

31/1/21

Worship Service

Dear friends, a warm welcome to our service this morning. As we come together to read, pray and worship today. Let us know that our Lord Jesus is with us close by our side. If we are feeling fed up and lonely and wondering when our lives will ever get back to normal, hang on to the promise of Jesus Christ the Son of God who said, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20) We are not alone.

Call to worship: Psalm 27:1

The Lord is my light and my salvation whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life of whom shall I be afraid?

Prayers and Lord's Prayer

This day, as are all days, loving God, the day to worship you. This time, as are all times, loving God, the time to give you praise. This moment, as are all moments, loving God, the moment to turn to you in faith.

And so this day, at this time, from this moment onwards, we worship you, we praise you, we turn again in faith. Fill our hearts with joy and gladness we pray, and take away the stress, that we may feel free to worship you with our whole beings.

Gracious God, give us ears to hear your voice, the eyes to see your glory, the hearts to know your love, and then the will to worship – for you are God and we are your people and it is right that we offer you our praise.

Lord please bless our time together, and bless us here in our homes that we may know your ceaseless presence in the power of your Spirit.

In the name of our living Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

O/T Reading: Psalm 19

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring for ever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

N/T Reading: Mark 8: 22- 38

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spat on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?' He looked up and said, 'I see people; they look like trees walking around.' Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, 'Do not go into the village.'

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, 'Who do people say I am?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.'

'But what about you?' he asked, 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ.' Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You

do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whosoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.’

Sermon: ‘Who do you say I am?’

This morning, our scripture reading from Mark’s gospel is divided into three parts. The first part is set in Bethsaida, a village close to Capernaum, just west of where the river Jordan enters the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus and his disciples having arrived in the village were met by some people who brought a blind man to Jesus for him to touch and heal. Not only did they bring him, they begged Jesus to touch him. What faith they must have had in Jesus’ power to heal this man. But Jesus didn’t perform the miracle there in front of them, he wanted to go somewhere private.

Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. This links in with other times in Mark’s gospel where Jesus doesn’t want his true identity known before the right time and this has become known as the messianic secret. The writer of Mark’s gospel makes it clear that if the true identity of Jesus had become common knowledge too early in his ministry, the people would have wanted him as their king and worshipped him as their long awaited Messiah. But it was vital to the mission of Jesus that he trod the path of suffering all the way to the cross. Only after his resurrection could people be told that he was truly the Son of God.

Jesus then does something remarkable. He spits on the man’s eyes and then places his hands on him and asks the man if he can see anything and the man replies that he can see people but they look like trees. Could it be that Jesus hadn’t got it completely right first time? Or is it more likely that this is a symbolic gesture. Perhaps, Jesus is signifying that what has gone before in his ministry is only partial and the second phase is about to begin.

A few weeks after I was ordained in 1999, I had to go and have my eyes tested. I was forced into it because I finally realised that in poor light I just could not see small print and my wife and daughter made me face the inevitable and arranged the appointment for me. The optometrist tested my eyes and then put a large pair of glasses on me and began to try different lenses in them until he found the ones that enabled me to read tiny print which I had to admit I hadn't been able to read for a long time. It took a while, but when he found the perfect lenses the difference for me was incredible, I could read everything!

The second time that Jesus touched the man's eyes he could see clearly, perhaps for the first time in his life. I'm sure the man would have been bursting with the news of his restored sight, but Jesus tells him not to go back to the village but to go home. Good news is something we usually want to tell anyone who will listen and yet the one piece of good news that most of us find difficult to tell others about is our faith in Jesus, the promised Messiah, who loved people so much that he was prepared to give his life for them.

In the second section of this passage in Mark, the scene changes. Jesus and his disciples have travelled about 25 miles further to the north east and arrived at the villages around Caesarea Philippi. As they were travelling they had been talking together and you can imagine the scene as they walked and talked together on what was a long journey on foot. Jesus dropped a question into the conversation which must have made all their ears prick up. 'Who do people say that I am?' he asked them. They replied that some people thought that he was John the Baptist who had come back to life, others thought he was Elijah the great prophet, and yet others thought one of the other prophets!

'But what about you,' Jesus asked, 'who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ.' As if out of the blue, Peter suddenly knew who Jesus really was. They had followed this man, they had left their families, their professions they had given up everything for him, but then suddenly as if as a gift from God, which of course it was Peter says 'You are the Christ.'

The Christ in Greek and the Messiah in Hebrew and Aramaic mean the anointed one. It carries the sense of consecration by God for a particular task. Not only is there divine choice; there is also divine empowering for the task. To call Jesus Messiah was a momentous step for Peter to take and probably took his breath away, not to mention the rest of the disciples.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus encourages Peter by telling him that this information had been given to him by his Father in heaven. (Matthew 16:15-19).

Then Jesus, just like before with the blind man, told them not to tell anyone!

This was a major turning point in Jesus' ministry and in the disciple's faith.

In 1964, I had the light switched on in my spiritual life when I was sitting in a service part way through a Christian youth holiday in Eastbourne. I had heard about this Jesus almost from birth and had gone to Sunday school all through my childhood. But suddenly as I heard the words of John's gospel chapter 3 and verse 16 being preached on this night surrounded by lots of my friends, I just knew that Jesus was the Son of God and he had died for me. The passage says, 'For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son that whosoever believes on him shall not die but have eternal life.'

From that moment I knew what Peter was talking about when he said, 'You are the Christ.'

After this declaration from Peter, Jesus began to teach them.

In Life, we often have to reach a certain level of knowledge before we can move on and this seemed to be the moment for the disciples and Jesus began to tell them of his suffering that was to come. That he was to be rejected and killed and after three days, rise again.

This is just too much for Peter who seems to be unable to keep quiet at crucial moments. For him, to have found the long awaited Messiah but then to be told that Jesus must face death and rejection was more than he could cope with. But Jesus tells him off in front of the rest of his followers. It was vitally important that they understood the reason why Jesus must go to the cross and be resurrected again.

We grow in our knowledge of Jesus throughout our lives. For some, like me that knowledge begins as a child. For others it is later in life. But all of us who are prepared to follow in faith must eventually reach that earth shattering conclusion that Peter did that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

May we have the faith of those who brought the blind man to Jesus and may we feel the healing touch of Jesus as he makes us whole again. Then may we as Christian people seek to serve the Christ and go out into the world to proclaim his salvation Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Eternal God, Father and Lord, we are here not alone of our own deciding; we have heard your compelling voice in so many ways and have come to you through the witness of so many people: parents have spoken to their children and have lived out lives of truth; friends have shared the good news with friends and have lived the news in love and care; the church has preached its sermons, told its story and has turned sermons into a community of living faith.

We ask, Lord God, that as we have heard, so may we speak, as we have shared, so may we live, as we have preached, so may we give so that we may be Christ for others day by day. May our worship on this day so prepare us.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Eternal God, you are a God of good news, always seeking to address your world; speak to our hearts this day so that we can share in your communicating. Open our ears to hear what you have to share through Scripture and saint. Open our hearts to receive your call through the cries of the world's wounded. Open our arms to embrace our neighbours in compassion and care. Open our mouths to pass on words and thoughts which glorify you. Open our minds to sift and weigh what we experience and feel. When the storm is past and we are able, may we open our churches as communities where words of hope and love are made flesh. Open doors of opportunity so that your voice can be heard through our sharing and caring; to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord Amen.

Blessing

God our shelter in the storm, protect us! God our Rock, be our strength! God our Father, nurture us! God our life-breath, inspire us! God our beginning and our end, hold us for ever in your love!

May the blessing of God Almighty, Father Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us now and always, Amen.