

Sunday Evening Service Order of Service

Welcome Proverbs 3:5-6

Song I cast my mind to Calvary

Opening Prayers

Story

Song I see grace

Bible Readings Matthew 26:69-75 Acts 4:1-20

Reflection 'Your Accent Gives you Away'

Song I will offer up my life

Prayers of Intercession

Blessing Through these testing times, may you know God's presence encompassing you, God's staff upholding you,

and God's Spirit guiding you. And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with you now and always.

OPENING PRAYERS for EVENING SERVICE on 26 JULY 2020

Almighty God, the Psalmist asks the questions, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" The answer is nowhere, for you are in all places at all times. You have promised in your Word, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." You have revealed that promise to be true in the gift of Jesus Christ and the abiding presence of your Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives.

Gracious God, you love us as we are, and you know us through and through. All that we are in our nature and ways is exposed before your gaze, and still your love shines on. Reaching deep, your love holds firm all that we are and seek to be. Reaching high, your love conquers all our foolishness and sin. Reaching wide, it draws all we are within its power, as you draw us to your heart of love.

Calling God, your voice sounds out to all with ears to hear. Your whispered challenge, and the call to follow and serve, can delight us or rebuke us, but it always renews and restores us.

Bonding God, to her and him, to us and them, your loving purpose is revealed. You enfold us all, and hold us, as one. Your love seeks to bind us together in perfect unity. Agreement finds new strength and disagreement is reshaped in the face of your love, grace, mercy and compassion. You are ours, and we are yours, and so how dear we are to one another.

Eternal God, you who ever loves, love us now. You who ever calls, call us now, each one by name. You who seeks, bind together all people. Be our bond in these moments, at this time, in this day, and always.

Amen.

Sunday Evening Service

You Tube

Sunday 26 July 2020

YOUR ACCENT GIVES YOU AWAY

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Introduction – Accents

I heard a programme on Radio 4 the other day where the presenter lamented the way regional accents have gone into decline. I always remember Peter Sugarman who had a surprise hit record with the song 'Hev Yew Gotta Loight Boy?' Some of my relations regularly read books written in the Yorkshire dialect. And then there's Scots, the Doric, West Country, Cockney (up the apples and pears) and many others.

It's usually very easy to tell where someone comes from by their accent. I could claim to come from the West Coast of Scotland but someone would quickly tell me that I don't remotely sound like someone from any part of the West Coast. And they'd be right because my accent gives me away as coming from down south, Hampshire in fact. My accent gives me away every time.

The Galilean Accent

This was Peter's experience after Jesus' arrest. Jesus was taken to the house of the high priest Caiaphas. Peter followed him to the courtyard of the high priest and sat down with the guards to see the outcome. Whilst he sat in the courtyard, he was challenged by a servant girl who said he had been with Jesus of Galilee. He denied it and repeated his denial to a second girl. A little while later, the people standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away"

(Mt26:73). In Mark's gospel (14:70), those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." Luke records someone saying, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean" (22:59).

His Galilean accent had given Peter away as a follower of Jesus. The Galilean accent, by all accounts, wasn't very melodic. Up at the capital, people joked about the accent being a bit rustic and uncouth. A man from the north was easily identified as a Galilean. As is the case for all of us, we can't hide our accent. It always gives a clue as to where we come from.

Same Accent from a Different Place

Our second Bible reading came from Acts chapter 4 verses 1 to 20. This takes us much further on in the Peter story. I don't know, but I think it's a fair guess, that Peter's accent still sounded like someone who came from Galilee. So, it was the same accent but, now, coming from a different place. He's now gone from denying his Lord 3 times in the high priest's courtyard to a bold, strong, courageous disciple, not afraid to confront anyone who dared to attempt to halt the progress of God's saving word in Jesus Christ amongst the people.

In Acts chapter 2, he preached the first sermon on the day of Pentecost so powerfully that about 3,000 people were added to the number of disciples on that day. Later in Acts chapter 4, we see Peter and John defiantly standing before the Sanhedrin, Israel's supreme court, after the dramatic healing of a crippled beggar in Acts 3, and telling them that they were never going to stop telling the good news of Jesus Christ's saving love, despite being commanded to cease their preaching. They said, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." Peter's Galilean accent now totally attuned to the accent of Jesus Christ.

What is Jesus Christ's Accent?

I'm sure we could all tell stories about people who had a huge influence in our journeys of faith. They could be family members, friends or people that we came into contact with for a time. I remember very well two brothers, Frank and Arthur Bath, who were loyal, faithful, long-suffering, Methodist lay preachers who, for many years, ran an afternoon Sunday School for groups of young people. The children who came to the Sunday School could be a bit unruly, difficult and were mostly resistant to the gospel message, partly because they'd been sent by parents who needed an afternoon of peace and quiet. But their faithfulness laid a foundation in 'this heart.' They had the Galilean accent. They spoke and acted in the ways of Jesus. In every situation that came up, they always reflected the nature and ways of Jesus.

I don't imagine the apostle Paul spoke with a Galilean accent since, in an autobiographical section in Philippians chapter 3, we clearly see that he came from a more cultured background and was extremely well educated. He was zealous for God, a true Pharisee, but after he met the Risen Christ on the Road to Damascus, he realized that he'd been coming from the wrong place. He says of his past circumstances, "I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him" (Phil 3:8-9). Thereafter, in his ways, he had the accent of Christ in his passion and devotion and also in his suffering for his faith revealed in 2 Corinthians 11.

