**Timothy Richard Appeal- Education for Syrian Children**

**Order of Service and Meditation**

**prepared by the Revd Peter Thomas**

In an article entitled “Eternal Moments” written by the celebrated Welsh author Islwyn Ffowc Ellis he states that there are moments in life that cannot be measured by the ticking of a clock – they are moments of discovery and encounter, moments of acceptance and trust. Moments that can change our perspective and change our lives.

There, in that fleeting moment - in a shadowed guise

I saw my Saviour

And the delight of a Father

Spending his store of love.

(PMT)

**Prayer:**

Thank you Lord for wide open eyes to recognise you in your world and in your creation. We thank you that all our life can be a prayer when we realise that you are in all things. Open our eyes to see you, in the daily round, the common task of life, in our comings and goings, in our many actions and responsibilities; in our hopes and aspirations – in an office or in a shop, in our homes or in church – all things sacred because you are Lord of all.

“Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee, take my moments and my days let them flow is ceaseless praise. Take my voice and let me sing always, only for my King, take my lips and let them be filled with messages from thee.” Amen.

**Introduction:**

On the 17th April 2019 as part of the Centennial Commemoration of Dr Timothy Richard a memorial stone was unveiled at Ffaldybrenin the village where he was born. Its inscription bears his Chinese name Li T’i-mo-tai as well as the three words: Missionary-Pioneer-Educator.

It was also decided to mark the occasion with a joint appeal launched by the Baptist Union of Wales and BMS to provide education for Syrian children who are among refugees based in Lebanon. A gesture that Timothy Richard himself would have warmly endorsed bearing in mind his own insatiable appetite for learning and for educating others.

Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic has hindered the opportunity for many of our churches to support the appeal and hopefully this particular Sunday will rally our interest and our giving.

**Hymn:**

Thy hand, O God, has guided

Thy flock from age to age;

The wondrous tale is written,

Full clear, on every page;

Our fathers owned Thy goodness

And we their deeds record;

And both of this bear witness,

One Church, one faith, one Lord.

Thy heralds brought glad tidings

To greatest, as to least;

They bade men rise and hasten

To share the great King’s feast;

And this was all their teaching,

In every deed and word

To all alike proclaiming

One church, one faith, one Lord

Thy mercy will not fail us,

Nor leave Thy work undone;

With Thy right hand to help us

The victory shall be won;

And then, by men and angels

Thy name shall be adored,

And this shall be their anthem,

One Church, one faith, one Lord.

*E.H. Plumtre*

In 1865 few would have prophesied that this young man who came from an obscure village in north Carmarthenshire and who had entered Haverfordwest Baptist College that year would become, to quote Dr Kenneth Laturette the American historian, “the greatest missionary sent to China by any of the Missionary Societies.”

We may well ask what was it that fired his imagination and his stalwart determination to become a missionary?

He came from a relatively humble background, his early life at Ffaldybrenin according to all accounts was quite ordinary and uneventful - he was the youngest of nine children born to Timothy and Eleanor Richard, his father was a blacksmith and farmer, his mother a sweet and beguiling woman and a fine cook and she was reputed to have no equal in making the finest pancakes. His other siblings remained within the local community, married, farmed, two of his brothers David and Evan kept local hostelries. But from an early age it became evident that Timothy had an interest in books. His father’s brother Jedediah Richardhad been a bookseller and had written a number of articles and pamphlets including an article on World Religions which could well have aroused an interest in the young Timothy and although his Father would have wanted him to follow in his own footsteps and become a farmer, his pursuit of knowledge seemed to have an overriding affect upon his life.

It must also be remembered that in 1859 a religious revival was sweeping across Wales and in its wake people were coming to faith in great numbers. And in the April of that year Timothy as well as his brother Joshua were among 52 people that were baptised in the river Twrch at Dôlwen by the minister of Salem Caio – the Revd John Davies. Timothy Richard was the first to be baptised, he was 14 years old at the time and as he entered the water his minister in a prophetic statement asked the question: “What will become of this young man?” A year later after listening to a sermon at Salem, he felt called to become a missionary and this was enforced further after hearing an address by Mrs Grattan Guiness on the China Inland Mission.

