

Bishopston **Methodist** Church

245 Gloucester Road, Bristol, BS7 8NY

10.30am Sunday 16 February 2025

Lectionary:

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Psalm 1

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Luke 6:17-26

Sermon

What is the point of our faith?

In our Corinthians reading we are given a simple, yet important answer. We are to represent God and proclaim that Jesus was risen from the dead in order to restore a right relationship between God and people. Why? Because God loves us!

In writing this Paul makes clear the centrality of the resurrection – without which our sin could not be forgiven and if this were the case we should be pitied.

But he emphasises what he calls the ‘fact’ that Christ has been raised from the dead. Without this what would be the point of our gathering this morning?

Yet we are living in troubled times – wars and other conflicts across the world, natural disasters, political division, rampant commercialism.

Our world moves so fast.

As an Amazon Prime member if I want to buy something online I have it delivered to my home (or anywhere else) the next day. Sometimes I can even get things the same day just by paying an extra £1.99...

If someone famous posts something on social media in the morning it can be headline news by lunchtime...

Or as we’ve seen in Sheffield this week, someone can get into an argument at school and within moments someone has lost their life – another victim of the scourge of knife crime. Something we’ve seen again in Bristol this week, though thankfully without loss of life.

With everything moving so fast, how are we supposed to make time for God?

Yet in so many ways this is the time we need to stop and make time for God more than ever.

At times of great stress we need to trust God all the more. In our Jeremiah reading we are told that we will be blessed *if* we trust in God and build deep roots. By doing so we can remain fruitful even in the worst droughts.

Jesus continues this theme in the Sermon on the Mount of which Luke cites just a small excerpt in today's reading:

Blessed are the poor, blessed are the hungry, blessed are those who weep.

This all indicates God's particular concern for the oppressed, the neglected, those who are 'under-dogs' in society.

It is the antithesis of what we are seeing with Trump's efforts in the states – God does NOT say 'put our own first', we are not called to focus on those who generate wealth or indeed to worship wealth as if it is all that matters.

Jesus directly challenges this – woe to you who are rich...

God cares about how we treat one another.

This is where projects like the Bristol Churches Night Shelter is so important.

It's about making a practical difference in the lives of homeless people who would literally otherwise be on the streets, and yet with the care and support of volunteers from Bristol Churches, they are able to help them not only have somewhere safe and warm to live during the coldest months of the year, but also to help many of them move on into accommodation of their own – thus creating a lasting outcome. This is NOT about preaching to or at them, it is about changing lives in a meaningful way – not in order to 'convert' them, but because it's what Jesus would do for them.

Jesus healed and helped many people – but never once did he ask them to become his followers as a condition of that healing or help. Jesus did it because of love for the people around him, seeing their need and realising he could make a difference.

It's easy to forget that Jesus spent 30 – yes, *thirty* years – of growing deep roots before we start to read of his ministry in scripture. His disciples spent 3 years physically following him day in, day out – and even then, they didn't fully get it. Do **we** ever fully get it?

A famous quote, wrongly attributed to St Francis, advises that we are called to "preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary use words". The emphasis is that we need to live the gospel.

This may include a necessity to speak truth to power, as the bishop of Washington did during Trump's inauguration. Similarly Pope Francis has issued a stinging rebuke to America's attitude of starting by focussing on those at home before looking wider – particularly where they are attempting to pervert the gospel to justify their actions.

The shameful actions of Trump in making sweeping decisions without thought for the implications for the US let alone the world and the planet. Pardoning violent insurrectionists, banning paper straws in favour of plastic straws which were banned by

the previous administration because of their impact on the environment. Now, having blamed diversity, equality and inclusiveness for the recent plane crashes, Trumps thoughtless dismissal of federal employees at the stroke of a pen has left America's nuclear infrastructure without staff to maintain it!

We're no better in this country as we are constantly pressed by the far right agenda to focus on our own needs and forget those who 'don't belong here' – however you might define that. The government is playing into this with its announcements this week about having deported more people than the last government, that they will no longer allow anyone arriving by unauthorised ways to ever be able to apply for British citizenship – no matter what their needs.

Where does this sit with a Jesus who welcomed all who came to him – including famously those known as enemies of the day – Samaritans, Tax Collectors, the occupying Romans and so on.

We need to recognise that not only is God's love for all, but that it extends to all of creation.

We are custodian caretakers of the planet with a duty to all life on the planet – human, animal and plant, as well as care for the very planet itself.

There is no value in being materially rich if that is at the cost not only of our soul, but also the natural resources that we share with everything else on this planet. Hence Jeremiah's comparison between a tree tended in accordance with God which flourishes and one that perishes in a parched land.

We must therefore proclaim not only the gospel of Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of our sins, but also advocate the priorities of a God of the poor and God of all creation.

AMEN