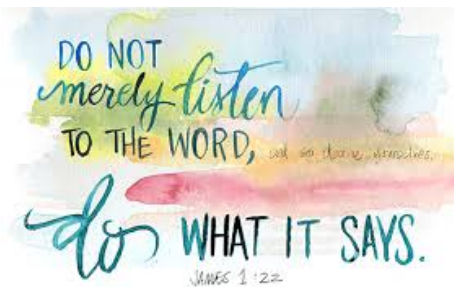


Dorset South & West. Written Service.
Sunday 1st September 2024. Happy 2nd New Year!
Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



Call to worship.

Mark 7:14 Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand....."

STF 137

New every morning is the love
our waking and uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness safely brought,
restored to life, and power, and thought.

New mercies, each returning day
hover around us while we pray;
new perils past, new sins forgiven,
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

If on our daily course our mind
be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,
as more of heaven in each we see;
some softening gleam of love and prayer
shall dawn on every cross and care.

The trivial round, the common task,
will furnish all we ought to ask;
room to deny ourselves, a road
to bring us daily nearer God.

Prepare us, Lord, in your dear love
for perfect rest with you above;
and help us, this and every day,
to live more nearly as we pray.

Opening prayers of adoration and confession.

Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. You are the one true God who reigns forever. Lord, Jesus you are always ready and willing to listen to us and we bring you our praise and thanksgiving. We praise you for your understanding of us and your acceptance of us as we are. Help us to listen to you and to understand what you are saying to us. Help us to be grateful for each and every blessing that you so freely shower upon us. **Amen.**

Lord God, You search our hearts and you see every part of us. All our desires are known to You, and from you no secrets are hidden. By the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, cleanse our hearts so we may perfectly love you and glorify Your holy name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?" He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

"These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."

And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honour your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them." After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.) He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

STF STF 520

Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart
and a discerning mind;
give, as I play the Christian's part,
the strength to finish what I start
and act on what I find.

When, in the rush of days, my will
is habit-bound and slow,
help me to keep in vision still
what love and power and peace can fill
a life that trusts in you.

By your divine and urgent claim,
and by your human face,
kindle our sinking hearts to flame,
and as you teach the world your name
let it become your place.

Jesus, with all your Church I long
to see your kingdom come:
show me your way of righting wrong
and turning sorrow into song
until you bring me home.

James 1:17-27

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Reflection.

We are fortunate to have two new year's and two new starts. Actually when we think about it, there are several new starts throughout the year. Being connected to the Methodist Connexion we celebrate the start of the new connexional year. It's a time for churches circuits and those in Ministry lay and ordained to begin new spheres of service. Those in education also begin a new chapter in their schools and colleges. A very happy and productive new year to us all.

I guess in the world of education, goals for the new year are pretty obvious. There are learning opportunities and targets to attain. Milestones and exams to pass and to do your best to achieve them.

What are your personal spiritual goals for this new connexional year? What is your church and the circuit planning for the new year ahead?

The letter of James is believed to be written for all Jewish Christians scattered abroad. We might feel a bit like that, scattered across the circuit and perhaps not as in touch, or 'in the know' as we would like to be.

Thinking about this epistle, I recall my theological tutor saying frequently that it was, "a right strawy epistle". He was actually quoting from what Martin Luther wrote in 1522, in the preface of his German translation of the New Testament, "St. James's epistle is really a right strawy epistle, compared to these others [Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 Peter, and 1 John], for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it."

Oh dear! I was hoping that the reading from today's portion of the letter would give us some perspective for the new year. However despite the centuries of speculation and controversy I still hold onto the usefulness of this letter in guiding us in how we live out the gospel.

James clearly does not lay out any extended exposition of Jesus's person and work, like Paul does in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians. That is certainly true. However James's short epistle is a call to Christian action, to living out the gospel we profess, not just believing it.

James uses the term 'the word' four times in this part of his letter (verses 18, 21, 22, and 23) which surely means 'the gospel' and refers to God. Remember John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The words and encouragement of our portion of James's letter today has much to say about the direction of our words and actions. So let's see if these four '**the words**' help us to set goals for the new year in our spiritual journey and that of our churches.

Doesn't verses 17-18 excite you? I am sure we can all think back to acquaintances who have promised us 'the moon' and not delivered! So I love that phrase, 'who does not change like shifting shadows.' Now we need to be careful not to put up our, 'spiritual umbrellas'! We can easily say, "oh I know so many who would benefit from hearing this" We let the 'droplets of the gospel' fall onto others and never touch us. I could name many shifting shadow types of individuals, but I would have to put myself first on that list! We are all imperfect and we like to think we never let others down but stuff happens. However what excites me about this first 'the word', is that God, the giver never lets us down. He is not a shifting shadow but an ever present reality.

Plus He chooses us and He gives us every good and perfect gift. When you give something to someone you do expect something in return. Even if it is only a thank you. So what are you going to give to God for every good and perfect gift you will receive from Him in this next chapter of your spiritual journey?

September 1st the dawn of a new day a new beginning and what have you to be thankful for already. I recall visiting one very elderly bedridden person who was a beacon of faith and hope. Joy just exuded from him. To look at him you would wonder what he had to be thankful for. Every time I visited he would tell me how every day as he woke up he would say, "thank you God another day full of opportunities!" It's a very long time since I had the privilege of meeting up with that dear gentleman but his influence remains. I try every day to thank God for the day ahead...but it might be raining, this or that isn't right and so on! We are not perfect and our second **'the word'** 'humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.' Encourages us to acknowledge and accept and by our actions show our gratitude for God's saving grace.

