

Worship @ Home

Sunday 28th February 2021

2nd Sunday of Lent

What sort of saviour?

*'If you find God with great ease, perhaps it is not
God that you have found'.*

Thomas Merton

Leader: Val Reid

Reader: Helen Dearn

Music: Mike Crowley

Christchurch Community Moment: Helen Dearn

Technology: Steve Cook



Pink Crucifixion – Craigie Aitchison

Call to worship

Jesus Christ –

In the quietening mind
And stilling heart;
In the depths of my solitude,
Come – make your dwelling.

In the hollow of my being,
Carve a breathing space;
Craft a sacred place,

For your home.

Come, rest in me,
And I in you,
This day
And for evermore.

Welcome

Music [StF 161]

Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of Your Holy Word
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All Your purposes for Your glory.

Teach us Lord, full obedience
Holy reverence, true humility
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority
Words of pow'r that can never fail
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us
Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory.

Keith Getty and Stuart Townend

Prayer *Response: Bless the Lord my soul (Taizé)*

*Bless the Lord my soul
And bless God's holy name
Bless the Lord my soul,
Who leads me into life.*

God, here I am before you.
I dash back to you from my busy life –
Fitting you in –
While you wait, ever patient, ever the same.
You know me.
But now I am still, and with you.
And you know me.

Bless the Lord my soul...

You know every thought I have –
The processes my thoughts go through, and why.
You are forever interested,
Supportive, delighted –
Fascinated in what your child does,
Though you have seen it all before.

Bless the Lord my soul...

You know every intricacy of my body –
Its unique detail, how it works,
Its strengths and weaknesses,
Its needs and dislikes.
It is a miracle,
And yet I do not always care for it, respect it,
Or thank you for it.

Bless the Lord my soul...

You know my successes and joys, wishes and longings.
You know my keen delights.
You know every one of my mistakes –
The small embarrassing ones,
The ghastly blunders, the huge regrets.
You help me to learn.
You do not shout at me.
You simply wait with me,
And I see myself, and cringe.

Bless the Lord my soul...

Thank God you know me, God.

Silence

Thank God you know me, God.
Thank God, you love me.
Thank God you forgive me.
Thank God I can start afresh, with you, right now.
Thank God you know me, God.

Bless the Lord my soul...

Amen

Mark 8: 31-38

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

Reflection

The Germans have an institute that documents and monitors their language. Each year they add around 200 new words that have come into common use. This year they have added more than 1,200 new words.

They include:

Coronafrisur (lockdown hairstyle)

Impfneid (envy of vaccinated people)

Kuschelkontakt (the person you meet for a hug during lockdown)

Abstandbier (a socially distanced beer – not for Methodists, obviously)

Overzoomed (no translation needed)

Dr Christine Möhrs, who works at the Leibniz Institute, reminds us that:

Language has a strong power.

Words not only convey content, but can also convey emotions and feelings.

And speakers – and listeners – should be aware of that.

Language is a slippery beast.

It carries a lot of emotion.

And baggage.

Words – handle with care.

Today's gospel reading starts enigmatically:

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed,

and after three days rise again.

He said all this quite openly.

Who is 'them'? 'Then'? – why now? What's so significant about saying all this quite openly?

We need to backtrack a little, to understand.

Just a few verses earlier, Jesus has a conversation with his disciples at Caesarea Philippi.

Who do people say that I am?

They throw a few ideas around – John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets.

*But who do **you** say that I am?*

It's Peter – rash, unpredictable, volatile, always jumping in feet first – who has the courage to say:

You are the Messiah.

Now Messiah is one of those words you need to handle with care.

It comes with baggage attached.

It comes with LOTS of emotion.

The Messiah has been hoped for, longed for, awaited passionately, though many generations.

The Messiah will sweep in trailing clouds of glory, and rescue Israel.

The Messiah will defeat their enemies, liberate the people, establish the New Jerusalem on earth.

It will be the Exodus and the return from Exile all in one glorious moment.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus' response is to sternly order them not to tell anyone about him.

At our Lent group last Sunday, one of the questions we discussed was – why does Jesus keep sternly ordering people not to tell anyone about him?

This is a recurrent theme in the first half of Mark's gospel.

Scholars refer to it as 'The Messianic secret'.

Why was Jesus so keen to keep his identity under wraps?

I think it was about words.

His fear of what words can do.

If his disciples were to label him 'Messiah' too quickly, too glibly, people will have all sorts of unrealistic expectations about him.

