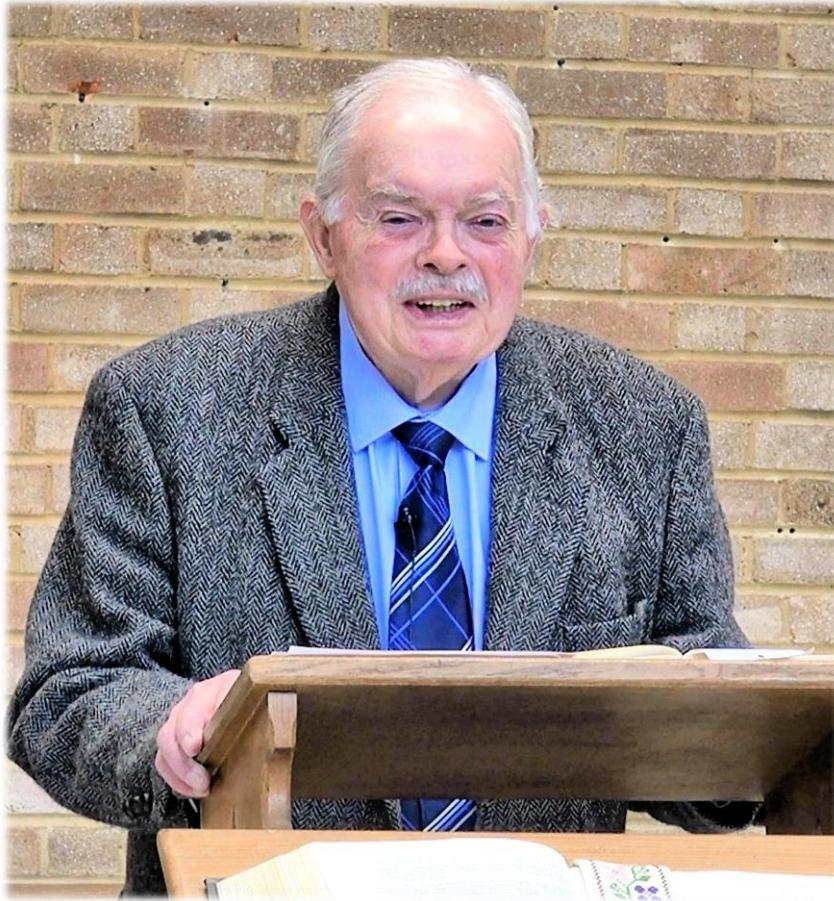


Communion Service Sunday 1st February – led by Mike Findley



With the Anglican Lectionary differing from ours this week (different Bible readings and themes), Mike had had to work without the usual books to help guide the service in line with the readings. So preparing his reflections had been a challenge, but one he'd enjoyed. And if you need an example of someone who "walks the talk" – look no further.

Our Bible readings from Micah and 1 Corinthians were aligned with each other. Mike's first theme, drawing on Micah, was humility—being humble, not seeking to be big or important, but instead choosing to walk meekly and do what God wanted, rather than trying to boost our own ego. The second from Corinthians was on how, for many people, the message we professed—Christ crucified and risen for us—seemed like foolishness, just as it had in Paul's day.

Micah had been a prophet from the southern kingdom of Judah, serving between 740 BC and 698 BC. The role of a prophet was often misunderstood, Mike thought; it was less

about predicting the distant future and more about speaking on behalf of God to challenge the leaders and the people of the time. And Micah had been troubled by how the Jewish people had strayed from their faith and practices, reminding them that God had done great things for them, yet they ignored God and went their own way. He challenged them by asking what God truly required. Was it burnt offerings and extravagant displays of devotion? No—Micah insisted that God desired people to live humbly, act justly, and love mercy.

The message was a warning: grand gestures did not impress God; what mattered was the condition of our hearts, what drove us, and the principles by which we lived. We were called to genuine humility, not a showy or artificial kind. God desired that we walked humbly every day.

