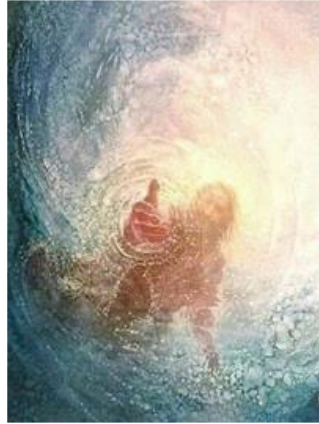


Worshipping Together : Apart
Sunday 12th September 2021 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson



A Call to Worship God

Here and now, I worship God.

The one who calls me to meet with him, calls me to learn about him
and calls me into prayer – into a conversation.

Lord, make me alert for your Word –
read, prayed or sung Amen

Hymn – MP 673: Melody Green © 1982 Ears to Hear Music / EMI Christian Music Publishing

There is a Redeemer, Jesus, God's own Son,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, Holy One

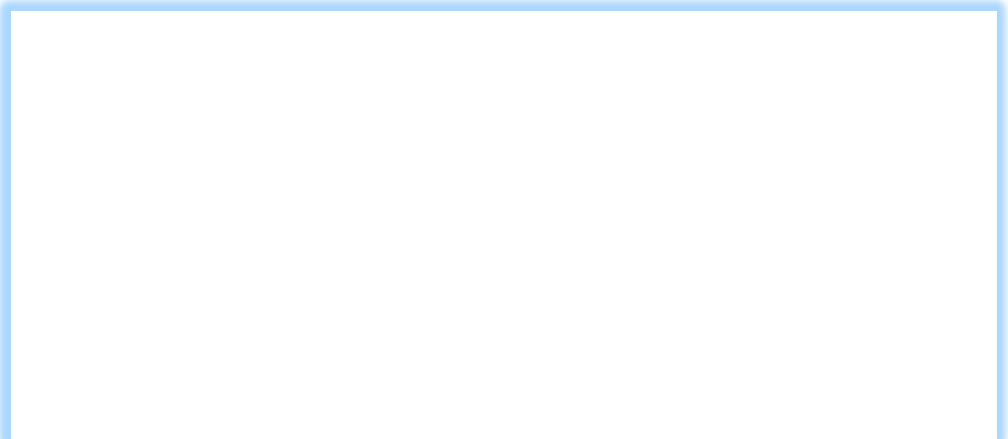
*Thank You, O my Father, for giving us Your Son
and leaving Your Spirit 'till the work on earth is done.*

Jesus, my Redeemer, Name above all names,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, O for sinners slain.

When I stand in glory, I will see His face,
and there I'll serve my King for ever, in that holy place.

Setting the Scene

Who is Jesus? What words or phrases come to mind?
Write them here if you like.....



Did you think of those because you looked at the pictures on the front cover? Or because you thought about what you know from the Bible? Or from your own personal experience?

There are lots of ways that we can describe Jesus and lots of words and phrases that we use. Some of them are easy to understand and think of and others, of course, are more difficult. Some might seem more relevant at times than others as our life changes and our experiences affect what Jesus means to us.

Unfortunately, whatever words and pictures we use, we can never completely capture the nature of Jesus; God incarnate; God in flesh and blood and bone; God with us. But that's the nature of God - impossible to describe because our words that aren't really up to the job

It takes time to get to know someone well enough to describe them properly. I wonder, how did you get to know what your best friend is like? Through conversation, listening and talking, spending time together, doing things together no doubt.

We can all get to know Jesus better as we keep Jesus close in our minds and hearts as our constant companion.

And then maybe, just maybe others might start to understand better what Jesus is like as we get better at describing him and become more like him as his company and character rub off on us.

I wonder if any of you 'tweet'? (I'm not suggesting you make bird noises by the way!) A 'tweet' is a message of 140 characters (letters and spaces) put 'out there' on the social media platform 'twitter'.

Now, even if you don't 'tweet', why not have a go at writing 140 characters, or less that you might use to describe Jesus to someone who knew nothing about him.

Have a go here....

Hymn - R&S 277: MP 251:

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear:
it soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, and drives away our fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole, and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul, and to the weary, rest.

Dear Name! the rock on which I build, my shield and hiding place,
my never-failing treasury, filled with boundless stores of grace:

Jesus! my Shepherd, and my Friend, my Prophet, Priest and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End, accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart, and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art, I'll praise thee as I ought.

