



for Sunday 31 January 2021

Dear friends,

Welcome to another Sunday and time of worship in our homes and in our hearts.

Over the past few weeks we have tried to develop our Zoom services and put the words of the hymns on the screen (with a nice backdrop) so that, safely in the comfort of your own homes, you can sing. I have missed many things and knowing that we are a good singing congregation and have Razvan and a choir, we all look forward to the chance to raise the roof in the future.

You should also say The Lord's Prayer out loud because Amanda has muted you!! However some of my colleagues have suggested un-muting at the Lord's Prayer so that it becomes a holy noise of prayer to God!

In our prayers with great sadness we remember that the number of deaths in the UK has now passed 100,000. The week of Prayer for Christian Unity has ended and Holocaust Day has been marked on the 27th of January. There are many things and situations to pray about personally: prayers of anguish and also of thankfulness. There will be an official day with the lighting of a candle to mark what has been an horrendously difficult 12 months.

Can I, as always, thank all of you who work so hard at spreading the Good News in these troubled times. Over the past few services we have had the pleasure of friends from Merrylea. It would be super to see them again for this service.

Take care: know that you are loved,

George

***Remember our helpline number, 07851 591 503,  
if you are needing help with shopping through this time of Lockdown***

### **Sunday 31 January - Epiphany 4 (Year B)**

For those who like to follow all the lectionary readings for this Sunday they are: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; Revelation 12:1-5a; Mark 1:21-28

For those who miss the hymns I have added them in here. The congregation in Naseby and in Kingsborough, whilst unable to sing them, have enjoyed following the words, giving them an opportunity to think more of what they mean and how they tie into the theme of the service. It also gives me the chance to 'slip in' some newer ones so that we can learn them for the future!!

Sunday's hymns are: 286 Tell out my soul; 187 There's a wideness to God's mercy; 655 For your generous providing; 396 And can it be.

Our Sunday reflection will be based on Mark but please read and ponder the suggested Scripture and see how it connects and what it says to you.

**Rest in His arms ..... read, reflect, rejoice...**

## **CALL**

To mark Holocaust Remembrance Day on the 27th of this month and the worries where we are in our world with Covid, we use this quotation from Anne Frank as our Call today to the God who knows and hears our cries:

"I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness; I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too. I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better; that this cruelty too shall end; that peace and tranquillity will return once more."

Hear our cries, O God,  
Hear our prayers, O God.

## **PRAYER OF APPROACH**

Holy God,  
we come to worship you.

We proclaim your glory.

We consider your power.

We ask for your mercy.

We trust you to be our refuge, our place of safety, our home beyond all homes.

We come, carrying our burdens of work, school and family,  
of news that is anything but good;

we come feeling busy and lonely, overwhelmed and grateful.

We bring these responsibilities and emotions with us when we worship you,  
for we cannot take them off like the shoes we wear outside  
and leave them at the door of your house.

We bring our whole lives and our whole selves to be with you.

We make our prayers from our living rooms,  
participating in our own ways but glad to come home to you.

Though we think we know it all,  
our lives reflect at times how little we respect others;  
how words and our actions hurt those around us;  
so we come to you seeking healing.

Forgive us, O God and have mercy on us.

May we silence our fears, so words of hope can be spoken.

May we give thanks not only with our hearts  
but with the grace we can share with each other.

May justice and peace be the tools we use  
as we serve beside Jesus Christ.

You are our rock.

You are our refuge:

our safe place

in all times and in all places.

Look on us with love.

Let your face shine upon us.

(The Lord's Prayer)

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 debts as we forgive our debtors,  
and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
for ever, AMEN

Let us turn to God's Word, found in Mark 1: 21-28

'This is the Word of God. Thanks be to Him.'

And now some music as we contemplate the readings.



## **PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION**

Un-stop our ears, O God, that we may hear your Word proclaimed this day.  
Open our minds and our hearts to be changed. Free us from the unclean spirits  
of worry, fear, destruction and pride. Teach us, Lord, that we may follow you  
more faithfully. AMEN

## **REFLECTION**

Last Sunday, talking about Jesus 'catching' people, I used, as an analogy, the children's game, 'Kiss, Cuddle and Torture'. The look of confusion on the Zoomers faces surprised me!

'We never played that game!' they commented afterwards. 'What kind of school did you go to?' said another. 'That sounds cruel.' 'We just sat and read our books and completed our homework.' Aye, that'll be right!

In the rough and tumble of the playground: football, skipping ropes, boys with their coats open and their arms open wide pretending to be aircraft, you must have played some version of tig – running and getting caught – it was part of the mating ritual, even in primary school.

No matter.

Another game came to mind that I'm sure you played!!!

'Rock, paper, scissors.'

Rock is strong (fist), it can break the scissors (two fingers) and scissors can cut the paper (flat hand) and the paper can cover the rock.

The rock may be strong on the scissors because of the rules but everyone has a chance to win – someone else is given the authority.

Authority – I wonder about the word in relation to the world that we live in today. In the past teachers had authority; the police had authority; parents had authority; the clergy had authority. Who didn't have a parent or grandparent who could just give you 'a look', if you were stepping out of line and it was enough!

Those mentioned above carry no authority but what about our politicians?

Some people have authority over others: they have power over others and they use that power to achieve their goals: the boss that makes you work longer

hours or threatens you with unemployment; the spouse who demands food on the table at a particular time; even the referee who will not discuss a decision because he says so – authority wielding power.

The Greek translation of the word ‘authority’ suggests its meaning as ‘out of being’-Jesus spoke out from who he was, out of where he came from. People could sense something different about him, different from what they saw from the scribes and the teachers of the law who told people what the scriptures said about how they should live and what they should believe.