He is not **that** sort of Messiah.

So that's why he starts telling them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering.

The 'them' is the group of disciples, who have just heard Peter's confession.

The 'then' is just after the word 'Messiah' has been first used.

The speaking openly is because the suffering is not a secret – in fact, it's important that they get their heads around what is going to happen.

Because immediately after this conversation, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a high mountain for the transfiguration experience.

And then he sets his face on the road to Jerusalem.

This is the centre of Mark's gospel.

The hinge on which everything turns.

What sort of saviour?

The sort that will walk this road to the cross.

So yes – you need to understand what 'Messiah' means.

And, as Mark tells, us, it's not easy listening.
Peter took Jesus aside, and began to rebuke him.
That's not the kind of Messiah we want!

Get behind me, Satan!
You've got it all wrong.
Watch.
Listen.
Learn.

Learning what sort of saviour they are following will take the disciples a lifetime.

Back track a little further.

Just before the conversation at Caesarea Philippi, when the word 'Messiah' is used for the first time, Jesus has performed another miracle.

He has healed a blind man at Bethsaida.

He leads him out of the village, puts saliva on his eyes, lays his hands on him, and asks him:

Can you see anything?

Yes – says the blind man – I can see people, but they look like trees walking.

Jesus lays his hands on him again, looks at him intently, and his sight is restored.

Mark does nothing without a reason.

He doesn't give us long reflective commentaries, like John.

The way in which he juxtaposes little stories is intended to make us do the work.

To think for ourselves.

To put all the clues together, and arrive at our own answers.

The disciples are like the blind man.

They can see the Messiah – sort of.

But it's like trees walking.

It's a bit blurry and out of focus, and they're guessing at what they might be seeing, and they're getting it wrong.

They're bringing all their preconceptions and emotions and baggage, and projecting it onto the vulnerable figure of the son of man.

What sort of saviour?

The sort I want!

Here's another interesting thing.

Who wrote Mark's gospel?

It's now generally understood to be the first of the gospels.

It was written down around 70 AD.
But the stories were collected over the previous decade.
It was probably written for the Christian community in Rome.
When Christians were being persecuted by the emperor Nero.

Early church tradition says that Mark was the writer of the gospel, but the stories and the memories and the perspectives come from Peter.
Peter, that impulsive disciple who first recognised that Jesus was the Messiah, but struggled to grasp what it meant.
Who promised loyalty to the end, but then pretended he didn't know Jesus when his own safety was at risk.
Who got it wrong so many times, but was given a second chance.
Feed my sheep.

If Mark's gospel was written for the Christian community in Rome who were suffering persecution under Nero, it was written for the cowards.
It was written for the survivors.
It was not written for the martyrs – the ones who had bravely clung on to their faith publicly, and been thrown to the lions or crucified.
It was written for the small, scared communities left behind, who hadn't wanted to confess their faith in public, because it was too risky.
Who were lying low and holding on and hoping for a better future.
It was written for those who had survived – but at a cost.

And if Mark's gospel does contain the memories of Peter – the disciple who didn't understand and made a mess of things and ran away at the crucial moment – then he knew what he was talking about.
And the first readers of the gospel heard a message for them.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

I think Mark's gospel speaks to us here and now, in this year's Lent.
Like those first hearers and readers of the gospel, we are lying low, living with suffering, hoping for a resurrection that – despite this week's road map – still feels a long way away.
We have made mistakes.
We have been failed disciples.
Like Peter, we hope for a second chance.
What sort of saviour do we need?
Not one who says everything's OK when it patently isn't.
One who has walked this road ahead of us.
One who walks this road beside us.

Craigie Aitchison's wonderful picture – Pink Crucifixion – was created in 2004.
The artist said that the crucifixion was 'the most horrific story I have ever heard'.

So there was no need to highlight the suffering: any depiction was enough to recall all its mystery, terror and wonder.

The picture holds together an unflinching depiction of Christ's pain, and a deep playfulness.

A Bedlington terrier was originally shown at the foot of the cross.

A printer trying to help finish the work added a tiny detail to the dog's head but, on seeing it, the artist erased the dog completely.

However, its ghostly outline is still visible to the bottom left hand side of the cross.

I invite you to take a couple of minutes to look at this picture.

What can you see?

What does it mean to you?

What sort of saviour is this?

Silent reflection

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
He calls us now to follow Him.
Amen

Music [StF 272]

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 needs to prefer,
For it is Christ we're serving.

This is our God, The Servant King...

