

## **Hinde Street Methodist Church**

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> January 2020 11.00am

Rev Peter Cornick

### ***To be beloved***

*And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'*

A Methodist minister makes this comment having experienced supervision:

*It is just good to know that after 10 years of travel, I now have someone I can share highs and lows with and unpack stuff. Enabling me to work out a way forward.*

Supervision in the Methodist Church has come about due to the past cases review on sexual abuse. One outcome is to help ministers identify possible safeguarding concerns. But aside from its benefits in identifying safeguarding risks, supervision is long overdue. It does so much more. And one element of supervision is affirmation – or restoring the minister's sense of purpose; sense of worth; sense of call.

As the anonymous minister says; to share the highs and lows with someone listening in, is affirming. Perhaps the supervisor might ask, *why* an event was such a high – what made it so – or such a low. What could be done differently next time? How did the experience confirm the sense of God's calling. Or of course, if the experience drained the minister to distraction, the question might be, *was* this God's calling at all?

To unpack 'stuff' means to examine pastoral situations in all their complexity. The supervisor's job is to notice what or who is missing in the story; is there a sign of an unhealthy relationship emerging? The supervisor might wonder what might happen if someone else became involved in the situation – a class leader; another minister; a doctor; a son or daughter and so on. In unpacking the story, who might the minister realise, he or she has missed out or could have involved?

There is in supervision, the opportunity to hear someone say, well done; you did a good job; I think you were right to report that incident. To think about how one's actions might have furthered God's compassion, justice and truth. Or of course, to realise that things need to be done differently – which is, in itself, affirming and supportive.

In the work of the minister being supervised, has God's compassion, justice or truth been embodied? If so, perhaps that minister begins to hear God saying, 'I am pleased with you.' Or perhaps a better translation is: 'I have chosen you.'

Last week, we made the Covenant Prayer together. 'Put me to what you will.' In the work we do for God, do we hear God saying, I am well pleased with you? How might greater supervision of, for example, Class Leaders, Night Shelter helpers and so on, help each of them in performing their work; but also, enable each to hear God saying, 'I am pleased with you.'

In the work of the minister being supervised, going about God's business, is to worship and adore God. And, if the work of God in compassion, justice and truth has been carried out, perhaps the minister hears God saying, 'you too, are my beloved.' In the Covenant Prayer, we each said, 'I am yours and you are mine.' There

is a bond, a love between God and the worshipper. We are deeply connected. And this connection, being 'beloved', has to do with being obedient, submitting to God. 'Let me be full, let me be empty.' Being 'beloved' is demanding. It's no sentimental or easy love. This love means something – and demands a response.

Jesus' baptism, is obviously, Jesus' baptism. There is quite a debate in the literature as to whether we can in any way, reflect on our own baptism – Christian life – in hearing his story. Well, we're not the Son or Daughter of God, clearly. But, to those eminent commentators who warn me against using the story to reflect on the Christian life more generally, I would say this. Pick up the baptism passage, and put it in the context of everyday life. See what it has to say to people. We all need to hear that we are beloved of God, and to hear that God is pleased with the work we are doing.

*And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'*

Jesus, the Son, is being affirmed in his ministry. A ministry yet to be fully worked out. 'A voice from heaven, the seat of God, 'I am pleased with you – or – 'I have chosen you.' You are my beloved.' The kind of relationship the Father and the Son have, the deep adoration – being 'beloved' – demands what might be called the work of Christ – the saving work – described for us in Acts 10:

*how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good – for God was with him. ... They put him to death ... but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear.*

Being 'beloved' – no sentimentality – no early Valentine's card: to be 'beloved' is to live the Covenant – that we are content for him to

appoint us our place of work – for Jesus, the place of work is the cross.

One of my places of work before Christmas was The Haven. I was attending a Christingle service there. The Haven is one of WLM's projects, in Crouch Hill, housing and caring for men with chronic alcohol addiction. The Christingles, are oranges with candles in them representing the light of the world. They had been made by some of the residents with the Chaplain. Before we lit all the candles, one candle was passed round the circle. As each person held the candle in turn, they were invited if they wished, to pray for someone they were concerned about, or who they wanted to bring before God. I found it most moving, when several residents were brave enough to pray for someone. To offer their own human frailty to God. They had a chance to voice their prayer. Heard not just by the group, but by God. Maybe I was being sentimental in the Christmas candlelight, but as each one spoke, it seemed as if here was a representation of God, holding them as beloved. 'I am pleased with your prayer – and particularly pleased that you had the courage to pray.'

Where have you experienced someone being beloved – God pleased with their actions? ...

Jesus has come to John, the baptiser, to be baptised. But, this isn't the way John imagined it to be. John protests: 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' For John, this is the wrong way round. Just as for Peter, Jesus washing his feet is the wrong way round.

We spent time at Christmas, contemplating Jesus, coming as a vulnerable child. For many, to see God: 'little, weak and helpless', seemed the wrong way round. Visited first by shepherds – the

poorest of the workforce; and then by wise kings – the wrong way round.

