



Personal Service for 28th February, 2nd Sunday in Lent.

Call to Worship

Let us come into God's presence and still our hearts
Let us come as a community separated,
but joined in this time of worship
Let us be still, and know that God is indeed God.

Hymn New every morning is the love StF 137, H&P 636, MP 480

Prayers

All – powerful God of past, present and future,
Keeper of promises, we adore you.

Son of Man, the way, the truth and the life,
Loving despite rejection, we adore you.

Holy Spirit, living power within,
Helping, guiding, testing and transforming, we adore you.

Father, son and Holy Spirit,
Your unique relationship – freely open to us, we adore you.
Amen.

Lord, we know that at times, we don't fully understand what it takes to follow you.

Forgive us Lord for taking rather than giving.

Forgive us Lord for hurting rather than healing.

Forgive us Lord for our worldly thoughts rather than living out your kingdom.

Jesus was handed over to be crucified because of our sins, he died and rose again to make us right with God. Through him we are forgiven. Let us follow the Lord our God, giving our lives as he gave his for us.

Amen.

Hymn Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult StF 250, H&P 141, MP 359

Reading Mark 8:31-38

Sermon

Through the church year we often jump about within the story of Jesus, and we can get a bit confused about where we are. Last week we looked at Jesus's baptism and temptation in the wilderness, right at the start of his ministry. Two weeks ago, we looked at the Transfiguration, which happened about the middle of Jesus's ministry and was the turning point of his ministry

towards the cross. We will get an opportunity to read through Mark's gospel as a whole in June when we join in with Bible Month, which might help us see the whole picture of Jesus's life, but for now, our reading today fits in just before the Transfiguration story, but also links with last week's thoughts of temptation.

You know when a bible reading starts with 'then...' you really need to look at what happened in the previous verses. Jesus and the disciples were travelling to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and maybe to create some conversation or to find out what the disciples had heard, Jesus had asked them 'Who do people say that I am?' In his repose Peter had boldly declared Jesus to be the Messiah.

Peter sometimes gets it really right; he sees that Jesus is the one promised long ago. Jesus started to teach them honestly about what it would mean for him as the Messiah to heal a broken world and broken relationship between God and humans. He would face suffering and death but also resurrection. Peter as in other places in the gospel then really puts his foot in it, maybe because he was buoyed by his correct answer last time and feeling over confident in his understanding of scripture. I love to read those human moments in the stories of Jesus, those human reaction, that you or I could so easily have. We can see in our minds eye Peter, dragging Jesus away from the others, and saying 'that isn't going happen Jesus, no one is going to hurt you and anyway how on earth are you going to be resurrected'. But Peter doesn't yet know what it really means to be the Messiah.

We know that Jesus struggled in the garden of gethsemane when he was facing the cross, did he have a momentary flicker of not wanting to go to the cross during this conversation. But then looking at the disciples, the motley band of men who followed him, was he reminded who he was doing this for? It wasn't even just for them, but for all who would go on to be his followers, including you. Jesus was faithful to his mission and recognised that he was once again being tempted, just as he had been by the devil in the wilderness. His human desires wasn't the way he should go, he had a divine, self giving calling to save the world.

Jesus and his disciples weren't travelling alone, there was a crowd with him, maybe others who followed him or just happened to be on the road at the same time. Maybe some of the women or people who had seen his miracles and wanted to know more. He told them all that if they wanted to follow him, they would have to pick up their own cross too. Not his, their own.

We often think of picking up our cross as the burdens we are carrying, the illness, the isolation, the loneliness, the unemployment, the things that make us weary... But Jesus also says 'my yoke is easy, and my burden is light'

(Matthew 11:30) he invites us to come to him for rest from those burdens. I think in our reading today Jesus is talking about something deeper than our worldly worries. For Jesus taking up his cross meant sacrifice, humiliation, violence and pain. He is asking the same from us, take up your cross, something that leads to sacrifice, self giving and possibly death.

The disciples were called a couple of years before this, but this is a deeper call than 'follow me', it was a call to give everything. We too need to continue to deepen our journey with Christ and work towards giving all of ourselves.

You can probably think of other examples of people who picked up their cross but here are 3 examples. Eric Liddle refused to run in the 100m Olympic heats, his strongest event, because they happened on a Sunday. He then went to China as a missionary and died in a Japanese internment camp in 1945. Mother Teresa spent her life working in the back streets of Calcutta with the poorest and most despised people in the city. In the current time there are many doctors and nurses this year who have risked everything to be in hospitals treating those with Covid 19.

When we talk of sacrifice it is giving everything we have, all the time. The people mentioned above gave their all to make the world a better place for others, can we really say that we give our all in the way they did or are doing? I know I can't at the moment. But we also need to recognise that no two crosses are the same, we are not asked to do what Jesus did, I am not asked to do what Eric Liddle did and neither are you asked to do what Mother Teresa did. The challenge for us is to work out what giving our all means for us today, in our individual circumstances.

But this passage isn't just about the doom and gloom of giving up everything in the pursuit of being a disciple of Jesus, there is also a message of hope. We know that Jesus's death on the cross was followed by resurrection, just as he said would happen. The disciples that heard Peter's rebuke to Jesus were also witnesses to the events following his death on the cross. Jesus's death brought the hope of new life and it is the same for us. If we follow Jesus and give all of ourselves then we too are promised that hope of new and everlasting life.

Often when we sacrifice ourselves, give our all, then we go on to help other people in some way. It is not just us that are offered new life, but other lives can be changed too because of the sacrifices we make.

There is a new hymn in Singing the Faith (452) that has a chorus that ends with the line:

not 'what can I gain?' but 'what can I give?'

Maybe that should be the thought that permeates our week as we move forward in our relationship with Jesus.

Prayers

Choose one of the following hymns and read through it as a prayer of Thanksgiving and/or Intercession. As you slowly and prayerfully read it add in anything you would like to thank God for, or you would like to bring to him as a concern this day. Then say the closing prayer as a joint prayer shared by all of us.

Father I place into your hands StF 519, MP 133

Beauty for brokenness StF693, MP 806

For the healing of the nations StF 696, H&P 402

Think of a world without any flowers H&P 572

Praise God for the harvest of farm and of field StF 126, H&P 351

For the fruits of all creation StF124, H&P342, MP 153

God hears all our prayers, our joyful thanks for the things that are good in our lives and the things that worry us, because they affect the whole world or the people close to us. Accept these spoken and unspoken prayers in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred StF 662
or I want to walk with Jesus Christ MP302
or Take my life, and let it be H&P 705, StF 566, MP 624

The Grace

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