

## **Hymns suitable to the theme:**

**149** 'Let all creation dance'

**404** 'I danced in the morning'

**565** My life flows on in endless song

## **Children's talk – 'A bruised reed he will not break' (Matthew 12:20)**

**use broken pieces of garden cane to make useful things: a ruler (stick a tape measure on to it); a pen (fit a fountain pen nib in to it); a small plant support, (with label on it)**

### **Readings:**

**Exodus 15: 19-27**

**Matthew 11: 1 – 19.**

### **Two little sermons:**

#### **1. On Matthew 11:1-15**

**John the Baptist's deputation to Jesus**

#### **John's searching question (v 2-3)**

'Are you the one or should we expect someone else?' Perhaps John expressed his own impatience with these words. He wanted to see a swift overthrow of evil and wanted his own work of condemnation to be continued by the Messiah. But, Jesus had a different strategy: he would work through his disciples and his church to combat evil in every generation. Christ's immediate work was of saying rather than condemning. But, perhaps John also saw something of that long term strategy, and was saying to his own followers: 'If you have doubts about Jesus, then go and see and bear and experience. Then your doubts will disappear'. Or as the Psalmist once said: 'Taste and see that the Lord is good' (Psalm 34:8). That is often the best argument we can use to commend our Lord and faith. "Try it for your selves'.

#### **Jesus' confident answer (v 4-6)**

"The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers cured, the deaf hear the dead raised, the good news is preached'. Jesus was the only person who could ever be confident that his actions marked his words perfectly. All the rest of humanity is tainted with inconsistency and frailty. Jesus was confident that he could meet human need at its every turn. So today, Christ meets the needs of those who are blind to truth, not strong enough to remain in the correct way, tainted with sin, deaf to conscience; powerless to change themselves; or poor in spirit. We can be confident about our Lord's ability to do all that for us.

### **Jesus' admiration for John (v 7-9)**

'There is no-one greater than John'. John had deferred to Jesus when he pointed to Christ as the Lamb of God and the Messiah. Christ now acknowledges the part played by John in bringing a hard message of repentance and preparation to make people ready for the coming of the Messiah. He was not a 'Reed swayed by the wind' – i.e. not a weak or spineless vacillator (see Ephesians 4:14). Rather he was a man of conviction. Neither was he "a man dressed in fine clothes - not a courtier who flattered the rich or the powerful. Rather, he told the uncomfortable truth to everyone, which was a dangerous occupation. But he was 'A prophet, and more than a prophet'. He had both a message from God, and also the courage to deliver it. The prophet is the one with God's wisdom in his mind, God's truth on his lips and God's courage in his heart- The church is called to be a prophetic voice in the world today and that might make us unpopular at times.

### **The blind see, the deaf hear, etc.**

#### **Humour**

A patient in a psychiatric hospital was asked 'If you were involved in an accident and you lost an ear, what would happen to you?'

'I would be partly blind'

'If you lost the other ear, what would happen to you?'

'I would be totally blind.'

'How do you make that out?'

'I would have nothing to hold my bunnet up!'

## **2. On Matthew 11:16-19**

### **The parable of weddings and funerals**

**The parable of the children at play** is a rather enigmatic parable, almost like a riddle. Perhaps Jesus wanted to puzzle his hearers into thinking more deeply about its meaning. We make the following points of contact and explanation about this little parable;

**Like spectators looking on to a game, people are often uncommitted and uninvolved.**

They prefer to sit on the sidelines rather than expend energy and sweat on the field of play. Jesus called people to get off the bench, and become his active disciples. This parable picture of the spectators who complain about the games being played was an indictment against those who complained but never responded to Christ's claims.

**People are often suspicious of exceptional people:**

e.g., artists, thinkers, preachers. They feel threatened and uncomfortable by those who are 'different', They prefer uniformity. In this parable John the Baptist is referred to as the one who sang a dirge, and Christ is referred to as the one who played the flute. People complained that John was too serious, and Christ was too much in questionable company.

**People did not understand either John or Jesus,**

and so they could not properly respond to either appeal. They did not understand John's call to repentance or his call to holiness or revival. Neither did they understand Christ's joyous sense that God would accept people through faith rather than through their respectability.

**People often judge superficially and dangerously.**

They make caricatures of piety and so ridicule the people they feel threatened by. In this way they try to dismiss the call to discipleship that these people represent.' This parable shows the danger of dealing with mere outward formality in religion.

**Jesus uses this scene to show why there is a lack of response to his (and John's) preaching:**

Like the children in the parable, people like their own way, and don't like someone else calling the tune.

Like the parable story, people are inconsistent, and can't make up their minds. They are quick to follow new fashions, and fickle

Some people are afraid of past tunes, rejecting a call they feel has let them down before, or which they feel is out of date.

And others are afraid of new tunes and do not wish to change their-set ways.

The challenge of the parable is: are we turning a deaf ear to God's call?

***Dance is a parable of involvement.***

***I like the Christmas version of the Lord of the dance:***

I danced in the angels when they spread their wings,

And they lit up the sky to make everybody sing.

They flew down to tell the shepherds what to do,

A baby King, yes, yes it's true.

I danced in the shepherds as they watched their sheep,

Although they were tired they just couldn't go to sleep.

They said 'We will search for him the whole night through',

A baby King, yes, yes it's true.

***See also the Graham Kendrick's song in Mission Praise, no. 489***

O come and join the dance that all began so long ago

When Christ the Lord was born in Bethlehem

Through all the years of darkness still the dance goes on and on

O, take my hand and come and join the song

Rejoice! Rejoice! O lift your voice and sing

And open up your heart to welcome Him

Rejoice! Rejoice! And welcome now your King

For Christ the Lord was born in Bethlehem

***Paddy and the Ratcatcher* by Alexander McCall Smith**

- is a variation on the Pied Piper theme, with its warning against greed. In Hamelin, it was natural for rats, then children to follow the pied piper's tune. It was the greedy adults that would not pay the piper who had played the tune. In McCall Smith's version, it is the adults who are all taken away, and the children are then bereft of all leadership, and struggle to run the town. The situation is only resolved when the children pay the ratcatcher's bill. Again the message is to pay the piper who plays the tune. That has an immediate application in today's debt ridden and credit crunched society, but it also reminds us to follow Christ's leadership for he is our piper. We dance to his tune as we follow him, and we pay him with the homage of our lives.