So, at his baptism, if things were the wrong way round – perhaps John shouldn't have been surprised.

From our Western church point of view, we have been trained to see baptism as the forgiveness of sins – John calls people to repent of their sins and be baptized. Does Jesus have any repenting to do? Things seem the wrong way round.

But Jesus reveals a reason for his baptism which might surprise us. His reason is this:

*'for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.'*

What does Jesus mean by, fulfilling all righteousness?

If we turn to the servant song of Isaiah, we see expressed, what it might mean to fulfill all righteousness.

In this first servant song, Isaiah describes a servant of God. He is 'chosen' – or perhaps, God is pleased with him. In fact, God 'delights' in this servant. Or to use Matthew's language, the servant is 'beloved.' But it is in what is to follow, that one sees quite why God delights in this servant.

*I have put my spirit upon him;  
he will bring forth justice to the nations.*

Justice, derives from God. If one goes back a few chapters, to Isaiah 40, which you all know off by heart ... it's the voice crying in the wilderness, the straight pathway for our God ... just after that famous bit, God asks some rhetorical questions; who holds the waters in the hollow of his hand; who weighed the mountains and the hills in balance; and ... who taught you justice?

So, the servant, is to bring God's justice.

What might that look like? Back to Isaiah 42 again. And as I'm reading this, have in your mind, my story about the prayers at the Christingle service at The Haven.

*<sup>2</sup> He will not cry or lift up his voice,  
or make it heard in the street;  
<sup>3</sup> a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;*

...

*he will faithfully bring forth justice.  
<sup>4</sup> He will not grow faint or be crushed  
until he has established justice in the earth;  
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.*

You don't need to be at The Haven, to enable justice – perhaps your Class meeting could be the venue for someone to feel they are beloved of God; that God is pleased or has chosen them. Perhaps that is a place, like my minister's supervision, to receive affirmation.

The servant of Isaiah, is chosen – God delights in this servant. Upon the servant, is put God's spirit. Choosing; God's delight – the spirit descending; we can see the roots of Matthew's baptism story. And it is here, that we see the type of servant, God is looking for – what righteousness is. Someone who will '*bring forth justice to the nations.*' 'I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you.'

It is the one who brings forth justice, who is 'beloved', chosen, with whom God is well pleased. And so, Jesus tells John the Baptist, who protests at baptizing him:

*‘for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.’*

But, I hear you say, we are all loved by God. Yes we are – all can be saved. But I can’t avoid the consistent theme; in the baptism story of Jesus, in Isaiah’s servant or indeed the Covenant prayer. Both Jesus and the servant are ‘beloved’ of God *and* are called to fulfill righteousness – which as we’ve heard, is the justice, compassion, truth which derives from God.

In the Covenant prayer, we hear that we are ‘Beloved in Christ’. Yet to take this ‘yoke’ of Covenant love upon ourselves, means that there are services to be done, some easy, others difficult, some bring honour, others reproach.

Jesus’ baptism, Isaiah’s servant and the Covenant prayer each draw us back from a soft, sentimental, ‘God loves you’ approach, to a commandment – here it is in Isaiah 42:

*<sup>6</sup> I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,  
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;  
I have given you as a covenant to the people,  
a light to the nations,  
<sup>7</sup> to open the eyes that are blind,  
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,  
from the prison, those who sit in darkness.*

And speaking of prisoners, being brought light, a story from the WLM/West London Mission Christmas extravaganza. A resident of KPH, which is one of our projects supporting men recently out of prison, spoke about some of the paintings he has created. They are beautiful murals, some of which adorn the walls of KPH. At the end, he thanked the West London Mission – for all the help he had received in his time at KPH.

I can tell you, that man has received the help he needed, not from one person or one servant who encouraged his painting. But from a whole host of people. From the manager of KPH, to the cleaner, to you who pray for KPH and its residents, to those who watch over its governance and those who fundraise.

The light brought to that man, in his simple word of thanks indicates a community at work. Isaiah's servant, as we know, 'will bring forth justice to the nations.' But rather than being one person, as is often thought, perhaps Isaiah's servant refers to the whole community. In the chapter before this, Israel, the whole community, are referred to as the servant of God. And in the baptism of Jesus, Matthew has an interesting difference to Luke and Mark. In Luke and Mark, the voice from heaven is, *You* are my beloved Son. The voice addresses Jesus. Not so in Matthew. *This* is my beloved Son. The voice of God addresses the people – the community who are also being baptized along with him.

To be beloved of God, to find that God is well pleased, to fulfill the righteousness of allowing broken men to express a prayer or a gifted painter who has served his time, to express thanks, is all situated in a community of faith.

The Covenant prayer might be intensely personal, but it can only be made worshipping together and is introduced: 'We are no longer our own, but yours.'

Which is why the minister in supervision for the first time, was overjoyed to be sharing the highs and lows of ministry, and unpacking stuff, with someone in the faith community. It seems to me, he or she, felt beloved; heard that God was pleased – had chosen them.

*And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'*