

## Sermon: Do you turn to Christ?

10 March 2019

Isaiah 45: 18-19, 22-25 and John 1: 35-42

As I trust you are aware, this is the first Sunday in Lent. This is also the first of four sermons that we will be having during Lent based upon the promises candidates make before baptism and renew before confirmation. They are also the promises that we renew each Easter as we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus.

Thus over the next five Sundays (excluding Mothering Sunday), Sue, Robert, Archdeacon Richard and I have the privilege of exploring the baptism promises in some depth. This is also an opportunity for you to go deeper too, for, just as we did in the autumn, each preacher will be also putting together a handout, which you can take home for personal reflection or to share with your house group. This Lent, in addition to the sermon series, we have given out 50 copies of Lent Pilgrim and you can join the Churches Together Oadby Lent group on Wednesday evening. We have many different opportunities for further biblical study – so I hope you will be taking one up.

As we start this sermon series, it is probably worth first refreshing our memory of the baptism promises. Actually there are lots of questions and commitment made during a baptism service. The first is a question for the whole congregation on behalf of the people of God, in which we make a pledge to welcome and uphold the candidates as they begin their faith journey with Christ. Later the whole congregation also share in the creed, affirming our belief in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However the vows we are focusing on are the ones that are asked during a part of the service called 'the decision'. They are:

Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

Do you submit to Christ as Lord?

Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?

You will notice that there are six questions, and only four Sundays. I am afraid some compromises had to be made to fit the themes into four sermons. Therefore next week Robert will be tackling '*Do you repent your sins?*' followed by Archdeacon Richard on '*Do you renounce evil?*' and after Mothering Sunday, Sue will be preaching on '*Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?*'

You will also notice that the Church uses bold language to speak about the reality of sin and evil and the hope of Christ. Sometimes using words like 'sin', 'repentance', and 'the devil' can feel like very 'churchy' language. Let's be honest, unless you are a priest, they are words we probably do not use much in common parlance. But at heart these questions are simple. It about the way we are facing and who we are following. Thus we are invited to turn away from sin, darkness and evil, and turn to Jesus. He is the one we are invited to follow.

The journey of the Christian faith, and the mini pilgrimage of Lent, is a voyage home to Jesus. Therefore we have begun our series with the most important question of all. Do you turn to Christ?

Do you turn to Christ? It is a short and simple question. Yet for the majority in our society, it is one that is pretty irrelevant. Anyone watching Christians in this country, struggling to serve God today, would not think that the future lies with the Gospel. Yet for five adults and at least two young people at St Peter's this is commitment that they will be making after Easter at our confirmation service on 19<sup>th</sup> May.

Likewise, anyone watching the Jews struggling to rebuild Jerusalem after it was destroyed by the Babylonian invasion, would think that the future of salvation lay within a small ethnic minority, whose capital had little strategic importance and no fresh water supply. Actually, the nation of Israel was also struggling with it! The wider context of the short passage from Isaiah that I chose for today's sermon is the return from exile in Babylon had been facilitated not by a Jew, but by a foreigner. One that took the name 'King of Kings' and King of the Universe.' Names traditionally reserved for Yahweh. Israel knew that they were God's chosen people, yet they could not understand why God would designate Cyrus as his appointed. If God has made a commitment to David and his line, how could God do such a thing?

God's response is to remind the peoples of Israel that his strategies are surprising. No one less than Isaiah himself marvelled at how God pursues his plan;

For thus says the Lord,  
who created the heavens  
    (he is God!),  
who formed the earth and made it  
    (he established it;  
he did not create it a chaos,  
    he formed it to be inhabited!):  
I am the Lord, and there is no other.  
I did not speak in secret,  
    in a land of darkness;  
I did not say to the offspring of Jacob,  
    'Seek me in chaos.'  
I the Lord speak the truth,  
    I declare what is right. (Isaiah 45: 18-19)

God asserts that he has not spoken in secret. His word has been openly available. If Israel had heeded the word spoken to them, they would have known that their God, the creator had plans for the whole world.

