

Worshipping Together : Apart
Sunday 17th October 2021 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

A Call to Worship God

Meet the Lord in worship,
not with self-satisfaction, or self-importance.
Come in humility, ready to listen for God's fresh word
in what you read, and pray and sing.
Come because God's love has called you to worship

Hymn - MP 50:

David J Evans ©1986 Thankyou Music

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here;
come bow before Him now, with reverence and fear:
in Him no sin is found - we stand on holy ground
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire, with splendour He is crowned:
how awesome is the sight - our radiant King of light
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord, is moving in this place:
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace -
no work too hard for Him. In faith receive from Him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

Approaching God in Prayer

Lord God, you came to us in Jesus –
touching the earth with your presence among us.
You enjoyed the company of others – laughter and love,
and I imagine the twinkle in your eye and the smile of recognition on your
face as I come to you in prayer.

I thank you for the bonds of trust and obedience that Jesus demonstrated as he showed us the love between you, Lord God – our Father – and him and how, in doing so, he showed the depth, length, height and breadth of your love for all humankind – *all* created things.

Christ Jesus, you came to be the servant.

Why should I – why should we – expect to be any different?

You told us that we need to be the least,
to accept the way of life and sacrifice you took on.

Yet we still expect to get the best places.

we still admire those in power,

we still want to be ‘somebody’

we still see greatness in the most successful

we still want you to *do* for us and *give* to us whatever we ask of you –
sometimes regardless of the cost to others.

Help me to hear again what you told us:

to be humble of heart and generous of spirit taking the place you give us.

You know humankind well, because you came to us in Jesus.

You showed us a better way to live.

Yet I confess that I have sometimes overlooked your guidance
and your companionship along life’s journey

I’ve squabbled with others along the way,

ignorant of the peace you offer when we live in right relationships,

when all life is valued, and as precious to us as it is to you.

Forgive us all, because sometimes we prefer to argue along the way
about who is right and who is wrong, who you favour and how important
we are in your sight.

Teach us again Lord – teach me – because we are not innocent and we
don’t always recognise our foolishness.

Lord, sometimes we have very set ideas about communities -
the ones we belong to; the ones we aspire to;
the ones we stay away from.

Help us to see as you do:
you love every member of every community.
We are all one in you.

Forgive us when we look down on others,
or consider our way alone to be the right one.

Help us to work together with you for good,
putting ourselves aside and others first.

We thank you that we can turn to you in prayer, put ourselves beside you
and in a moment of quiet I bring to you all the failures that I need your
help to mend.....

Fill me with your Holy Spirit and show me the way to right wrongs and
restore what I have damaged, or broken.

Lord God, I have inherited the prayer that Jesus himself taught, so I say
Our Father, who art in heaven....

‘Listen’ for God’s Word for you, as you read from Mark’s Gospel

Gospel Reading: Mark 10: 35 – 45

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. ‘Teacher,’ they
said, ‘we want you to do for us whatever we ask.’

³⁶ ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ he asked.

³⁷ They replied, ‘Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in
your glory.’

³⁸ ‘You don’t know what you are asking,’ Jesus said. ‘Can you drink the cup
I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?’

³⁹ 'We can,' they answered.

Jesus said to them, 'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.'

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Hymn - R&S 474:

Richard Gillard. (1953-) altd.

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.

Setting the Scene - Masters and Servants

When I was a teenager and involved in Church youth activities, we used to play a game called 'Master and Servant'. The idea was to get into pairs. One of the pair would be designated the Master and the other

Servant. The Master told the Servant what they wanted the Servant to do, and the Servant had to do it!

It was intended to be a silly, game and the Masters would ask their Servants to do silly things like peel a grape for them to eat, or tell a joke, or give them a piggy back ride wherever they wanted to go etc. etc. It was great fun to be involved in and to see the capers that the Masters dreamed up for the Servants.

Now, you might think this game was terribly one sided and unfair on whoever was appointed Servant, but at any point the Servant could refuse to do what the Master asked, simply by saying 'No', at which point the Master had to do whatever it was they had asked the Servant to do, and from that point on the Master became the Servant, and the Servant the Master, until the Servant refused again. And so the game went on, with enormous laughter and great capers.

The game never really got out of control, and even if it did it wasn't for long, because people quickly realised that the Master would be very unwise to ask the Servant to do anything they weren't prepared to do themselves, because, if the Servant refused, the Master would have to do the task themselves. So, for example, if the Master asked the Servant to lick her shoes clean, and the Servant refused, the Master would have to do that very same thing for the Servant.

