

## Comfortable Words

**D**o you remember the *Prayer Book Communion Service*, published in 1662, but still in use (often at 8am on Sundays) in some of our parishes? After the confession and absolution, the priest says these wonderful words:

*Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn to him.*

This is followed by four Bible verses, reinforcing the fact that we are forgiven people:

- *Come unto me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.*
- *So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*
- *Hear also what Saint Paul saith. This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*
- *Hear also what Saint John saith. If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins.*

Sadly, we have lost this from some modern services, apart from *God so loved the world*, which is there as an option. The *Prayer Book* offers a deeper confession (not to everyone's taste these days), and in these verses a deeper assurance of forgiveness (albeit uncomfortable to some,

especially in the verse from St John). The newer services bring in some good emphases, such as the way we feed on Christ together, not in isolation from each other, having shared peace with one another. However, in our world today we could do with a return to a more thoroughgoing understanding of our sin, and then the fullness of our redemption by Christ. That is where true peace and joy are to be found.

Let's go back to that deeper prayer of confession (very precious to me as it formed a huge part of my coming to faith). Be prepared to be hit hard as you pray this prayer:

*Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all men: we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thy divine majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; for thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past; and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life, to the honour and glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Now go back to the Comfortable Words, and let them reassure you of full forgiveness.



Bishop of Peterborough