

November 7th 2021- personal worship – written by Kirsty Butler

Call to worship Psalm 139 vs 1-3,23 and 24

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you know my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Search me O God and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen

Hymn - Immortal invisible StF 55, H&P 9, MP 327

Prayers

Our loving Heavenly Father we thank you for this new day. Still our hearts and minds so that we may feel you close, throughout our time of worship. Amen

Almighty God, Creator of all that is known and yet to be known we thank you for our beautiful world. You made each one of us in your own image. All we have, all we do, all we are, comes from you. We thank you for families and friendships and for the love shared among us which begins with you. As the daylight hours shrink, we watch the leaves change colour, and nuts and berries fall to the ground and we know that just as you provide all that will keep us through the coming winter, you also provide for Nature.

Caring Lord we know that although your provision is sufficient for everyone, many, lack even the barest essentials. With growing populations in a world where natural resources are shrinking, we acknowledge that we take more than our fair share. And so Loving Lord we pray that you will help us to understand the needs of others, so that we will be ready to share all we have, as we reach out to them. Help us to show the light of your love to all we meet but especially to those in need

We know that through greed and ignorance we have damaged your planet. Forgive us Lord and Inspire us, to find new and innovative ways, to limit the damage and to turn the tide of destruction.

We thank you for the forgiveness Jesus sacrifice bought when he died for each one of us. As we accept that forgiveness in his name, we pray to you in the words he taught us.

The Lord's prayer

Introduction:-

For this morning's gospel reading we are already in the last week of Jesus life. He has entered Jerusalem in triumph, and has already cleansed the outer court, of money lenders and dubious vendors. Mark's narrative is rich with exchanges between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees, who are always watching and ready to trip him up with trick questions. They have been unable to fault him, so they fear him, and now they are seriously plotting against him.

Today we will join Jesus in the great Temple in Jerusalem where he has been teaching his disciples and the crowd. As we listen to the reading let's try to imagine we are there, hearing him, as he speaks scathingly about the teachers of the law – a nice broad title for many who sought to clarify the law of Israel. Jesus feels that they do not practice what they preach, but seek wealth, power and position and enjoy the honour and flattery that they receive.

In the second part of the reading the disciples are in the Court of Women, a large space and crowded, but not exclusively for women – simply the furthest they may go towards the sanctuary and the Holiest of Holies, where once a year the High Priest makes a sacrifice for the forgiveness of his own sin and the sin of the people. Of-course only Jews are present, in this court, since for Gentiles to pass beyond the outer court would mean a death sentence.

Let's pause and imagine ourselves there with the worshippers as we sing:

Hymn Blessed be the name of the Lord StF 40, MP 809

Reading Mark 12 :38-44

Hebrews 9 : 24-28

Reflection on the readings.

So, as we heard, Jesus sits watching for a moment as men and women, move about depositing offerings in the trumpet-shaped temple treasury chests. There are thirteen - and all are marked for a specific purpose. Two are for temple tax – men must give half a shekel annually – while others are for contributions to Temple upkeep, wood and incense for instance for sacrifices and burnt offerings. Then there are 'chests' which receive payment, for the necessary sacrifices offered in atonement for transgressions, sin, or ritual uncleanliness. Mary would have paid such an offering when Jesus was presented at the temple as a baby and Simeon recognised that he was seeing the Messiah. There are also receptacles for free will offerings, dedicated to God – which will help the donor to a closer relationship with the Almighty.

We heard, that there are rich people there and although it does not say teachers of the law, I can't help wondering if Jesus is spotting such people in that crowded courtyard - swishing about in their beautiful robes, greeting each other, bowing to superiors and carelessly, yet ostentatiously, casting their offerings into the treasury. The inference however when he speaks of the widow, is that she is there, to give a free will offering of her funds for daily living because of her close relationship with God. Widows are on his mind, for he has already vilified those same teachers of the law for their pretence of piety, and their lengthy public prayers ...even as they devour widow's houses!! Scribes and Pharisees were beneficiaries of money, left to the temple, but they were also involved in will making, conveyancing and advising - giving them plenty of opportunities for dishonest behaviour, as they prayed and proclaimed their piety.

Jesus, has already promised severe punishment for such people and now he gathers the disciples from wherever they have been and tells them that the widow's sacrificial offering is of an astonishing order. It surpasses all the other free will offerings, they may have noticed. The rich have given from the extra they have - not difficult to do – but she has given from her poverty.