So you see, because the Master could never ask the Servant to do anything they weren't prepared to do, the Servants learned to trust the Masters and be obedient. The Servant never had to do anything the Master wasn't prepared to do.

The similarity between Jesus and this seemingly silly game, of course, is that in Jesus we have a Master we can trust, one who never asks us to do anything he wasn't willing to do himself, as a Servant.

And in our lives, we shouldn't force anyone else to do anything we aren't prepared to do ourselves.

In the end there is nothing we can do, however challenging or difficult that Jesus would not do himself, even to die for us.

Hymn - R&S 522: MP 162 Graham Kendrick (1950-) Copyright © 1983 Thankyou Music.

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...

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...

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

Sermon - The versus in these verses!

"We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you".

Do James and John sound familiar? Whether in quite these words or not this sounds like a child's demand of harassed parents. Or perhaps the child who believes they've been good, so, full of righteous expectation, writes a Christmas present wish list.

It was only as far back as chapter 9 that Jesus had set a child in front of the disciples as a model of discipleship. But *already*, instead of following Jesus in a child-like manner, James and John use a child-ish strategy, trying to manipulate Jesus to their own advantage.

And, like a prudent and patient parent, Jesus asks "What is it you want me to do for you". He wants them to spell out what it is they really want, as he sometimes does before healing someone.

The two disciples ask for *places*, positions of power at the right and left of Jesus 'in his glory'.

It seems as though they still imagine that this trip up to Jerusalem will end in glory for them all (despite their fears because of what Jesus has been telling them about what's going to happen to him).

The preceding 3 verses, spell out the impending events clearly – “going up to Jerusalem. Jesus was walking ahead of them and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. Jesus took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.’”

Jesus couldn't really have been more explicit!

Yet still James and John don't understand the implications of what they are asking. It seems they still imagine an earthly glory for Jesus, a triumphant and conquering glory for him – and them.

But, in fact, as we know, two robbers will occupy the places to the right and left of Jesus. And what happens won't appear to be glorious in any way. In a mocking performance Jesus will be enthroned as king, but his throne will be a cross, and his crown will be made of thorns.

Bizarrely, despite Jesus' repeated teaching about *denying* self; self-*giving*; taking up one's cross and *losing* one's life; despite Jesus' rebuke about the squabble over greatness, by the example of a child and his words about being last of all and the servant of all; despite three predictions about his own suffering and death at the end of this road to Jerusalem, James and John are still fantasizing about the coming glory – and scheming for positions of privilege.

A sort of 'inner circle' of three disciples seems to have emerged – Peter, James and John.

Yet all twelve disciples became embroiled when the other ten heard about this request, they became angry with James and John.

Perhaps their anger came from some sort of moral indignation at James and John's ambition that they could even contemplate making such an inappropriate demand. But the picture that's building up throughout Mark's Gospel means that we suspect the other ten are angry because they want those places of importance for themselves!

Three misunderstandings seem to occupy in the minds of the disciples.

Being child-ish versus being child-like

Earthly glory versus heavenly glory

Self-serving versus self-giving

The disciples seem to have heard the music of Jesus' words, yet they still dance to the world's tune.

The disciples seem like an untried football team running onto the field looking fine in their new kit, but failing to understand the rules they must play by if they're going to make an impression.

The rules are made clearer as Jesus indicates the nature of what sitting at his left and right will entail.

"You do not know what you are asking" Jesus tells the disciples. But James and John confirm that they *are* indeed able to drink his cup and be baptised with his baptism. Jesus accepts their words, but turns their expectations inside out.

James and John seem to think of his cup and his baptism as a means to share his glory, but Jesus talks about a cup of suffering and the baptism of death and of empowerment for mission as the proper means of fellowship with him and the only way to truly follow him.

At the heart of this passage, we find the roots of Christian theology that tie baptism and communion together. Jesus is associating both the cup and baptism with his death.

We don't know whether or not James and John realised what they were saying when they said they could share Christ's cup, but Jesus certainly warned them that they *would* experience what Jesus experienced for *themselves*.

When we are baptised 'into Christ' we are baptised into his life and his death. But we are also baptised into his resurrection and new life.

Like James and John, we should remember to be careful what we ask for, because we might just get it! We're not promised an easy ride.

Jesus takes James and John at their word – that they are indeed able to drink the cup he will drink and be baptised with the baptism he is baptised with. But he also firmly points them in the direction of a life of service and sacrifice if they really are committed to following him where he is going.

