



# TOGETHER

For this issue of TOGETHER Revd Peter Bates has prepared the service material.

## Judgement and Forgiveness

**Hymn** O for a heart to praise my God  
(StF 507, H&P 536, SoF 411)

### Prayer

Lord, we come before you knowing that you are a holy God. There is no other like you. We worship you not only because you are almighty, ever present, all knowing but also because you are a God of love who knows each one of us personally. As the thief on the cross acknowledged his sin before you, we too can with all honesty confess our sin to you, now with the knowledge that you died for us, and so we ask that you forgive us for the selfish way we have lived our life. We thank you for your free and full forgiveness that cost you so much but which brings spiritual freedom in our lives.

Just as the thief put his trust in you completely, help us to do the same. Help us to see you as you really are, a great and powerful God who will be with us whatever we face. Amen

**Readings** Jeremiah 23 v 1 – 6  
Luke 23 v 33 – 43

**Hymn** Beneath the cross of Jesus  
(StF 442, H&P 165, SoF 39)

### Sermon

Jeremiah v 23 v 1, “Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!” declares the Lord. These are strong words which God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah. God was angry at the way the leaders of his people were abusing and neglecting his people, and he spoke judgement on them. “I will bestow punishment on you for the evil that you have done.” declares the Lord. ch 23 v2. God was going to punish the leaders of his people. There is clear judgement and punishment in the Old Testament but there is also leniency. God cares about people and he is willing for people to repent of their wrongdoing but if they do not then there will be consequences.

The reading from Jeremiah is aimed at the leaders of Israel, they were disobedient to God and neglected the people. But as God showed in the exiles that the people of Israel endured God was the God of the whole world and not just of Israel. Today we see God holding back judgement until the final day of judgement. It means that everyone has an opportunity to repent right up until their last breath. But there will be judgement. How can we live in a world where people like Adolf Hitler, Stalin and many others get away with murder, mass murder, and we can possibly add a new name to the list, Vladimir Putin. These men may have thought they were above the law and they certainly have no thought of God but each will appear before his throne on the day of judgement.

We need to make this clear so that we understand that Jesus died for each one of us on the cross. We have all sinned and there will be a judgement day but if we put our trust in Jesus our sins will be forgiven. So let us look at our reading from Luke 23 v 33 – 43. Crucifixion was a brutal death; it was meant to be a warning to others that if they break the law, they could face the same punishment. It was in the agony of Jesus being nailed to the cross that Jesus asks his Father to forgive these very soldiers that were hammering in the nails.

Forgiveness is never easy; it always takes something out of us. We have to relinquish the anger and hurt and move on in our lives. This is difficult because we want to hang on to them, we want the other person to suffer, Jesus forgave the soldiers instantly but for most people it takes time. There are some amazing examples of people who have forgiven the ones who have murdered their loved one. I can remember the story of one family whose son was murdered by another young man. The family wanted to forgive the person because they were Christians and when they found out about the young man’s upbringing, they decided to speak up for him at his trial. He was sent to prison for a number of years, but when he came out of prison the family welcomed him into their home, to help him to get a fresh start in life. He

could never replace their son but they turned something terrible in their lives into something which brought goodness out of pain. We are called to forgive but how far would we go to forgive someone who has hurt us?

The soldiers had no concern for Jesus' suffering, they were only interested in who would get his clothes. When Jesus was on the cross, he was ridiculed by the religious leaders. Jesus had outwitted them on many occasions and now they felt they had the upper hand. They took the opportunity to taunt him. "He saved others let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One". Jesus could have come down from the cross but he had a greater purpose for his sacrifice.

The Christian faith makes some mighty claims, which as believers we know to be true. The claims are open to ridicule from unbelievers. We are tested in many different ways to explain our faith, we are asked to prove that God exists. We are asked about suffering and how can a loving God allow suffering in our world. We can also be tested in our own life. When we are ill or a family member is ill, or when our loved ones are going through a difficult time. We can ask God why are they suffering like this? We need to continue to believe in a loving God who cares not just about us but everyone. It is important that we maintain our relationship with God and talk to him and give him a chance to speak to us, especially when we are going through a difficult time.

The soldiers mocked Jesus because of the sign which Pilate had ordered to be placed above Jesus' head, it read. 'This is the King of the Jews'. The soldiers had no idea who Jesus was but they were indignant at this title. The criminals however, may have heard rumours about this man who was crucified with them. One of the criminals' ridicules Jesus by saying. "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us?" He was angry at his own suffering and lashed out at the nearest person. He had no thought of the suffering he had caused others he was only interested in himself.

The other criminal was more aware of what he had done, he accepted his punishment knowing he had committed a crime. There was no hope for him in this world but he saw something in Jesus which made him recognise that Jesus was different. He rebukes his fellow criminal and states that Jesus was innocent. Unlike the

others, he doesn't say, "If you are the Christ?" He expresses genuine faith to the man who is dying beside him. In some way this show of faith is remarkable because the man had to see through all the blood and agony of his fellow sufferer and see the real Jesus. He puts in trust in this dying Christ and asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom Jesus responds immediately. "Today you will be with me in paradise." That's all it takes, an acceptance of what we have done wrong and a trust that Jesus is all we need. Amen

Hymn My song is love unknown  
(StF 277, H&P173, SoF 400)

Prayer

Lord, we pray today for the people of Ukraine as they stand against a foreign power that is causing so much damage and death. We ask that you will help the government of Ukraine in the decisions they make to defend their country. We pray for peace

We pray for our world as we try to combat Climate Change. Help the leaders of the nations to take seriously the warnings by scientists, so that they can commit to plans that have been made to reduce greenhouse gasses. We pray for manufacturers to do their bit in reducing packaging which is harmful to the environment. Help us to be better informed and to do what we can to reduce waste. Amen

Hymn Blessed Assurance  
(StF 548, H&P 668, SoF 44)

Blessing

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us for evermore. Amen

**Circuit Strategy Team Message:**

The Circuit Strategy Team has met twice (7th and 23rd November) since our last message to you to discuss taking our circuit forward. We'd love to hear thoughts on the following questions:

*What in the worshipping life of the circuit works well? What could work better?*

*What styles or forms of worship engage you the most or are most accessible?*

*How could we make Worship more accessible to you?*

*Let us know...*

[peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk](mailto:peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk) (01636 812166)