

Sunday Worship for Matlock Methodist/ URC on 10th January 2021

Rev. Robert Foster
“New Beginnings”

Introduction to the theme

The theme of today’s service is “**New Beginnings**”. In exploring this theme, we will think about Jesus changing the world and about the potential that we have for new beginnings and change through faith in him. Today’s Bible passages are Mark 1:4-11 and Acts 19:1-7.

Gathering prayer

Whenever we worship –
online, in church, or elsewhere –
we are part of the Body of Christ,
part of the community of faith.
Through faith in Christ
and the work of the Holy Spirit
we find newness of life
and we may be prompted to
embrace new beginnings and change.

As we worship together,
may we open our hearts
to the love of God the Father,
to the work of the Holy Spirit
and to the fresh perspectives, new
beginnings,
growth and change that our faith may bring.
Amen.

Hymn: STF 8 – “God with us”

Prayers

Lord Jesus, when you came into the world, things changed. When we came into a relationship with you, things changed. Life became filled with a new sense of purpose and peace. But, Lord, sometimes we let you down by doing wrong things or failing to do right things. We are sorry, Lord.

Loving Lord, help us not only to say sorry, but also to look to change for the better; give us compassion in the use of your world’s resources, wisdom in our stewardship of your gifts and reverence for all that you have made. Help us to turn things around and turn to you. Help us to learn from the past and, drawing on your strength and peace, to work together for a better future.
Amen.

Adapted from <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2021/111-january-february-2021-b/baptism-of-the-lord/prayers>

Bible Reading 1: Mark 1:4-11

Reflection 1 – “A new beginning for Jesus”

I was never much good at New Testament Greek when I was training for ministry, but I do remember the Greek for the very beginning of Mark’s gospel, which translates as ‘The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’ (v. 1). Shortly after that introduction, in the reading that we have just heard, Mark set the scene for transformation by telling the story of John the Baptist, who fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy and made the preparations for the promised saviour. These were impressive preparations in themselves, not only because John was *preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*, but also because the *whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him*. Even John’s clothes may well have reminded them of the clothes worn by Elijah and other prophets and John’s simple food, clothing and lifestyle may have been seen as a signal that change was due.

John’s ministry reached its climax with the announcement that *‘After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.’* The whole passage centres on new beginnings. That first sentence of the Gospel which is pretty much the sum total of my capabilities in New Testament Greek also spells out the way in which the world was entirely

changed, now that Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, was present. The baptism of Jesus himself was also a moment of new beginning; there was nothing for Jesus to repent of, so this was a new stage in Jesus' life as he began his active ministry. The world was changed by that new beginning for Jesus and those who experienced Jesus' baptism in the Spirit would begin to discover what that meant. All of which leads us on to our next Bible reading from Acts 19.

Bible Reading 2: Acts 19:1-7

Reflection 2 – “New beginnings through the Holy Spirit”

In our first reading, we heard about John the Baptist signalling a new beginning and about the new beginning for Jesus, after his Baptism, when the Holy Spirit came upon him like a dove.

Between our readings was the whole of Jesus' ministry, his suffering, death, resurrection and ascension, followed by the coming of the holy Spirit and to formation of the early Church. In our reading from Acts, we heard about believers in Ephesus being baptised and receiving the Holy Spirit. Paul baptized the Ephesians in the name of the Lord Jesus, and this was followed immediately by evidence of their new life through gifts of the Spirit. Their baptism enabled them to relate to God and to their community in new ways.

Taking our two readings together, we have seen how Jesus' own new beginning would change the world and have seen the potential that those who believe in him have for new beginnings and change through faith in him. With all that has been happening in the world today, there is surely a great need for new beginnings and for people to repent, to come to faith in Jesus and to receive the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are not limited to speaking in tongues and prophecy, as 1 Corinthians 12 tells us that the wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues are all the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, for the common good, just as he determines. That new beginning of receiving the Holy Spirit can make a significant difference to people not only through spiritual gifts, but also through the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). As we see those gifts and fruit shaping the lives of ourselves and of the people around us, we can see for ourselves how faith in Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit have been shaping many new beginnings. May God's work among us continue to shape us and equip us to serve him well each and every day. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

As we think about particular situations and people, let us pray for: the people of America amid the recent turmoil as the inauguration of their new president draws near; countries across the world where politics, wars, natural disasters and other events are hurting people; leaders and people across the world struggling with the impact of Covid-19; children and young adults as their education is disrupted; ourselves, our families, our communities, our church fellowship. Let us thank God for the amazing ways in which people are responding to these situations and needs; may God's work and ours bring support, encouragement and fresh hope. **Amen.**

The Lord's prayer

Hymn: STF 7 – “God, who made the stars of heaven”

Closing prayer

As we go, Lord, help us to be open to your prompting as we seek to discover what you would have us be and do. Remind us again and again that you have promised to be our guide and companion on our journey. Help us to look forward with renewed commitment and bless our thinking and speaking and doing. **Amen.**