

Worshipping Together : Apart  
Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2021 at 10.30am  
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United  
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

### A Call to Worship God

Lord, I come before you as a child.

Laying my ego aside, I strip away my pretensions,  
my delusions, my conflicts and confusions.

Lord, I come before you as a child.

I forget what life has made me, or what I have made of life.

Power, money, status - I strip it all away;  
and I come before you as a child.

Gather me to you now, Lord Jesus.        Amen

### Hymn – MP 128: Sing through twice

Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist  
without the knowledge of your parenthood and your loving care.  
But now I am your child, I am adopted in your family,  
and I can never be alone 'cause Father God, you're here beside me.

I will sing your praises, I will sing your praises,

I will sing your praises for ever more.

I will sing your praises, I will sing your praises,

I will sing your praises for evermore

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### Approaching God in Prayer

Lord God, you offer me a choice

I can sit here in dull and dutiful silence reading with my mind closed,  
or I can be alert for what I may hear from you.

I can think that I already know all the answers

or I can acknowledge that I've barely even asked the questions about you

I come before you Lord in worshipful awareness.  
hoping; waiting for each of my sense to tingle in expectation.

Lord, I am barely worthy of approaching you.

In fact, often I would rather not.

I would prefer to remain as I am, arguing about you.

Convincing myself you are something you are not.

What did you mean when you said some of the difficult things you said?

I tease it out endlessly in my mind, and even with others

while you watch and listen, bemused and sorrowing.

So I turn to you now, Lord, and ask you to teach me.

Sometimes I am ignorant, sometimes I lack innocence;

Sometimes I am foolish and yet don't realise how unwise I am being.

Accept me in your presence, Lord Jesus,

and show me the way, your way.

Sometimes I am ignorant of what peace really means.

I pray for peace in war-torn nations,

and feel self-satisfaction that I am doing my bit;

yet sometimes I don't really strive for peace within my own relationships.

I give money to help the victims of war,

but yet withhold a crumb of forgiveness to my neighbour.

Yet I know that in disputes such as ours, over place and position,

favour and fortune, the seeds of warfare are sown.

Forgive me for not weeding my own garden of conflict,

before I condemn the actions of others.

And hear me as I pray in your words about kingdom growing and

forgiveness Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.

Amen

'Listen' for God's word as you read further into Mark's Gospel

## Gospel Reading Mark 9: 30 - 37

<sup>30</sup> Leaving that region, they travelled through Galilee. Jesus didn't want anyone to know he was there, <sup>31</sup> for he wanted to spend more time with his disciples and teach them. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead."

<sup>32</sup> They didn't understand what he was saying, however, and they were afraid to ask him what he meant.

<sup>33</sup> After they arrived at Capernaum and settled in a house, Jesus asked his disciples, "What were you discussing out on the road?" <sup>34</sup> But they didn't answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. <sup>35</sup> He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, "Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else."

<sup>36</sup> Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me."

## A Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving

Praise be to the child in you, Lord Jesus;  
to the baby of Bethlehem who lives in you still.  
We praise you for your childlike wonder at creation,  
your love of sparrows and lilies of the field.  
We praise you for your joy in company, in laughter and love.  
We give thanks for your love of your Father,  
for the total trust and obedience that we should all have.  
Lord Jesus, bring out the child in each one of us,

and set that child in the midst of our adult complexity. Amen.

## Setting the Scene

Children are a bit like sponges, they soak up and absorb everything presented to them by way of learning and opportunity.

Children, of course, have everything to learn! They come into the world unable to control their voice or limbs and they learn everything from their role models – parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins, church family teachers – you know the sort of list I'm getting at here!



Jesus says we are to be like children – people who learn by absorbing the teaching and experiences that we encounter and the role model we have to follow for our learning is Jesus. It's by learning from his example that we will become more Christ-like.

Now, everyone who is a follower of Christ is a disciple, because a disciple is someone who follows a religious leader. So, we can describe ourselves as disciples, followers of Jesus.

The Greek word for 'disciple' is '*mathites*'. But the interesting thing about this word is that it most accurately means an 'apprentice' or 'pupil'. So, a disciple is someone who is not *only* a follower but *also* a learner. So, a disciple is 'someone who learns as they follow'.

Although we are God's children we are to grow in our ability to be more Christ-like, to be disciples to grow into Christ and align our behaviour with his.

The more time we spend with someone, the more their habits and behaviour (good or bad) rubs off onto us. If we are to grow as children of God, we need to spend time with Jesus in whatever ways we can so that his character will be absorbed into us and rub off onto us.