Belonging to Christ

In the NT we're reminded that if anyone really belongs to Christ, his or her Christianity can't be concealed. The whole way someone speaks, behaves and reacts will inevitably show his or her true allegiance to Christ. Paul puts it very bluntly that if anyone is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit, he/she does not belong to Christ (Rom 8:9). It's as we look at life through the eyes of Christ, as it were, we think and act and live with his accent. In 'Les Miserables,' Jean Valjean says to love another person is to see the face of Christ. We feel with his compassion, speak, think, act and love in his ways and with his accent.

The way, nature and person of Jesus is precisely revealed in his claims, not least in saying that he is the light of the world (Jn8:12), the way and the truth and the life (Jn14:6) and the Good Shepherd (Jn10:11) He had a beautiful way with Him we call Christlikeness.

So, what is this Christlikeness? It's his absolute trust in God and obedience to His ways. He said he came to do the Father's will (Jn6:38) and this is exactly what he did. He's the most single-minded person who has ever lived. And this intimate relationship was founded on his constant contact with his Father in prayer. And this prayer was both sustaining, directive and necessary thing for Jesus. Apart from the passage in John 17, we often don't know what Jesus prayed. No doubt they were more expansive than in the prayer he taught us to say. Although we often refer to what we call the Lord's Prayer there's every reason to believe that these are words that Jesus himself also said. No shadow ever seemed to cross his mind, no occasion when he began to doubt the Father's presence and blessing. At the times of great trial, the words of Jesus were, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Mt26:38).

Acquiring the Galilean Accent

We can speak Christian when we choose. There are times when, quite naturally and without thinking, grace love and compassion surface. We do know something of having the Galilean accent. But we're liable to drift into our own agendas all too readily.

Our calling as followers of Jesus is to acquire his accent, to know the Spirit of Christ in our hearts and lives, and truly be his disciples. Tolstoy once said that he became a Christian because he noticed that they met life and its rigour and surprises with peace and joy. We see such examples in our Christian friends overseas suffering for their faith in exposure to inhumane and life-threatening treatment. And yet their peace, joy and strength from the Lord bears witness to their Christlikeness.

How do we get the same accent, the Galilean accent? How does anyone get any accent? Surely by living in a place. As people converse with one another, what they say and how they say it, the phrases they use, the stress they put on certain things, soaks into us, often without our realizing it until we, too, speak in similar ways.

The way open to us to learn Christlikeness is to be someone who is close to Jesus. We make room for him in our lives. We call him often to mind in the same way that our loved ones are always on our minds. We dwell in his presence by spending time with him in silent and contemplative moments. As we do those things, his influences on our lives grows and we become more like him in how we speak and act.

There's a lovely scene in one of the Enid Blyton books where Noddy and Big Ears go to the seaside. They're at the seaside with the waves gently lapping over their feet and Noddy asks, "Shall we go in a bit deeper?" Shall we go in a bit deeper with Jesus?

This may demand a radical change in our lives as individuals and as community. We're not clear of the coronavirus which could well be with us for sometime yet, maybe even years to come. But even when we emerge into a new future, things will probably be very different, certainly different in the ways we do 'Church.'

Church can often be a ceaseless round of activities of valuable and compassionate actions on behalf of many people in all sorts of situations and needs. Lots of energy goes into sustaining such activities and there's always a danger of such business being an end in itself. We can lose sight of the instruction in Psalm 46 verse 10, "Be still and know that I am God."

Jesus chose 12 disciples that they might be with him, be close to him, observe him and learn from him. And then he sent them out to work with and for others, to transmit to them the ways they'd learnt from Jesus. However different things are in the 'new normal' there will still be a need for the gospel of Jesus to speak into human lives. The ways we do that might be very different.

In life we learn that our accent almost always gives us away. As Christians, the only accent we desire is the Galilean accent, the accent of Christ, speaking and acting through us. We can only learn that by abiding in him. "This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (Jn15:8).

PRAYERS of INTERCESSION for SUNDAY EVENING on 26 JULY 2020

Loving and Gracious God, in these past weeks and months we've become more aware of the preciousness and value of life, and become more aware of the experiences, relationships, freedoms, choices, decisions and possibilities that we took for granted. We seldom reflected on how thankful we should always be for all those things which were a blessing to us.

And then, we were brought up short by the coronavirus pandemic. The restrictions necessary for virus control made us rethink our lives in terms of the things that really matter and need to be preserved in our lives going forward.

God of Grace, as yet we don't know what lies ahead of us, but we know that on each one of our journeys you will be with us. Your footsteps will be in step with ours, you will keep us in your love and care. You will keep us in perfect peace if our minds are fixed on you.

Thank you, Gracious God, that you have been with us and our families in recent challenging times. In moments and times of worry and anxiety your peace has entered our hearts afresh. In times of stress and grief, your loving arms have enfolded us and held us tight. Your promise, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you," has been a true and strengthening reality for us.

We continue to pray for those upon whom we depend for our healthcare and provision of medicines and treatment, for those who serve in our shops, for those who provide social care, for those providing social relaxation, for those who give of their time, effort and money to help those in need in many ways.

Compassionate God, we pray for those who've found the restrictions during the pandemic to have affected their mental health and well-being, for those feeling isolated from human contact. We pray for the resources needed for their recovery.

We pray that medical research to find a vaccine to combat coronavirus will lead to international co-operation so that treatment will be equally available to all, across the globe.

Glorious God, lead us, we pray, into a future where love, grace, mercy and compassion are real expressions of relations between nations, people, neighbours and strangers.

We bring all our prayers to you in the precious name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.