Till then I would thy love proclaim with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy Name refresh my soul in death.

John Newton. (1725-1807)

Now 'listen' for God's word as you read from Mark's Gospel.

Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, 'Who do people say I am?'

²⁸ They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.'

²⁹ 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah.'

³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus predicts his death

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ 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 concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'

The way of the cross

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If

anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'

Approaching God in Prayer and Saying Sorry

Lord of time and space and realms beyond my imagining,
I praise and adore you for your holiness in each and every dimension.
I remember you as the baby born as one of us,
and also the one who walked among us in all our suffering,
and who is with us still;
the hope of the world, beyond our wildest dreams.

So, who are you Lord Jesus?

The baby; the shepherd; the servant; the king; the man; the Messiah;
Son of God; Son of Man; the Christ.

Sometimes we see you teaching on a hillside,
or enjoying company at the table with friends,
and sometimes eating with the 'wrong' sorts of people!
Sometimes on the cross, suffering and dying.

And who are we, Lord Jesus?

Sheep who follow; disciples who argue and criticise.
Sometimes we are listeners;
hungry for crumbs of understanding and faith;
Sometimes we are sinners who know what we are,
what we lack and what we long for.

We are all of these things.

And you, Lord Jesus are the Messiah, and we come near to hear your words and to follow in your way.

But even as we follow we know that sometimes we lag behind,
dragging our feet, hanging back,
hoping people won't notice that it's you we're following,
because sometimes we are ashamed to own and confess our faith.
We clutch it to ourselves as a guilty secret.
If we speak of it, we make apology.
We wonder - what will people think of us? Will we be ridiculed?
So, we prefer to keep silent - even in this *free* country.

Yet across the world, people suffer for their faith:
they profess, confess and bear the consequences,
carrying their cross as they follow you.

So I confess my cowardice...
I am ashamed and ask for your forgiveness.

I also ask you to strengthen me and make me more bold
so that I will gladly be seen to walk with you,
and so that I might be equipped to take my part in your counter cultural,
kingdom building ways.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Messiah who seeks us, saves us, and
renews us.

In a moment of quiet, I ask you Lord to renew and refresh me as I come
to you, faults and all with the confessions of my heart.....

Lord God, renew my way so that I may copy your pattern for life as I
follow the path you tread with me. Amen

And I pray in the words that bind me to Christians worldwide as I say
Our Father, who art in heaven...

I'm not ashamed to own my Lord, or to defend his cause;
maintain the honour of his word, the glory of his cross.

Jesus, my Lord — I know his name, his name is all I trust;
nor will he put my soul to shame, nor let my hope be lost.

Firm as his throne his promise stands, and he can well secure
what I've committed to his hands, till the decisive hour.

Then will he own my worthless name before his Father's face;
and in the new Jerusalem appoint my soul a place.

Reflections 1 - Identity crisis

That snippet from Mark's Gospel is almost exactly half way through Mark's account of Jesus' life.

Up to this point the story has been one of light and life and mission. Now there's a sharp bend in the course of the story from now on the story of Jesus is shrouded in darkness and threat.

The conversation we've 'overheard' takes place during a journey, as Jesus makes his way from Caesarea Philippi in the far north of the country, to Jerusalem in the south.

Along the way, lots of things happen 'along the way' in Mark's Gospel Jesus encourages the disciples to think about his identity.

The disciples tell Jesus what they have heard people say and have to be encouraged further and directly before they give their own view. I wonder if there was an awkward silence before Peter was able to answer 'You are the Messiah'.

Peter, having spent a long time on the road listening to and watching Jesus, and perhaps speaking on behalf of all the disciples, thinks he's

sussed out who Jesus really is - the long awaited and anticipated Messiah - at last!

And Peter is right - well sort of right anyway, because although Peter has put two and two together and come up with the right answer 'The Messiah' – it seems he's missed the real point.

Realising this, Jesus explains to them what it will mean and require to be the Messiah and, importantly, what this will mean for anyone who decides to follow Jesus' way as a disciple.

Jesus talks to them about being rejected by the law-makers of the day and of dying - and rising again.

This must have sounded shocking and disturbing to the Disciples, who'd given up everything to follow Jesus, because something about him was irresistible.

