

We are told clearly not just to associate with likeminded people ~ other children of God, other Christians ~ but all people whatever their belief or culture.~ those who are unlikely to know God's peace.

All belong to God and are His creation ~ even when they don't recognise it. The point is they will never recognise what they are not given the opportunity to experience for themselves and you and I can be the channels for that experience.

None of that is easy, all of it asks for creativity in the way we think and live our lives and all of it asks that we review our attitudes regularly to ensure that we are not marring God's image in us ~ but showing His love for all of creation.

As Lent approaches consider, not so much what you might give up or how you are going to use the 40 days to benefit yourself, but rather what you might take on not only to your benefit but to the benefit of others too!

The greatest thing to benefit any of us is to gain a greater understanding of God's Love for us and express it in our lives. So how are you going to learn more of God's Love by **knowing Jesus and making Him known** this Lent ~ you could do worse than committing to read our recommended Lent study ~ "Dethroning Mammon" by Justin Welby. If you sign up after Service I will ensure that a copy is ordered for you. Amen.

Ministry Musings (19th February 2017)

As we draw closer to Lent we look to the first recorded Word of God in Genesis. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". It matters not that we now know about evolution, and continue to learn how this might have taken place; creation still had to begin somehow and with something and we believe that thing, that being, is God. What we are told of the beginning of creation is that God had a vision and an order for things and that all that was created was good!

We are all aware that good things can go bad or suffer because of the way they are treated or neglected ~ and that the neglect is not always obviously caused by humankind. By God's grace, we and God's world can receive, and be channels of, healing and restoration. You and I as Christians have a responsibility to take the lead in being channels of God's healing and we can do this because we first experience God's love and healing for ourselves. Whether you are at 09.00 am or 10.00 am Service today Matthew talks of the differences between retribution and restoration, turning the other cheek and loving our enemies. About not worrying how we will be equipped to walk against the tide of general opinion and attitudes when they deny God's presence and His love. Whatever you are worrying about God says stop! Worrying won't make things better or make a problem go away, worrying only wears us down making us less able to face the imminent, the immediate and the inevitable.

Perhaps one of the hardest human things to do is to let tomorrow worry about itself ~ start practicing today because that is what Scripture asks of you and me and as we learn to obey we will be **knowing Jesus ~ making Him known !**

Genesis 1:1- 2:3 OT page 1, Romans 8:18 - 25 NT page 154,
Matthew 6: 25 - end NT page 6 ~10.00 am Matthew 5: 38 - 48

This morning at All Age Service there is a colouring activity ~ quite simple ~ there is a picture of a rainbow, an olive branch and a dove and on hearing this mornings Old testament reading you will be able to imagine, I am sure, what they are representing.

There is also a creative suggestion to make a bouquet of love at home. The bouquet comprises cut out hand shapes on pipe cleaners so that they look a little like flowers and on each one we are invited to write an idea about how to show God's Love. Perhaps not such a clear message from that reading.

What you will be unaware of is that we are not hearing the Genesis reading at 10.00, we are not hearing the reading from Romans either that talks about present suffering and future glory ~ God's Love revealed ~ and the patience to wait and recognise it! Paul writes of the frustrations God's creation faces that are not of its making or choice but happen through what it is subjected to by God's children whilst they learn that they are God's children. We are told God's creation waits in eager anticipation for the children of God to be revealed! When that happens creation itself will be liberated from the bondage of decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. Paul also tells us that those of us who recognise that we are God's children will be frustrated and groan at the worlds selfishness while we wait for the redemption of our bodies.

Note the passage does not imply that we sit passively waiting, Groaning and frustration are active experiences and implicit is that we try to share the right way forward ~ towards wholeness; but it does say that we wait patiently ~ we do not lose heart or temper but continue to hope.

At this Communion our Gospel reading in the 6th chapter of Matthew has been about not worrying about our life, our survival, what we will eat and drink; how our bodies behave or what we will wear ~ there is more to life than any of these things! We do not get to live longer because we have spent time worrying. Matthew records Jesus' teaching that we are more valuable than the birds

of the air or the flowers of the field and they are fed and clothed, forming part of the beauty of creation. We are a more valued part of God's creation than they are. But note ~ being more valued does not mean we are more important or have more splendour ~ it simply means God knows what we need and He will make provision, we may not think we have enough but God will care for us. It takes faith to trust God will provide what we need and it takes discipline to resist the temptation of chasing after things we would like but do not need! The thing we should concentrate on seeking as God's children is an awareness of God's kingdom by coming to know Jesus better and receiving all that He and the Spirit offer us and we will discover then that tomorrow takes care of itself when we learn to let go of worry and take one day at a time.

At All Age we are not looking closely at that message either ~ we are looking at the previous chapter of Matthew which considers the Old Testament teaching of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" and how Jesus' teaching turns that on its head and tells us that we should not seek retribution but, in love, if someone slaps us on the right cheek then we should offer them the left one to slap as well! If they want our shirt then offer our coat as well and if we are forced to walk a mile with someone then willingly walk the second mile too. ~ Jesus goes on to teach that you love your neighbour even if they are your enemy! You don't pick and choose ~ but how you show your love may well be different to each individual. So, when your neighbour is an enemy who persecutes you then pray for them ~ it is no good getting into conflict with them ~ instead meet their evil with good ~ with love ~ with prayer. That way you and I will show that we are children of God the Father and share, through example, the love that we know in Jesus.

All of us carry hidden agendas and, if we do not recognise them and deal with them; or if we are unable to deal with them, will reflect in our behaviour. Anyone appearing to be an enemy has an agenda of need, worry or concern that causes their anger and mistrust. For whatever reasons, at that moment, their needs are greater than ours ~ because we have a means of calming our worries and fears ~ we have the Peace of God and they need that peace too,