On one occasion Jesus himself said to his followers that they should listen to them, for ‘they have the seat of Moses.’

But somehow the reality of what they taught was not part of them in the same way it was with Jesus. It did not arise out of their being in the same way as it did with Jesus.

Jesus, as we will see in Lent in the wilderness, lived the Word of God: applied it to his own life – even when it was hard to do so. When he spoke the truth, it was his truth as well as his Father’s and this was communicated to others.

We have all known people like that:-

the person passionate about those in care;

the teacher fanatical about nurturing the pupils in her class;

people who when they speak, when they act, show that what they do is more than a job but something they feel strongly about. They, therefore, speak with authority: not the authority that denies an opinion and crushes development and thought but one that gives power and strength to the listener, encouraging them, like the game, to speak with authority too.

The people were amazed because he taught with authority.

They were in awe.

Not because he spoke down to them and kept them in their place but because he opened up the scriptures to them in ways that they had never heard before, challenging them to think anew.

I asked about politicians because we are weary worn. Many of us are battling a deep and persistent malaise. We are worried about the future and we are worried about the present. Time drags on and so many things are limited, even our church community – spiritual space and sacrament to name but two. What we all seek are politicians and scientists, decision-makers for that matter, who speak with authority; an authority not with power but with compassion; not with the ‘rock’ to crush us but the ‘paper’ to cover us in some way to feel comforted and confident so that we may speak encouragingly in a similar way too.

A colleague and friend sent me once more a poem by Brian Bilston called ‘Daily Briefing’. The emphasis in this poem are the words ‘sadly died.’

He writes –

‘Responsibility and accountability has sadly died,  
faith in government, has sadly died,  
ministerial integrity, has sadly died,

The exact cause of death is not yet known, although it is believed to have happened sadly,

... in other news, openness and transparency have sadly died,  
while satire and irony are also have thought to have died at this time, in a manner which can be best described as sad.

The use of ‘sadly’ as a subtle deflection of blame is yet to die, sadly.’

Make what you will of the poem but Mark encourages us to see that when Jesus speaks, people are amazed and in awe because he means what he says. So much so, he causes a stir not just in the congregation but a man, troubled with his own demons and worries in life, recognises that authority too.

When people speak I look for authority. I look for people who mean what they say and feel it in their bones. What I am looking for are people who will give you and me hope, hope that we know of because we know of the man who stepped up to the lectern and made the word of God come alive because he was the Word of God.

The passage challenges us to look hungry for an encounter with God when we worship. We should still expect Jesus to turn up and surprise us. Are we ready for that? These are old problems, when the freshness of the Gospel becomes familiar, forgetting that when Jesus steps up and speaks out, things become new.

Jesus used his authority to free, to heal, to serve, and to empower.

Remember the game, 'Rock, Paper, Scissors' which allowed others a say and an opportunity for participation. Maybe this is why he was so appealing because this was the servant king.

Like us all, I have my moments and while I look to Jesus for hope, I find hope also in those who are so compassionate, caring, considerate and concerned, with a fire in their stomach, upbeat and gentle, that they give me hope too.

I pray that all of us speak with loving, healing authority to a world that needs to be astonished and in awe once more.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN

(We make our offerings of body, mind and soul, as well as in a monetary way.)

### **OFFERTORY PRAYER**

God of power and wisdom,  
we give you our eternal thanks for the gift of your Son,  
who came not only to save  
but to teach us about your kingdom and how we might live,  
readying ourselves for that kingdom.

He taught with authority, and if we listen,  
we will live a life of generosity, mercy, and compassion.  
Bless what we give this day and help us be faithful  
in the use of all our resources,  
that we might live like those anticipating your kingdom.  
In Christ, we pray. Amen.

(We turn to our world)

### **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Our words, Lord, sometimes are a give-away –  
"I don't know what got into me..."  
"Whatever possessed you..."  
as though something that was not who we are, something out of character,  
had somehow, for a moment, got a foot in that door,  
taken a life of its own, outside our control.

The child who writes on the wall;  
the advert tempting the poor to spend what they cannot afford  
on what they don't need – is that far away from what Mark calls 'evil spirits'?

This day we remember that Jesus came with authority:  
he calmed the storms of nature and the torments of the mind;  
spoke healing to the body and defeat to death itself,  
telling Martha to unbind the grave clothes and let Lazarus be free to live again.

Some things, it seems, are sent to try us  
wherever what we perceive is wrong shows its naked face;  
throws down the gauntlet. We cannot pretend we did not hear.  
It is one thing to think of following Jesus  
in the sense of taking on board his social and moral teaching:  
love for neighbour, care for the poor...  
it is another thing to think of following Jesus  
in the sense of making him Lord, measuring every thought and deed,  
accepting forgiveness and grace to become like him...  
it is quite another thing altogether  
when we glimpse what is wrong in the world  
and for those whose battles are real –  
and if we are truthful, involve us.  
Perfect love casts out fear, so we pray for those who are fearful,  
for those in a fight with heart and soul and mind,  
who find daily living a conflict, a struggle and an encounter.  
Help them and us see that Christ is Lord  
and good triumphs, when all is said and done,  
over whatever possesses us this week  
and tries to take us away from the road we should travel.  
(sending music)

## **BENEDICTION**

Jesus comes to us, offering healing and hope,  
speaking and acting with authority.

Listen to him.

Go into this world, confident in God's love and healing power.

Go forth...

...replenished by the grace and mercy of God,  
...blessed by the healing love of Jesus,  
...energized by the limitless power of the Holy Spirit.

Go in peace and may God's love and peace always be with you. AMEN.

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