They'd thought, I expect, they were following someone with a degree of celebrity status, a miraculous healer, a great teacher, and a creative storyteller, one who wasn't afraid to challenge the authorities - he was looking for all the world like the expected Messiah, the victorious king, the one who would vanquish all the Jews enemies. Yet (puzzlingly for some of the disciples) Jesus was making an enemy of the Jewish authorities.

And now, here's the Messiah, a monarch, the anointed one, discussing the issue of sacrifice and suffering with his 'subjects', namely the disciples. That really didn't sound like the behaviour of a king in those days, one who was a mighty and powerful ruler to be obeyed and served, not one to serve others.

Instead, Jesus talks about a way forward of humble service, and self-sacrificial love. Here Jesus seems to be suggesting that his identity is more like the character described by Isaiah as 'The Servant', whose

existence is characterised by suffering, which will ultimately lead to freedom for others.

Although it's still not really clear quite who Isaiah was talking about, particularly not to the disciples, this later became a central way of understanding Jesus' life, death and resurrection. He is the servant of God, whose suffering will redeem (be traded in for) the life of others.

Meanwhile the disciples are getting the message about Jesus' suffering and, voiced by Peter's 'word on the side' we understand that the disciples don't like the sound of it one little bit!

More of that in a little while.

Hymn - R&S 522: MP 162:

Graham Kendrick (1950 -)

From heaven you came, helpless babe,
entered our world, your glory veiled
not to be served but to serve and give your life that we might live

*This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow Him
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to The Servant King*

There in the garden of tears, my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn, 'Yet not my will but yours, ' he said

This is our God, The Servant King.....

Come see his hands and his feet, the scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered.

This is our God, The Servant King.....

So let us learn how to serve, and in our lives enthrone him;
Each other's need to prefer, for it is Christ we're serving.

This is our God, The Servant King.....

Reflections 2 - The twist in the tale

So, the disciples begin to realise that their thinking is a little 'off beam' and their 'worldly' concerns are not the concerns of God in this instance.

Well, it's all fun and games 'til someone loses an eye, as they say! You see, if Jesus is to be understood correctly, following him is going to be a bumpy ride, a risky and dangerous adventure that demands sacrifice.

Jesus characterizes himself as the suffering servant, the one who carries a cross before wearing a crown.

Jesus is applying the pathway of suffering, self-sacrifice, being at odds with the chief priests and teachers of the law and losing his life, not just to himself, but also to the lifestyle that true followers of Jesus must adopt - losing their own life in order to save it for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel. They we are also to be suffering servants if they are to take discipleship seriously.

Imagine the penny dropping as the disciples and the gathered crowd gradually grasped and began coming to terms with the idea that following Jesus would be this tough!

When Jesus says 'whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow me', he's **not** talking about involuntary burdens, such as illness or infirmity - these are part of the human condition - he's talking about the voluntary acceptance of the persecution that following him and his topsy turvy, counter cultural, kingdom ways will bring.

It's easy to imagine that sacrifice and losing one's life for the sake of the Gospel is ancient history, an admirable ancient era of sacrificial Christian discipleship, but hardly relevant today. But, for some Christians, martyrdom is a real possibility in some countries of the world.

And perhaps even in this country when we hear that people aren't allowed to wear a cross on the lapel of a work uniform, or place a palm cross on the dashboard of their work van it might seem as though our freedom to worship is being eroded away.

Of course, this can hardly be compared to the stories of people made homeless and stateless, denied work, or a vote and even killed in some parts of the world.

But it's true that making a stand for what we believe about Jesus and the causes he would be prepared to stand up for, can lead us to suffer because of the unpopularity that our views might cause.

People whose interest in Christ relates to the privilege and powerful position they hope for from Christianity should worry. If anything, following Christ in the way of the cross is about accepting earthly powerlessness.

Now the Queen is our longest reigning monarch. When commentators discuss the Queen's time on the throne, the terms 'sacrifice' and 'giving' get mentioned. They'll say that she's had to sideline a life-time's worth of personal ambition, as well as her own family's needs, in favour of her royal duties. She's been described as a 'still point in a tumultuous world', and a 'constant amid gale-force changes'. However, for the Queen, sacrifice has come with privileges.

Similarly, Jesus offers a sense of permanence in times of turbulence and transformation. Jesus is the 'rock of ages', the 'anchor' and 'strong tower' on whom we can draw strength, support and inspiration at all times, especially during adversity.

However, for Jesus and his disciples, that's us by the way, sacrifice is exactly what it says on the tin - losing ourselves for the sake of 'kingdom' ways, accepting a life that demonstrates inclusion, grace, freedom and

love in practical ways, especially in the face of all that says exclude, blame, fear, suppress and mistrust.