In the gospels Jesus has much to say about riches, the poor, and our relationships with them. In particular he told a rich man, that he had little hope of obtaining eternal life unless he gave away what he had, in order to get alongside the poor. Jesus told his listeners that it is for the poor and those in need of all sorts that he came to the world and to have a close relationship with God it is necessary to be willing, to be not just servants, but slaves for others. He cares about the dignity of the poor. In his time poverty could be seen as the outcome of unrighteousness on the part of a poor person. Unrighteousness right back by right back to the third or fourth generation of their

forebears ..people 'not right with God'. Now Jesus is pointing the finger at those who Judge them, believing that riches are a gift from God for right living. That makes US feel uncomfortable! Does he really mean that we should give everything away and cast ourselves on the state? We can see that that would simply cause different problems. I believe that Jesus is actually asking for a change of attitude, for a different view of ourselves in our relationships with others. If we have position power in the world and in our church communities, are those titles important to us - do they get in the way of us being, as Jesus put it, slaves to others? For those who seek to be important, will end up being the least of all. So, do they allow us to feel superior – saying 'the poor need not be in that situation if only they would ... prioritise or budget,' rather than.. 'but for the grace of God go you or I'.

Jesus looks for us to get rid of our preconceptions about others as much as he asks us to share our wealth. We may say, 'We do give to our churches, to our families, to help our friends and to those in need through charities', but do we know people in dire straits, can we stand alongside them? We may organise the collection of donations, given by the congregation for the food banks but what about the other side of the system? In the past I acted as chauffeur for a family of six for a year. Destitute through no fault of their own, I took them each week, to register and to transport their heavy bags – with no public transport available. I saw those who came in need, and that for them, it was lacking in dignity, even degrading... in spite of the kindness and empathy of the volunteers.

The food banks are just beginning to re-organise after Covid, and they are looking for volunteers, who can bring compassion, understanding and time, to find ways of helping to end the misery of those genuinely down on their luck. This winter is likely to be a trial for many who have stories to tell that cut through the idea, that all these are people who mishandle their resources or just expect the State to support them. It is easy to Judge but that is for God not us 'Jesus!' we say 'this is not easy for me. I cannot always turn my back on worldly commitments!' 'I understand' he replies!' but I am simply asking, you to look at what is dear to you and to think about how you use your God given resources. Where your 'treasures' are, your heart will also be'.

He is challenging us to think whether our wants, or ways, or actions take us away from the Kingdom and God. Again, we say 'Jesus it isn't easy - we try to follow your way, to be for others the way you were ... we try ...but we fail'. Then we remember, that once every year, the High Priest, made atonement in that Temple for his sins and the sins of the people. But Paul reminded us in Hebrews 9, that we have a Great High Priest who entered not the Holy of Holies but Heaven itself as a once and for all time sacrifice to take away our sins. We are not perfect, we will fail, but there is always forgiveness and a new start.

Today we are challenged to think of ways, in which, in our own particular circumstances, we can make our giving more sacrificial. Through prayer and keeping our eyes on Jesus we can come closer to those things he asks of us. Age and mobility, time and energy just as much as material resources will play a part in our responses, but if we keep an open mind to the prompting of the Spirit and love in our hearts for others, Jesus will guide us on our way to living the life of the kingdom here on earth, and one day with him in Heaven. Amen

Hymn - Will you come and follow me StF 673

Intercessions

Loving God as we come to you this morning in prayer, we are aware, that your world is divided against itself and against you in so many ways. WE pray for places devastated by war and natural disaster trusting, that aid will be given and that we and our government

may be generous to those who have lost the little they had. As power struggles lead to bloodshed, we feel hatred in the air, and a wish to suppress the rights of others. We witness acts of cruelty which once would have been inconceivable in our land. The compassion we experienced early in the pandemic seems increasingly to be giving way to self-centredness and feelings of superiority. We find that racism, abuse and contempt for justice seem to be acceptable to many.

Lord we know that your will, is that your children the world over, should come together to protect the poor and less able, as you did when you were here with us.

Just as we pray for a fair sharing of essentials for living, we also pray, that affluent countries including our own will reach out to poorer nations with vaccines, for the problem of Covid will continue to blight lives if the world acts in a narrow and selfish way.

Loving Lord we pray for world leaders – and for all who hold power. May they listen to each other with sincere desires to do the best for all people at this time of pandemic. May they be guided by your Spirit of truth and love. We pray that in our future living and through our efforts for the environment we work towards a future where there is food and shelter for ALL. We pray that with good will and understanding real progress will be made at the conference in Glasgow. Guide those leaders Lord and guide us as we seek your way forward for the future of Creation

We pray for Christians of all denominations and particularly for members of our Methodist Connection as they seek to demonstrate the power of your love to a needy world. Guide our staff, lay leadership, and congregations as our South and West Leeds Circuit moves through the process of stationing, seeking new ways to be God's people.

Lord we thank you for all people who are carers in whatever way, that word may be understood. May they be guided by you, and may their acts of caring be filled with your gentleness and love. As we think of the people we know from this church and among our family and friends who are in need of care whether housebound or ill we name them silently to you praying that each need will be met through your love.

May they feel us with them in prayer

Silence

As we pray for them Lord, we pray too for ourselves, that we will be filled with your Spirit and guided by your will, until such time as we come to be with you in glory - through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

Hymn - Beauty for brokenness StF 693, MP 806

The Grace