It is said that the 10th chapter of St. Mathew’s gospel had a profound effect on his thinking and the principles that he adopted in practice. He believed that the way to lead people to faith was by *influence* rather than by *individual dealing,* expounding the example that Jesus set for his own disciples in sending them out. “Whatever town or village you enter seek out some worthy person…”

**Reading: St Mathew Chapter 10 verses 1-16**

**Meditation Address:**

Chapter 10 in St Mathew’s gospel begins with the statement that Jesus called twelve disciples, gave them authority “to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness, in order to send them out as his ambassadors to proclaim good news.

We are given a list of their names:  Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

They are the disciples that Jesus chose, called, appointed and sent.

He ***chose*** them: In Luke 6:13 we read that when morning came “Jesus called his disciples to him and *chose* twelve of them to be his apostles.”

In the first-century Roman world there were various religious leaders who would often have a committed group of followers. In Judaism, dedicated apprentices followed a rabbi. The norm was for someone to approach a rabbi and ask to be taught by him, but Jesus did the reverse by choosing the men that he wanted and called them to follow him.

The group He chose was a diverse bunch, they weren’t from the Jewish religious establishment, instead the twelve men that he chose came from various professions and walks of life – fishermen and tax-collectors in their midst. There were three sets of brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John, the other James and Thaddeus. Simon the zealot once belonged to a very patriotic band of Jews and would have hated Mathew being a tax collectorand yet this diverse mixture were the chosen twelve to become his “sent people”

He ***called*** them: Marc in his gospel narrative reveals the purpose of their calling: Jesus called his disciples that “they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.” But Mathew in his narrative goes further by saying that the twelve were also given authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal.

Christianity in its very essence is an act of faith, as we place our trust in a Saviour who is the Lord of life and the Light of the world, ready to follow Him, not knowing where and to venture out not knowing the out-come.

**St Paul writing to the church at Philippi says this: “My dear friends, let’s put behind us what is past, and press on to what lies ahead – grasping ever more firmly that purpose which gives expression to our actions and our thoughts - that upward call of God upon our lives.”** (Philippians 3:12-15).

That calling can be manifested in a variety of different ways - A still small voice - a tap on the shoulder - a question from a friend - a burning inner voice. Some people experience the call of God through a growing conviction - for others it will be flashing lights and high drama. Sometimes it can be in response to a challenging sermon, at other times the quiet influence of a teacher or minister. All these can be expressions of God’s calling. And the way that we discern that calling and respond to it will often determine the depth of our commitment and the measure of our faith.

When we think of all the calls recorded in the Bible we realise that whereas many of them were sudden and dramatic - others were expressed over a much longer period and sometimes we need to be patient.

But the underlying truth in all those experiences is that *God’s call is always personal* - one size doesn’t fit all, there is no “off the peg” vocation, it’s bespoke, a made to measure experience.

*God’s call is specific* and will often determine a course of action and a place of service.

*God’s call is also – intentional* - it is to fulfil a purpose - you and I become part of his story, of his incredible plan. Romans 8:28 reminds us that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Notice that when Jesus calls his disciples he doesn’t coerce or force his intention – he simply invites; “come and follow me.”

He ***appointed*** them: Jesus takes time to prepare his disciples for the task ahead aware that the journey will not be easy and the experiences will often be wrought with difficulties and yet he offers the assurance of his abiding presence. “surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Mathew 28:20.)