Jesus, had a lot to say about the society in which he lived. He was **never** frightened of speaking truth to power, I expect that today he would probably be the purveyor of uncomfortable truths to governments over their attitude towards the countless thousands of fleeing men, women and children and their plight – human lives full of potential and all made in God's image.

Jesus led by example, he never promised that the Christian life would be easy, just that he would be with us, especially when the going gets tough. And while there will be a reward at the end, we must first carry the cross of self-denial along the hard road travelled by and with Jesus.

Amen

We use many names to describe the ways in which Jesus meets us - many of them during worship today, in song and prayer and word, and now as you sing about Jesus as 'Redeemer' the one who claims us back for God, liberates and rescues us.

Hymn - R&S 285: MP 496:

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of his grace.

Jesus, the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears, 'tis life and health and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me.

He speaks, and listening to his voice new life the dead receive;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice, the humble poor believe.

Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ;
ye blind, behold your Saviour come; and leap, ye lame, for joy!

My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad the honours of thy name.

Holding the World in Prayer

Now turn your attention to the needs of the world, the church and yourself as you come before God in prayer again

God of creative and infinite grace,
we believe that you made us out of love and joy;
that you laugh when we laugh and that when we weep, you weep with us
because you cannot forget us in our needs and struggles.

People in our own communities are struggling - open our eyes and ears
to their needs.

Help us all to find our identity in you Lord, as people who are loved,
forgiven and free.

We are painfully aware of the victims of extremism –
extremism in both politics and religion,
where dangerous and unrepresentative beliefs and activity
cause a climate of fear and anxiety.

We hold in prayer in particular the multitudes of people fleeing violence
and oppression – those we hear about and see on our television screens
– such a wealth of human potential vulnerable to the violence of regime,
the greed of traffickers, the sea and the cold shoulder of bureaucracy.

So we lift before you in prayer the leaders of Governments considering
appropriate responses to these dire situations, that they will respond with
wisdom, integrity and compassion for the many thousands of innocent
people reeling from wars in which they have taken no part, but been the
victims of extremism and governmental upheaval.

We are conscious of all the fragile relationships between the nations and regions of the world, praying that decision makers and those with power will explore with care the sort of people and nations you call us to be.

We remember all those who suffer for their faith;
praying that they will know that you walk in company with them.
We think of the taunts and sneers that have been dealt to us;
asking that we will know your encouragement and strength within us.
We pray for those who suffer far more than us,
more than we can begin to imagine, so we pray for their safety.

We pray for a change of heart of governments in countries where
Christians are punished,
tortured for their faith, praying for healing and hope.
Lord, equip them with integrity and courage.

And we pray for an enlightened world where all creeds are respected,
and your human family can flourish and live in harmony.

And finally, I pray for myself and those whose struggles are known to me
In a time of quiet name them in your heart.....

I commit myself again to following Christ's costly way and to playing my
part in your healing and transforming work.

Lord God, I bring all my prayers to you, in Jesus' precious name

Amen

Hymn - R&S 261:MP 41:

*Caroline Maria Noel. (1817-77)**

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season, to receive a Name
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
he became a witness, faithful to the last,
and returned victorious, when from death he passed.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him make new
all that is not holy, all that is not true.
He is God the saviour He is Christ the Lord,
ever to be worshipped, trusted and adored.

When this same Lord Jesus shall appear again
in his Father's glory, there with him to reign,
then may we adore him, all before him bow,
as our hearts confess him King of glory now.

Closing Words and Blessing

Live in peace, loving and serving the Lord
Be a person of prayer, and praise, and blessing
Serving God in the people he gives to our care this week.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore Amen

*Hymn words reproduced under the CCLI Licence numbers of the SPACE Group of Churches:
181588 - Grove URC: 178113 - The URC Heckmondwike: 177949 - Longcauseway Church:
1236906 - Norristhorpe URC: 783508 - Ravensthorpe with Hopton URC*

Images from top left to bottom right

The Birth of Christ - www.jesus-story.net:

The Hand of God - www.melaniejeanjuneau.wordpress.com:

Children Come to Me – www.blackartdepot.com:

Expulsion of the Money Changers - www.jesus-story.net: www.downloadfreepictures.com:

Jesus Christ Revolution – www.publicdomainpictures.net