Of course the second and subsequent **'the words'** really speak about what gets in the way of proclaiming the word within us. We need to get rid of those things that get in the way of living a life that proclaims the existence of God and His goodness in our lives. *Quick, slow, slow* should be our response. Quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to become angry. But there's more! We don't like to think that 'moral filth and evil', exists in our Christian world but it is there. Anger is so often expressed in words that are degrading and pure filth. We are human and we easily fall into believing that we are above the temptations and desires that are against the life Christ calls us to live. However we know that the basest faults lie within all of us and can easily emerge. Or, as Jesus puts it in today's gospel reading from Mark, we all have "defiled hearts." Have you noticed how too easily we assign degrees of fault and guilt to our mistakes. Likening our actions to the actions assigned by the law of the land. I remember seeing a Christian sketch entitled, 'stealing the sausage', trying to defend a crime and saying that all theft was not equally wrong. We hear it from Children trying to justify their wrong actions and we stay as Children always trying to defend ourselves and the things we know are not right, ... "but it was not as bad as.....!". We know when we are not humbly accepting the word planted within us and living and acting in a way which honours that belief. Which is a good grateful response to the perfect gifts that we are given by our gracious Heavenly Father.

Quoting James, 'Do not merely listen to **'the word'**. "Are you listening? Are you really listening". "Mmmm sorry what did you say?" We all for a myriad of reasons have the ability to half listen. When I was growing up it was rude to not give another person your full attention when they were talking to you. Now it has become commonplace to check-in and check-out as we see fit. We have created a new disease of half-listening and it is infecting organisations and families. Instead of others feeling like we care about them, we instead focus only if we feel stimulated to engage. People check their mobile phones and text messages. I dread the ping of someone's phone when I want to enjoy their company. It's no wonder they are often asking, "did we really say or agree that?". In the armed forces we had a rule about listening and talking called TAR. It's an alliteration for giving Time, Attention and Respect to the person who you are in conversation with. It's hard to imagine the Pharisees checking the web to verify what Jesus was saying to them. However in the gospel reading they obviously are not fully listening. Jesus says to them, "Listen to me." Who where they listening to? Not mobile phones, they hadn't been invented! They were tuned out and into Tradition! They would equate man made traditions alongside the scriptures. Tying people up in lengthy and innumerable rituals. For example there are nine hand washing rituals upon waking. These rules can be extreme. For instance, after sleeping and before breaking bread, it is required to use a vessel to pour water over your own hands. The rules are very detailed, stating that there must be enough water to at least cover one's middle knuckles. Water must be poured over each hand twice. Washing is required after sleeping, whether that is an all night sleep or a nap. It is believed to remove any evil spirits present as well as prepare a person for prayer or reading Scripture. Of all of these washings, the one before eating bread is considered the most important. It is so important that disobeying it can bring about ex-communication. Rabbinic law requires that travellers go up to four miles away to find water for this ritual. However, that is only required if the water source is in the same direction as the traveler is journeying. If the water source is in a different direction, he is only required to journey one mile.

Now tradition's can be helpful and even enjoyable and connect us to people and communities that enrich us. However when they stifle and drown out the joy of the gospel they are not right. Those traditions that stop us from living in the present and listening and acting on **'the word'**, need to be archived at the very least. Oh don't you just hate that phrase, "we have always....", does it allow us to really listen to the words of God?

Finally, do you catch glimpses of yourself in a photo or a mirror and find yourself saying, "surely I don't look like that?". I remember meeting someone who was at college with me and he asked me if I had spotted others from our year? He couldn't recognise them because they had aged so much! Didn't we laugh, because of course we hadn't aged much! Then there are those times when we don't recognise the person we became in that situation. "I'm not normally like that". We blame the; "heat of the moment", other's interactions even the weather! Anything but look at the reflection of the person we became and acknowledge our sin. We very quickly recognise others faults and failures but do we need to take a long look at the mirror's reflection and own what we see? So in this September restart, what are your resolutions. How will you reflect The Word, in your deeds and actions? How will you really listen to God's words? What are your hoped for outcome's in the year ahead? What will be your words about 'the word'?

Prayers for others

In this new September season we pray for all in Ministries lay and ordained. Let us take a moment to remember our Circuit staff and all office holders.

We pray for God's guidance and strength for them and for us.

In this new September season we pray for all in education, for those who teach and those engaged in learning. Be especially with those who are facing new challenges in different places of education. Give them patience and peace as they begin to learn and grow a new.

In this new September season we pray for all in times that are difficult. A new season may not come with an end to the past and present difficulties. We pray for those struggling in these difficult economic times. We pray for those engaged in helping and enabling ministries. Food banks, CAP, and care giving in so many different ways.

In this new September season we pray for all in times that are challenging. A new season may not come with an end to the past and present difficulties. We long for violence and warfare to end. For the moral filth of our age to be vanquished. We pray for all those suffering in inhumane circumstances. We pray for those working for change.

In this new September season we pray for those who are struggling with sickness and suffering, those who we know personally and those who have been brought to our attention. Bring to them wholeness and healing. These our prayers we offer to you The Word, who alone can make us whole. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

STF 673

Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?

The Blessing

May God pour grace upon us and bless us;
May Christ Jesus reveal to us the truth of God's ways;
and may the Holy Spirit fill our lives with passion and love.
May we go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

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Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