## Hymn – MP 760:

John Henry Sammis (1846 – 1919)

When we walk with the Lord In the light of His Word,  
What a glory He sheds on our way; While we do His good will,  
He abides with us still, And with  
all who will trust and obey.

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus, But to trust and obey.*

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,  
but His smile quickly drives it away; not a doubt or a fear,  
not a sigh or a tear, can abide while we trust and obey.

*Trust and obey...*

Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,  
but our toil He doth richly repay; not a grief or a loss,  
not a frown or a cross, but is blest if we trust and obey.

*Trust and obey...*

But we never can prove the delights of His love,  
until all on the altar we lay; for the favour He shows,  
and the joy He bestows, are for them who will trust and obey.

*Trust and obey...*

Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet,  
or we'll walk by His side in the way; what He says we will do;  
where He sends, we will go, never fear, only trust and obey.

*Trust and obey...*

## Prayer

Lord, I am your child.

But it's only with you that I can be a child.

The world demands so much of me:

hard work, opinions, decisions; so much responsibility.

I lay it aside when I come to you.

I am just me: not parent, spouse or employee;

just me, stripped of all my roles.

Lord, I look to you. Help me to grow into you.

Teach me, and love me, Lord Jesus. Amen.

## Reflection

Toddlers and children can squabble over something and nothing. You'd think we'd grow out of it, but sadly, as the disciples 'on the way' with Jesus demonstrated, we often don't

Children have to grow up into adulthood, sadly we cannot remain children, much as we might like to, because adults have responsibilities!

Jesus spoke in Parables – which weren't always easy to understand. So he taught the disciples privately, explained the meaning of them when they were alone together. The disciples were followers of Jesus who were also keen to learn from Jesus.

A *first* and *continuing* step in discipleship is the desire to learn as we follow. The prayer of every disciple should perhaps be the prayer of David: "Teach me your way, O Lord, so that I may walk in your truth" (*Psalms 86:11*). If we want get to know Jesus better, even if our interest is just the smallest seed of a desire, it will grow like the mustard seed.

Learning from Jesus can lead us in directions that we didn't expect, that's why being a disciple can be an adventure and a challenge. But we learn from each other as well as from Jesus as the adventure unfolds.

If we are followers and learners of Jesus, we need to be open minded, willing to learn and explore – just as children are and we also have to grow up and take on the responsibilities of discipleship the difficult narrow path less populated but the way of life that leads to life – here and now and forever.

We need to take our place beside Jesus every day, whatever the cost!

A true learner takes their new knowledge and translates it into action. A learner's behaviour and outlook will be changed for the better and they

will want and learn to communicate that new knowledge – that good news – to others.

God challenges us to be disciples of Jesus today, a people who follow and learn and change, as they act on what they're learning – a people who always remain children of God, but grow (as we must) into Christ, taking on the responsibilities that come with copying Christ's pattern.

Jesus' disciples 2,000 years ago were followers and learners who continued to learn. It's clear from what the Bible tells us that they weren't always quick on the uptake, and his teaching was sometimes hard to bear, but they persisted and continued to learn.

In life, we don't learn just to collect facts, we learn because learning helps us lead better lives and learning from Christ as our role model cannot be beaten. Learning from him is a lifelong task. We are and always will be on an adventure as disciples of Jesus' way.

Amen

As followers of and learners from Christ, the more we pour ourselves into serving others in God's name, the more God will fill us to overflowing.

### Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, in the people I welcome  
and those I avoid, help me to see you.

In the people I serve and those I compete with, help me to see you.

In the people I like and those who irritate me, help me to see you.

In my friends and in strangers, help me to see you.

Christ Jesus, you came to be the servant, and asked us to be servants too – so why would we expect to be any different?

You told us that we need to be the least –  
but we still expect to get the best places.

You know us so well because you walked our path  
and asked us to walk yours.

Yet we still admire those in power, we still crave to be somebody  
we still see greatness in the most successful.

Help me to hear again what you told us - to be humble of heart and generous of spirit taking the place you give me – as one who loves and serves others – near and far.

Loving God, in the me I like, and the me I dislike, help me to see you and the needs of others as I take my place beside you to learn from you.

Amen

*Hymn R&S 474: Richard Gillard. (1953- ) alt.*

Brother, Sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey, and companions on the road;  
we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night-time of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh I'll laugh with you;  
I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven we shall find such harmony,  
born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, Sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

### *Closing Words and Blessing*

Remember that as a disciple you follow Christ  
and learn from him along the way.

Be a person of peace, keep hold of what is good,  
Encourage, support, and honour one another, be joyful and give thanks

And 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

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