Considering the vastness of the universe as we understood it, Mike wondered whether the writers of the Old and New Testaments might have spoken more about humility had they known how immense creation was and how powerful God must be. Our calling was to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. The small, quiet acts of service—being present for others, helping those in need, opening our homes—were what truly mattered. We should not seek status or importance for ourselves but simply serve and do God's work humbly.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians had told them that the message of Christ's death on the cross was considered nonsense or foolishness by many. In Paul's time, the idea that a god would allow himself to die, especially in such a shameful way, would have been unthinkable for most people. Gods were expected to be powerful and invulnerable. And Corinth, known for its toughness and moral laxity, was not a city that would have welcomed what it saw as foolishness.

Paul had said that Christianity was not reserved for the upper classes or the highly educated. It was simple and accessible to ordinary people. He told the Corinthians that few of them were wise or influential by worldly standards, but that was not required. True Christian faith meant putting your trust in God, walking humbly, and accepting the message of Christ's death and resurrection.

Many people struggled with the concept of resurrection, even within the church, yet it was central to Christianity—without it, our faith would be just another philosophy. Resurrection opened the door to new life, both in this world and beyond. The Christian message was foolishness to those who were perishing, Paul had

written. To those who were being saved, it was the power of God. The "foolishness of God" was wiser than human wisdom, and the "weakness of God" was stronger than human strength. And God had deliberately chosen what the world considered foolish or weak to shame the wise and strong.

The cross was at the centre of our beliefs and the most recognisable symbol of Christianity. Some years ago, Mike's small church in Chiswell Green had been asked to lead the ecumenical service at St. Albans Abbey on Good Friday evening. One reading from that service, "Why Do We Lift Up the Cross?" – which he read to us – remained particularly memorable for him. It encapsulated our beliefs and highlighted Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians.

There was often a mistaken belief among people on the fringes of church life that they were not good enough to become members. Yet, the point of Christianity was that we came as we were, precisely because we were not good enough. The cross bridged the gap between us and God, wiping away our failings. Unlike some other religions, in Christianity, you did not have to become good before joining; you joined and then allowed God to transform you.

Our challenge, therefore, was to walk humbly, love mercy, act justly, and let God be present in our lives, resisting the temptation to seek status or recognition for ourselves.

Why do we lift up the cross?

Surely, we could have come up with another symbol to front our faith. The stone rolled away, Christ ascending to God, that's a beautiful image. The baby in the manger, the king on the donkey.

Why the cross?

Why would we want this image always in front of us? Why do we have this image as a representation of what we believe, or what ultimately saves us?

We are Christians. Followers of the Christ who died on this cross because He loved us. Because he has something to teach the world and would not be deterred, even by death. Look at the cross and remember Him when your heart wants to betray someone you love. Look at the cross and remember Him when you are tempted to deny who you are or what you believe. Look at the cross and remember Him when you want to wash your hands of the whole awful mess you see in the world.

The cross cries out its warning against loving yourself more than others. Against fearing truth that may cost you something. Against selling what is priceless for 30 pieces of silver. Do not ever forget this symbol. Do not ever let it become just a piece of jewellery, or a work of art, or a design for a stained-glass window. It should burn your heart and mind and spirit every day.

Why do we lift this up?

Maybe because the cross has the power to change the world. We are Christians, followers of the Christ who died on this cross because He loved us. And we are Christians because we believe He has something to give the world. That he was not defeated, even by death. He calls us to resurrection. Not resuscitation of our old life, but resurrection to an entirely new way. We are called into death with Him, death to all that holds us down or keeps us apart, death to our meaningless clinging to that which will crumble and fall. We are called to new life through Jesus Christ. Who died forgiving. And lives on with the message of new life still singing in our hearts.

Lift him high.

Never put that symbol down. Let it live in you. Let it sing out its truth that even when we fail, God remains, love prevails, and we are forgiven and freed. Resurrection happens today.

There will come a time when everything around you will be gone, blown away like dust. But there will never come a time when the wind breath of God ceases to blow, when the Spirit sleeps.

Let us worship what holds everything fast.