

Prisoners Week 2019

Out of sight-out of mind

Readings:

Matt 25 vs 31-40

Psalm 139

Colossians 4 vs10-18

Matt 25 is one of the “Kingdom attributes” passages of the New Testament. It is a challenge that God’s Kingdom has different values and requires a new set of principles. Caring for the least, the lost and the last doesn’t figure in the politics of the bully, the boaster and the belligerent. Jesus calls us to take sides and be clear whom we will serve.

Psalm 139 is a favourite psalm of many, with its clear message of God’s care from conception to beyond the grave. There is a message about the personal relationship God offers and the fact that we are never far from his love. Expressed positively, this is comforting and a call to stay faithful to the One who is always faithful to us. We are never out of God’s sight or mind!

Colossians 4 vs 10-18 is very similar to the “menchie’s” which often appear on cell walls! The marking of time, and the desire to be remembered when you are out of sight remains a pre-occupation with many who are incarcerated. Here, Paul is reminding his readers of the group with him, prisoners for their faith, and requiring prayers and support, even as they support him.

Time with the children.

Play Kim’s Game: (collect up to 20 random objects on a tray, cover with a cloth. Reveal for 3 minutes, then re-cover and ask how many the children remember. The number of objects can be varied according to age group).

Talk about how hard it is to remember when you can’t see the objects. Sometimes when people go away that can be hard too. (*This discussion requires a degree of sensitivity to any recent losses which might have been experienced.*)

Use the Colossians passage to talk about Paul in prison and missing people. This may lead to a wider discussion about remembrance, especially with the closeness of Remembrance Day.

Use Psalm 139 to talk about how God is always there, loving and caring for us, no matter what physical separation there is.

If the church is wifi friendly, an older group might well respond to a “live” chat with a member who is overseas or away at University etc. This leading to a chat/discussion about remembering those who are absent, and the issues families face with prison time.

Sermon ideas:

Psalm 139 was once described to me as a charter for the paranoid! The idea of God watching us can often be expressed negatively and offer a vision of the Almighty as a sneaky headmaster, ready to catch us out. The profusion of CCTV and cyber monitoring within our society lends a degree of paranoia to many communities, and those who least like being watched, (maybe because of their activities?) are very vocal about the invasion of privacy and erosion of freedom.

Many within the criminal justice system share this viewpoint for fairly obvious reasons!

There may be scope in exploring the notion that this is NOT how God operates!

God's interest in our lives is positive- seeking the best for us and offering us a way of love which allows us to be the best we can be. God will never forget us.

The challenge of Matthew to join the "upside down Kingdom" invites us to examine our attitudes and our motivations. The work of Throughcare organisations such as Caring for Ex-offenders, <https://caringforexoffenders.org/> Junction 42 <https://www.junction42.org/> and Bethany <https://www.bethanychristiantrust.com/> among others, allows us to see something of the scope of the work with many of the most vulnerable in our society.

The Colossians passage allows us to examine how we deal with those who are most intimately concerned with those who are incarcerated-their families. Through the work of Families Outside, <https://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/> there is excellent material to help congregations examine how we respond to the needs of partners and children of offenders who often end up feeling they are doing a sentence too.

Prayers:

Call to Worship:

Leader: We are here not because we have found God but because God has called us here.

People: God calls us to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, and to be his co-workers in serving the whole human family.

Leader: This call of God is also a promise:

People: God has promised forgiveness of sins, fullness of grace, courage to seek justice and peace and eternal life with God.

All: Blessing and honour and glory and power be to God, who will never forget us! Amen.

Scripture sentences: Isaiah 49 vs 13-16a
Hebrews 6v 10

Prayer of Adoration, confession and supplication

God of steadfast love, you have shaped the world in wonder and mystery. We marvel at the complexity and detail of life itself. We are awestruck by the vastness of the scale of the universe and the wonder of life in the gaze of a microscope.

Despite the mind-boggling beauty and infinite care of creation of which you have made us part, you are no absent watchmaker or dispassionate scientist.

God of tenderness, we thank you that you care for each of us individually and intimately. We thank you that you know us through and through-and yet you love us!

Despite our failures and fickleness...

Despite our haphazard responses and our lack of attention

Despite our sullenness and self-centredness....

You love us.

So much you came among us, showed us a new way, died for us and offered us your forgiveness.

In the quietness of this space. We offer you our lives, messed up and messy as they are.....

God of life, we place ourselves before you as children, made new and eager to learn more of your marvellous works and wonderful ways.

Breathe into us the refreshment of your Word, as once again we recall our sacred story.

Make us open and pliable, that we might creatively meet the future.

Tickle our being, that we might be totally present in the moment.

Keep our hearts pounding and our veins surging with the blood of new life.

Make us ever aware that we are children of your love, and you will never forget us.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

God of compassion, we thank you that in Jesus you came to share our life. Like a shepherd searching for a lost lamb, you look for us when we wander. When you find us, you throw a party in our honour.

Fill us now with your Spirit, that we might be channels of your tender care for those who are broken hearted or wandering.

We pray for those who feel out of sight, and out of mind.

The lonely, in the midst of our communities.....

Those for whom family has broken down....

 The ones who feel isolated by bereavement or mental health issues....

 The ones who find it hard to open up for fear of judgement.....

God of the lost and lonely, speak peace and healing we pray.

We remember those who seek to go unnoticed, and forgotten.

 Those who carry heavy burdens of guilt for the past.

 Those who know their activities cause pain and distress to others....

 Those who feel insignificant and useless....

God of the lost and lonely, speak peace and healing we pray.

We remember those who are in prison.

 In the words of the Prisoners Week Prayer we ask:

 Lord, you offer freedom to all people.

 We pray for those who are held in prison.

 Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist.

 Support with your love: prisoners, their families and friends,
 prison staff, chaplains and all who care.

 Heal those who have been wounded by the activities of others,
 especially the victims of crime.

 Help us to forgive one another, to act justly, to love mercy,
 and walk humbly together with Christ

in his strength and in his Spirit,
now and every day. Amen.

In quietness, we bring those who are on our hearts, and ask your blessing.....

We remember those who would lead our society, our nation, our world.

We pray for an openness to Kingdom values-where the vulnerable are remembered and cared for....

We pray for a commitment to justice and peace and a turning away from hostility and violence...

We pray for the establishment of your Kingdom, joining in the words you taught us saying:
Our Father....

Prayer of dedication:

Creator of all life, you have given our world bountiful blessings. We thank you that we can share in this goodness. We bring to you portions of what we have been given: our time, the fruits of our labours, our commitment. We dedicate these to you now and commit to loving and serving your Kingdom.

Praise God from whom all blessing flow! Amen.

Benediction

God sends us into the world, to accept the cost and to discover the joy of discipleship.

Go-carrying the peace of Christ, the love of God and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, knowing God is with you, now and always. Amen

Hymns: (All CH4)

195 Here to the house of God we come

198 Let us build a house

484 Great God your love has called us here.

510 Jesus calls us here to meet him

96 You are before me God

97 O God, you search and know me

193 God is love, his the care

393 We turn to God

271 Loving God you see us here

718 We cannot measure how you heal

721 We lay our broken world

710 I have a dream