Jesus invites his disciples to be like him. Jesus is talking about himself when he says "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many", but he's clearly thinking about what the disciples have to *become* like. If Jesus was a servant, then the disciples are to be servants too. They are to be self-giving not self-serving.

James and John's request reflects something that's plagued the Church for centuries: the quest for power and influence. There's a logic that some have created to support this view. If being a disciple is *indeed* about being *partners* with the 'coming' world ruler – the Messiah – surely, people imagine, faithful service must be rewarded with positions of significance in the coming kingdom. But, I wonder, does this expectation spill into our expectations for the here and now?

The fact is that, if it doesn't hurt, we're probably not truly living the way of servanthood that Jesus calls for. There can be no doubt that, at the very

least, Jesus is saying that discipleship is a tough and challenging business, because it turns on its head all the expectations that we naturally have about how things work, and how we recognise true value and greatness in other people and 'world order'.

The disciples are depicted as slow learners, sometimes even ambitious and selfish. Nevertheless, they continue to follow Jesus. Their relationship with Jesus is imperfect, yet the relationship remains unbroken. This is good news because the same applies to us! We're also invited to identify with the twelve disciples, the stumbling followers, the shaky servants of the Lord – but it won't be an easy path to walk.

The message at the heart of Jesus' teaching is that if you want to be great, you have to be a servant. In God's Kingdom citizenship comes, not to those who want to lord it over others, boss people around and look important, but to those who offer themselves to serve and care for others.

Despite Jesus' difficult words there's a clear message of hope for us. Peter, James and John are all notable for being a bit dense (as described in chapters 8, 9 and 10 of Mark's Gospel) but Jesus loved them dearly nonetheless, a message of love for each and every one of us who struggles to be obedient to Christ amidst the temptations of life. Amen

Hymn – MP 465: STF 362: Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity,
in perfect harmony the man who is God.
Lord of eternity, dwells in humanity,
kneels in humility and washes our feet.

Oh, what a mystery meekness and majesty:

bow down and worship, for this is your God. This is your God

Father's pure radiance perfect in innocence
yet learns obedience to death on a cross
suffering to give us life conquering through sacrifice
and as they crucify prays Father forgive

Oh, what a mystery meekness and majesty:....

Wisdom unsearchable, God the invisible,
love indestructible in frailty appears:
Lord of infinity, stooping so tenderly,
lifts our humanity to the heights of his throne
Oh, what a mystery meekness and majesty:....

Holding the World in Prayer

Lord, I pray for those who have given their lives to serve others – whether on far-off mission fields, or just around the corner. They pour out love and compassion on those you have placed in their care and in their lives; may they know your strength, especially when they are weary or overwhelmed. Be their refuge, Lord God, and give them all they need for each day.

Lord, I pray for those who, in their vocations and workplaces, are in a position of caring for others in tangible ways – looking after the sick and the lonely, providing housing or advice, being at the other end of a phone, transporting those who cannot get around easily.

I pray for strength for them to meet the demands of each day, and gentleness towards all with whom they have contact, wisdom in their words, and the attitude of servants called to serve. Lord God, enable them to care with compassion. and work through them, to bring healing and wholeness.

I thank you for them, and ask for your blessing on them. May they be provided with the resources to do their jobs well.

I pray that all those people those who work in supervisory roles might have wisdom and awareness of the needs of those who work for them.

Lord, I pray for myself and all your Church – together and apart – that you will lead us as we serve others.

Remind us of the deep motivation of Christ's love, and give us – give me – a heart for your world.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Hymn - R&S 602:

James Quinn (1919-) © J. Quinn, by permission Geoffrey Chapman

Forth in the peace of Christ we go;
Christ to the world with joy we bring;
Christ in our minds, Christ on our lips,
Christ in our hearts, the world's true King.

King of our hearts, Christ makes us kings;
kingship with him his servants gain;
with Christ, the Servant-Lord of all,
Christ's world we serve to share Christ's reign.

Priests of the world, Christ sends us forth,
this world of time to consecrate,
our world of sin by grace to heal,
Christ's world in Christ to recreate.

Prophets of Christ, we hear his Word:
he claims our minds, to search his ways,
he claims our lips, to speak his truth,
he claims our hearts, to sing his praise.

We are his Church, he makes us one:
here is one hearth for all to find,
here is one flock, one Shepherd-King,
here is one faith, one heart, one mind.

Sending Words and Blessing

Act in a spirit of servanthood:
do not lord it over others, but serve, in the manner of our Lord.
And if suffering comes your way, take courage; he suffered too.
And if you are brought low, have faith; he was too.
Follow him always, in every way. Amen.

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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