When Jesus interceded in prayer on behalf of his disciples in the upper room he used the word “sanctify” (John 17 verse 17) – “consecrate” is the word that appears in the New English Bible*: “Sanctify them in the truth... for thy sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated.”*

The Greek word *“Hagios”* that appears in the original version paints more than one picture -–its speaks of setting apart. When Jesus calls us to be his disciples, his followers in the world – we become his *set apart people – his church*. The word *ecclesia* means: to be called out, to be appointed.

He ***sent*** them: This the first and only time in Mathew’s gospel that the twelve are called *apostles*. The word only appears four times in all the gospel narratives. The word *apostle* literally means: “one who is sent out” it is the word for an envoy or an ambassador. Verse 7 in this chapter reads: “*as you go*, preach this message – the kingdom of heaven is near.” This is the good news – this is the message which we are given to share.

Chapter 10 is a transition in Jesus' training of the twelve. Until this time they had been observers with little involvement in the miracles or teaching. Now they are commissioned and sent out with authority to do what they had seen their Master do and to proclaim what they had heard Him proclaim.

Jesus instructs, prepares, empowers and encourages His disciples for both immediate and future ministry. Jesus had personally demonstrated His authority previously, He now delegates that same authority to His disciples so that they may carry out His ministry in the world.

That remains the call of Christ upon our lives as well – we are called to be his ambassadors of truth - we are called to make a difference - we are called to change the world.

What an awesome task but, what a glorious challenge. The seeds that Timothy Richard had sown in China a century and half ago are still bearing fruit. If we were to evaluate his contribution in terms of what is happening in China today we can humbly make this observation. Last Sunday, there were more Christians worshiping God in China than in all the countries of Europe put together. The call of Christ upon his life succeeded in rushing on the purposes of God and to expand the boundaries of Christ’s kingdom here on earth.

***The Timothy Richard Appeal for the education of Syrian Children in Lebanon presents us with an opportunity in the name of Jesus to make a difference, our contribution can change the world.***

Please send your gifts to the Baptist Union of Wales (Timothy Richard Appeal),

Y Llwyfan, College Road, Carmarthen. SA31 3EQ.

**Closing Prayer:** Open our eyes Lord, we want to see Jesus. To reach out and touch him and say that we love him. Open our minds to sense his presence with us and his guidance in our lives. Heavenly Father we come before your throne of grace in the name and in the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray your blessing upon us, renew our faith so that we may be more effective witnesses to you in the world. We thank you for your Word, its significance and importance in our lives. Give us the ability to discern your purpose and to realise your promises in our daily lives. We acknowledge with thanksgiving those, who in every generation, have served you faithfully, who through their teaching and guidance have influenced our lives and led us into a living relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father -we give you thanks for your abiding love – a love that was manifested in the sending of your only begotten Son into the world to show us the way, the truth and the life. Above all we thank you for his death upon the cross of Calvary and for his mighty resurrection on the third day, and that by believing in him we are assured of everlasting life.

“Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with Thee – morning by morning new mercies I see, All I have needed thy hand has provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.”

We thank you O Lord for all the blessings we receive from your hand. Thank you for those we love, our family and friends, we ask that you bless them and keep them safe. We thank you for our work and for the colleagues whom we share time with, and we thank you for leisure time.

May we use the time and the gifts you have given us to bring you honour and glory.

In our prayers of intercession, remember those whose lives are blighted by hunger, disease and sickness, in particular we ask you to be near to those who are homeless or displaced from their countries because of war and conflict. Help us to remember our responsibility towards them and to respond to their plight.

Comfort and console those who are bereaved and bereft, let them know your peace and consolation.

In your mercy forgive us our sins and shortcomings; renew and strengthen our faith so that we may draw nearer to you and feel your closeness.

Help us to dedicate our lives to your service, so that all honour, power and glory will be directed to you. We ask these things in the precious name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Hymn:**

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin,
My hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,

I have born my peoples pain.
I have wept for love of them,

They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them,

Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them,
My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide,
Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them,
Whom shall I send?

Dan Schutte

 **The grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Chrit, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, ever more, Amen.**