Graham Kendrick

Christchurch Community Moment: Helen Dearn

- What was your life like before lockdown?
- What has been going on for you over the last year?
- How do you feel about the Road Map for the months ahead?
- Where is God in all this?

Prayers for ourselves and others

Faithful God,
as a cautious route out of lockdown is planned,
may we hold on to the hope it offers, but not run ahead of the realities.
We pray for the work of Covax as they ensure fair access to vaccine,
and we ask that poverty would not create vaccine inequality.
May we find new and creative ways to reconnect
with friends, family members and our church community.
May we live the story that we tell –
of your suffering love for us,
of your creative power,
and of the gospel promise of a world made new.
May we be ready to play a part in the healing and restoration
of our relationships and of your world,
and may we be ready to heal the hurt that separation has brought.

Your promise is to all generations:

We believe that all things are possible with you.

Faithful God,
we pray that the under 5s will have opportunity to play,
that students studying for exams would not have their futures jeopardised,
that decisions would be wise and timely,
and that classrooms will be made as safe as possible.
We pray today for all teachers wearied by long hours and changing rules,
for students who have been lonely and confused,
and for parents stressed by home schooling.
We pray for the estimated 1.6 billion children worldwide
whose schooling has been disrupted by the pandemic,
and we pray especially for the education of girls across the world.
Surround all schools with your protection,
and may we find long-term responses to the needs of children and young people.

Your promise is to all generations:

We believe that all things are possible with you.

Faithful God,
you promise that the poor shall eat and be satisfied,
but in the UK, rates of deprivation have skyrocketed in the pandemic –
220,000 households have fallen into destitution,
and funding to support the homeless has dried up.
We pray also for starving children in the ongoing conflict in Yemen,
and for the Yazidi people, displaced and without hope.
As we begin to think about the future,
may we focus on your priorities and be ready to work for change,
so that no one goes hungry and all find a place to live.

Your promise is to all generations:

We believe that all things are possible with you.

Faithful God,
you promise peace in our cities as a sign of your blessing.
We pray for local councils,
struggling to balance budgets and deprived of post-Covid funding.
May wise decision making prevail and essential services be preserved,
may the needs of residents be prioritised,
and care be provided for those most in need.
We pray that we would find creative ways of revitalising our cities,
making them safer greener and more peaceful places for all.

Your promise is to all generations:

We believe that all things are possible with you.

Faithful God,
all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to you.
As we look at pictures from the red surface of Mars,
we wonder again at the miracle of your creation,
and give thanks for the extent of human adventure and achievement.
May the same courage that explores space, finds new vaccines;
and that sails alone across the Atlantic, be applied to our everyday challenges.
Give us fresh energy to face the future,
with all its seemingly intractable issues,
and may we be ready to respond to your call to follow you,
though the pathway is challenging
and the way ahead may require sacrifices.

Your promise is to all generations:

We believe that all things are possible with you.

Faithful God,
as days lengthen and signs of spring appear,
we thank you that you have placed us in community,
and we remember today all the people who fill our lives with hope.
We remember in silence all we know who are struggling today:
the sick and hospitalised,
those who are waiting for treatment,
and those who have lost loved ones this week...

Silence...

May your love surround them.
Soon you will call us to follow your footsteps to the Cross:
help us to make ourselves ready to respond.
Your power is seen when love is poured out
in the broken body of your Son
and by your Spirit we are made whole.
So, in your healing and your hope we stand this day.

Your promise is to all generations:

We believe that all things are possible with you.

May your faithfulness give us hope in believing.

Amen.

Lord's prayer – a different perspective

Our Father and Mother,
Who is the source of all life,
Holy is your life-giving name;
May we know on earth

Your enlivening heavenly power.
Give us today the bread of life.
Forgive us when we deny life
As we forgive those who limit our life force.
And lead us not into the temptation of despair
But deliver us from all that is life-denying.
For you are eternal life:
The power and the glory
Of everything that ever lives.
Amen

Blessing

Gracious Christ,
You have walked a path we could never tread.
You hold the wisdom of the ages
And you invite us to sit with you.

Forgive us when we lose sight
Of the blessings you pour out for us.
Help us to open our hearts
To your way of being.

Transform us into a people
Who delight in walking your way.
Lead us towards your kingdom –
May it come in us! Amen.

Music: Who has laid the earth's foundation?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_bBHjv72bM

Prayers are taken from the URC Prayer Handbook 2021: Conversations.

Intercessions are taken from Roots for Churches 28.2.21

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