

Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people.

Arouse. Excite. Provoke. Stimulate. Urge.

These are some of the words that I am told mean the same as stir up.

Beg. Crave. Plead.

Those are words that mean beseech.

On this last Sunday before Advent, that is what we are asking God. We are asking him, from the bottom of our hearts, pleading with all our might, for him to fire into action our wills, our desires, so that as we bring forth the fruit of good works richly, that we may be rewarded richly. Let me take a step back in time.

Because of the first words of the Collect for the Day, this Sunday has for a long time been called Stir-Up Sunday. Why is it so named? Is it a day when the preacher is called upon to ask God to stir up his people, or is it just a quaint tradition where people take the first words, forget the message but remember to stir the mixture for their Christmas puddings, their Christmas cakes, their mince pies or whatever their tradition leads them to do?

Why are we here? Is it to give glory to God, the maker of all things or is it because it is the right thing to be seen at church? I put two things to you here and now: if you are simply at church because it is seen as the right thing to do, you must consider very carefully whether you would be better off at home mowing the lawn, watching the television, reading the newspaper, painting the shed, sewing a quilt or whatever it is that you want to do, because I really don't think that being at church is any more the thing to do. Traditionally, the church was the focus of the respectable society, but that isn't the case any more. To be honest, I'm not sure that our society does have such a focus any more. Perhaps that is part of the

problem.

The other thing I put to you is the question of why are you here if your motivation is not to worship the God I have just described, and who completely overcame Saint John as he wrote

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins - to him be glory and power for ever and ever.

That's why we come here: to worship God, to learn more about Him and to share in prayer, in fellowship and in friendship with God's people here.

It's hard to be stirred up. If I may, for a moment, take the picture of a baking mixture, whatever it is, I know that it is hard to stir it up. You have to mix together the flour and the water and the sugar and the yeast and the salt and the butter and it's not easy. Stirring up the single ingredients to make a useful whole is not an easy task, and I guess that's why we need to pray for God to stir each one of us up so that as a church we can make a useful whole.

These things take time. We look back from near the end of two thousand years to a church which has struggled against many things in many different ages. We look back to the Romans at the time of our Lord Jesus himself and just after, those who would execute people simply for being followers of The Way. We look at the dark ages when the light of the Gospel burned exceedingly dim, when so much of God and of secular knowledge was lost or forgotten, to the times when Islam has been on the march and to our present age when the world is teaching principles so totally opposed to the clear Christian messages that so many people are turning away from the church.

People are turning away from the church not because of what the church preaches, but because of what the church

is supposed by those outside to be preaching.

Have you ever passed one of Jehovah's Witnesses' buildings or one of the Mormon buildings? You can find both of them here in Hastings if you must. Do you ever wonder what goes on inside those places? Maybe you do. In the same way, most of the people outside of our congregations have no idea what happens inside our churches. Sure, they've heard rumours, but those rumours probably tell them that there is nothing of relevance in the church and nobody there except a couple of old ladies wearing funny hats. Does that describe our church? Does it actually describe any church you have visited?

Yet that is the image that our church is given by the media of this country and by the rumours that circulate. The rumours are not deliberately malicious. People vaguely remember a church service they attended in their youth.

I remember a preacher many years ago asking why people don't attend church.

It's boring.

When did you last go to church?

When I was twelve.

And did you think girls were boring when you were twelve?

Yes.

And have you changed your mind since?

Yes, we do indeed need to be stirred up to bear the fruit of good works, each one of us, so that we will become a part of God's work here and elsewhere. God, the beginning and the end, the A and the Z of our whole existence, the creator and finisher of all things.

I remember a friend of mine who was very much alive to

God and all that God wanted being very excited by the day being Stir-Up Sunday. On several occasions I remember him excitedly saying "It's Stir-Up Sunday" and he was not excited by the prospect of cooking (though he liked that too) but by the opportunities given for people to be inspired to do more for God.

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He was certainly stirred up by those thoughts and went on to do so many different things for so many people, troubled in many ways. And he continued to work alongside the disadvantaged until his untimely death.

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Our Gospel reading shows Christ stirring up people too.

My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the [Jews](#). But now my kingdom is from another place.

And Pilate responds...You are a king then!

As time goes on, more and more people are stirred up and recognise who Christ is. Even at the crucifixion, one of the soldiers recognises him and cries out "truly he was the son of God".

Of course he's a King. King of Kings. Lord of Lords. And we had better remember that, not just each Sunday as we come to worship God at our church. Not just when we are cooking or eating. Not just when we are doing good deeds or when we are praying.

We must be stirred up, aroused, excited, stimulated by our great God not just on the last Sunday of the church's year, but at all times, wherever we are.

As Saint John wrote,
To Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Readings for Stir-up Sunday are:

- Revelation 1:4b-8
John begins his letters to the churches by showing that he is completely overcome by our God, who is the beginning and the end of all things.
- John 18:33-37
Jesus debates with Pilate about whether or not He is King, and what it means if He is.