Turn to me and be saved,  
    all the ends of the earth!  
For I am God, and there is no other.

Sometimes it is hard to see the beginning of the new heavens and new earth in Christian believers today. Look around you for a moment. Can you capture of glimpse of God's new creation? Because it is here! God has put the power of the resurrection of Christ within us. It is worth reading that verse again.

Turn to me and be saved,  
all the ends of the earth!  
For I am God, and there is no other.

This verse reminds us that there is no life, no salvation, no hope at all except in God alone. Our part is to turn away from the worthless idols that promise much and deliver nothing, and turn to the living God. If we do, we cannot help to experience salvation, because God cannot fail to be God with us. The whole point of creation, history is for God to glorify himself by saving you. Your salvation is not ultimately about you. It is about God. God is both perplexing and faithful because he is God.

‘What are you looking for?’ asks Jesus. Because if it wealth, power or status then you have come to the wrong place. What is on offer is life, hope and salvation. By turning to Christ, we will follow him as we do each Lent, on the way of the Cross. For Andrew, who became one of Jesus’ first disciples, what he wanted was to spend the whole day with Jesus. Learning from him. It had such an impact on him, that the first thing he does is rush and find his brother Simon. To tell him that he has found the Messiah. Andrew then brings his brother to Jesus. The next three years would see Andrew and Simon Peter following Jesus around first Galilee and then to Jerusalem. They would witness and perform themselves many miracles. They would participate in the heady days around the Passover, when they were expecting Jesus to become King. They would flee from the cross. But ultimately they would return to Jesus. Turn again to the resurrected Christ. Because in him they discovered that God saves sinners, not just Jewish sinners, but everyone.

If we trust him enough, we will bow in deepest joy forever. Isaiah’s words are a prophecy for the future. A prophecy of Jesus that;

‘To me every knee shall bow,  
every tongue shall swear.’

I don’t know about you, but this is something that I want to be part of. Thus on Easter morning, I will be delighted to renew my baptism promise and boldly state in response to the question; ‘*Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?*’ that ‘**I turn to Christ**’.

**Amen**

### **Further reading**

The initial inspiration for the sermon series is;

*Pilgrim Turning to Christ; A course for the Christian Journey* by Stephen Cottrell, Steven Croft, Paula Gooder and Robert Atwell.

I also consulted a number of commentaries when preparing the sermon. These are;

*Isaiah for Everyone* by John Goldingay.

*Isaiah* by J.Alec Motyer.

*Isaiah: God saves sinners* by Raymond C. Ortlund Jr.

The most accessible is *Isaiah for Everyone* by John Goldingay, which are companion books to Tom Wright’s New Testament *For Everyone* series. I looked at *John for Everyone* but this time it did not contribute to my sermon text.

## Questions

Below are some questions that you might like to reflect on, individually or in groups.

1. What stayed with you from listening to Liz's sermon on Sunday?
2. Re-read Liz's sermon. What strikes you now?
3. Jesus' question to Andrew is also his question to you. 'What are you looking for?'
4. What originally attracted you to Jesus? Why do you continue to follow him now?
5. If you were to spend the day with Jesus, like Andrew did, what would you ask him?
6. What else could you be doing to get to know Jesus better?
7. Can you remember your baptism or confirmation. What was it like to respond to the six questions of the decision?

## Prayer

Almighty God  
your Son has opened for us  
a new and living way into your presence.  
Give us new hearts and constant wills  
that we may learn of your love  
and come to worship you in spirit and truth;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord  
Amen.

Some ideas for prayer this week

1. Meditate on the question and response; 'Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?' **'I turn to Christ'**.
2. Pray for those approaching baptism and confirmation during the Easter season.
3. Pray for one or two people who have yet to turn to Christ.