**Morning Praise @ Home 27th August 2023**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading Matthew 16:13 – 20

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**Reflection from Sue Coyne**

***Jesus revealed***

Have you ever had a moment when ‘the penny dropped’ and you suddenly understood something that had just not clicked previously? Recently I read an autobiography about the presenter of *The Repair Shop* who was operating under huge stress, running lots of social initiatives, until someone revealed to him that he was actually an introvert, who desperately needed solitude to recharge. ‘Ohhh!’ No wonder he was stressed!

Well, in all three of the synoptic Gospels, our passage today is a key ‘drop of the penny’. Peter’s realisation and exclamation that the carpenter Jesus is the real ‘Messiah, the Son of the living God’ (v.16) is a pivotal moment. It is a moment when lived time and eternal time intersect, a curtain is drawn back and there is an ‘Ohhh!’ of recognition. The jigsaw pieces of Jesus’ miracles and message start to resemble a picture. And from this point onwards, the Gospels shift focus.

We sometimes forget that, although Jesus was divine, He was also human too, plodding through the hill and lakeside settlements of a northern backwater, trying to get through to a motley bunch of followers who often missed the point of His teaching first time around. His family thought he was crazy, those set in their religious ways resented Him, and meanwhile everything had to be done beneath the radar of the political authorities, one of whom had recently had Jesus’ cousin beheaded. As the Lord experienced the real-time slog of daily ministry, I wonder if He ever grew despondent? ‘Really Father? Is this what you called me to?’

Meanwhile, the surrounding crowds had clear expectations of what a Messiah should be like … and Jesus just didn’t fit the bill. Living in conditions similar to those in Russian-occupied Ukraine today, the Jews were desperate for a rescuer, God’s inspirational leader who would deliver a military victory and restore them to freedom. They clung to scriptures that promised an eternal inheritor of King David’s throne, who would establish justice at last and uphold true worship, as opposed to the huge Roman temples to nature gods and emperors which surrounded them.

They just didn’t know how these lofty hopes of the Messiah would work out on the ground…. But a working-class, northern nobody, who kept challenging their traditions, was certainly not what they were looking for.

So what a moment of wonder, of revelation, of clarity and joy when God opens faithful Peter’s eyes, as the jigsaw pieces at last fit together and, speaking for all the disciples, he recognises Jesus for who He is: the long-promised Saviour, ‘the Son of the living God’ (v.16), the anointed One who would bring God’s plan to fulfilment. And it is surely a moment of joy and affirmation for Jesus too: yes, God is indeed speaking through Him to His followers; the slog is not in vain!

God’s Holy Spirit enables Peter to recognise Jesus’ true worth, and that recognition, that worth-ship, is a moment of worship, as Peter truly connects with Christ. He properly ‘sees’ Jesus in a moment of intimacy, of joy and wonder, God revealing a new perspective, as the trudge of lived time is intersected by the leap of eternity.

In return, Jesus blesses Peter and affirms the connection that has been established between them. And He opens Peter’s eyes to the fisherman’s identity in God’s hands, who he really is – not as the impulsive and unstable disciple whom we have so far seen in Matthew’s Gospel, but, through God’s work in his life, as a ‘rock’ (v.18) – steadfast, faithful, providing stability for others, encouraging them in – and holding them to – their allegiance to Christ.

What an encouragement that must have been for Peter! That he doesn’t have to be trapped by his past failings and current unhelpful habits; that God sees his ‘best self’ coming to fruition, and loves who Peter may become through what he already is!

You see, God knows our end from our beginning. He is, as we pray each Sunday, an ‘Almighty God, before whom all our hearts are open, all our desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden.’ Yes, Peter will, within just a few verses, go on to fail once again. But that doesn’t mean he won’t ultimately become a ‘rock’. Jesus builds his church on forgiven sinners, on restored people.

This vision of what can – and ultimately does – happen to Peter surely can encourage us too. There is hope for us all! All the sin with which Satan attempts to separate us from God, the forces of death and destruction (symbolised here by ‘the gates of Hades’ v.18), do not have to prevail. Life in Jesus opens the prison doors.

So why is this narrative important for us, here in Burton?

* When we come together to worship, we are here primarily to give Christ His worth, as Peter did, to make following Jesus’ example of love our top priority.
* We are here to see afresh, opening our minds and hearts to God, knowing that we are seen by Him, giving His Spirit free rein to shape us into living stones. Are we ready to be intimate with Jesus?
* Understanding that we are loved and accepted, for what we are and who we may become, means our worship should be a joyful encounter. To what extent do visitors register our joy when they step through the door of St Nicholas’?

Secondly, we need to be alive to the eternal consequences of what we do and say and how we communicate Christ’s saving truth.

* To Peter, and then (in Mt 18) to all the disciples, is given the responsibility of interpreting to others the person and teaching of Christ: this is the responsibility of the ‘apostolic church’ which we are a local expression of today.
* The image of ‘the keys of the kingdom of heaven’ (v.19) is about whether we make access to the Kingdom of God available or unavailable through our witness. Are we unlocking the truth of Christ’s saving power for our friends and neighbours – or making it inaccessible, either by keeping quiet, or expecting them to cope with religious jargon and church habits when they start to explore Christianity?

Lastly, understanding that Jesus has chosen to build His church on and through forgiven sinners and restored failures, in other words, on US, helps us realise that we need to live in His light and shine it out to others. By modelling our lives on Jesus, we become ‘the people through whom the living God will put the world to rights, bringing heaven and earth’, daily life and eternity, together ‘into a new state of justice and peace’, just as Jesus’ contemporaries were longing for. Today’s world still longs for it. The people of Burton need it.

When we trust in Jesus, the solid assurance of our faith in Him means we can be rocks for those who are floundering through life, shaken by climate change, Covid, economic difficulties, on-line negativity or addiction etc. We can only be such rocks if we ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith and our allegiance to Christ, the Son of the living God, to help us ‘see’ and encounter Him each day.

This passage is the beginning of a new focus in the Gospels. Are we ready to re-focus too? **AMEN**

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession**

Father as we come to You in prayer we ask that You help us to put Jesus at the centre of everything we do and say.

We pray for all those who work or help at our local hospitals. Give them courage to face all trials that occur and let them feel your presence when they are weary. We especially pray for all the staff at the Countess of Chester hospital.

We pray for all children who have received examination results recently. Be with them as they make choices for their future education. We pray for all teachers as they prepare for the new school year. We especially remember all at Bishop Wilson School.

We pray for all Christians who face persecution for their faith in You. We lift those in Pakistan who are the victims of riots. Give them strength to continue in worship for You.

Father we ask for an end to war in many parts of this world. May all places that suffer violence, injustice, war and terrorism find peace and reconciliation. We pray for the peoples of the world and that the leaders of the nations may uphold what is right and good.

We pray for our church leaders that they are witnesses for You. We especially pray for Ruth Abbott as she mourns the loss of her brother.

We pray for all who are in sickness, in hospital and in nursing homes and for those that we name quietly in our hearts. We remember all those who are lonely and consider how we can reach out to them.

May they know your presence in their daily lives and remember that you are our hope and that all our strength comes only from you.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**