that basic tenet leads to something quite wonderful: coming even closer to the bringing of that promised kingdom of God here on earth. ***"Find the good and praise it."*** Just as we cannot find buried treasure without doing the hard work of digging a hole, we cannot grow spiritually if we are unwilling to confront our own stumbling blocks.

Perhaps it is helpful to remember that the gospel writers were not like us. They were not interested in facts, exactly, although very much interested in truth, and not much interested in detail, really. This is especially helpful to remember as we read the gospel narrative on Sundays. It probably never occurred to them that we would add chapter and verse numbers and divide their narrative into little snippets and read just a bit here and there. So, it may be well to remind ourselves of just what scripture, exactly, Jesus is claiming is fulfilled in their hearing in that synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. We heard it just last week, you may recall. From the book of the Prophet Isaiah:

***"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim***

***release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."***

Now the Nazarenes may well be astounded that this young man they knew as Joshua, could read at all. It was not the usual thing, of course, for people to read, let alone the children of menial workers — isn't this Joseph's son, they ask. But we imagine they are also astounded at what he chose to read: the very promises of salvation. Is Jesus proclaiming himself as a prophet, as great as Isaiah and Elijah? Is Jesus bringing the ancient Israelite prophet's words into that first-century assembly? Or is Jesus announcing that the kingdom of God has come very near? Well, perhaps all three. And even more.

By choosing to read from the prophet, rather than the law, Jesus has already aligned himself with a particular party within Judaism. We know, over time, he will continue to distance himself from the lawgivers: the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees, to be more precise. And he has also chosen to align himself with a particular wing of the prophetic party — for he has not chosen to lament, with Jonah, or to chide, with Jeremiah. He has chosen to proclaim hope for a better tomorrow. He has chosen to find the good and praise it. He has chosen to live as God wants him to. And he does so using an ancient text. He does not need to be inspired by the Spirit to create it; he needs not compose the words; he is simply the living, breathing mechanism for proclaiming God's word. He finds the words on the page and reads them aloud:

***"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim***

***release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."***

And in this act, he breathes new life into that text. You can almost imagine the bated breath, the hair standing up on the back of someone's neck, the racing heartbeat — as if to say, ***"Wow, that's part of our scripture? Our tradition says that?"***

So, Jesus reads these words, proclaiming himself as a prophet, as great as Isaiah and Elijah, bringing the ancient Israelite prophet's words into that first-century assembly, and announcing that the kingdom of God has come very near. With these words Jesus is calling us to be prophets ourselves. To live a similar life of gratitude and thanksgiving. To breathe new life into the ancient words of Scripture. To ***"find the good and praise it."***

***Amen.***

## **PRAYERS**

Father as we live in troubled times we pray for our nation and others in trouble at this time. God of hope, in these times of change, unite our nation and guide our leaders with your wisdom. Give us courage to overcome our fears and help us to build a future in which all may prosper and share.

And eternal God, fount and source of all authority and wisdom, hear our prayer today for those who govern; give to our Queen grace as the symbol of loyalty and unity for all our different peoples; give to the parliaments in these islands, and especially to its Government, wisdom and skill, imagination and energy. Father we recognise that

there is a need vision, understanding and integrity, that all may live in peace and happiness, truth and prosperity.

O God our heavenly Father, we pray for those whose love sets no boundaries and whose strength is in service, grant to the leaders of the nations wisdom, courage and insight at this time of change and uncertainty. Give to all who exercise authority determination to defend the principles of honesty, freedom, love and tolerance, strength to protect and safeguard the innocent and clarity of vision to guide the world into the paths of justice and peace.

Grant us, Lord God, a vision of our world as your love would make it: a world where the weak are protected, and none go hungry or poor; a world where the benefits of abundant life are shared, and everyone can enjoy them; a world where different races and cultures live in tolerance and mutual respect; a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love. And give us the inspiration and courage to build it, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

O God, who has revealed yourself as love, and taught us by your word that whoever lives in love lives in you; in times of trouble and uncertainty renew our hope in this promise; help us to receive afresh your gift of love, that with generosity we may share it in the service of others to promote the common good; through him who is the perfect expression of love, Jesus Christ our Lord.

And finally, Lord God, you hold both heaven and earth in a single peace. Let the design of your great love shine on the waste of our anger and sorrow, and give peace to your Church, peace among nations, peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

O God and Father of us all, hear the prayer we offer in this time of transition and uncertainty. Forgive our selfishness in ignoring the needs of our brothers and sisters. Save us from the arrogance that disregards the opinions of others. Strengthen us to work for your kingdom of justice. And unite us as a people in the love of freedom and in the cause of righteousness, for Christ our Saviour's sake.

***Amen.***