

Christ Church Woodley 27th June 2021

Jesus said,

"I am the Light of The World.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

HYMN: StF175 Light of the world <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdfrijGy-FIU>

Light of the world,
you stepped down into darkness,
opened my eyes, let me see
beauty that made this heart adore you,
hope of a life spent with you.

*So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.*

King of all days
oh so highly exalted,
glorious in heaven above.
Humbly you came to the earth you created,
all for love's sake became poor.
So here I am to worship ...

And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.
And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.
So here I am to worship ...

Tim Hughes

Prayer:

Lord, you are the light of the world. You promised that whoever follows you will have the light of life. Lord, we come now to meet you – to be in your presence – to open ourselves before you that you may overcome darkness within us. We come because we want to follow you more closely in the way we live. We come to offer ourselves in your service. We come to spend this hour in your presence worshipping you and sharing in fellowship with each other. We come to be filled with your Spirit, that you might travel with us as we leave carrying your light into the world.

Lord, we your people are called the Bride of Christ. Forgive us that we do not live up to this title. Forgive us individually where we fall short – and for the particular things we have done wrong this week. Forgive us as a church when our following is lukewarm and our efforts are small. Lead us into greater commitment because you have a job for us to do in your service. Lord speak to us. Increase our dedication to you. Show us how we can serve you.

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's prayer (said as projected on the screen), or in its traditional form:

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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

All age talk: Two sides of the coin (summary, not to give too much away)

A coin has two sides – head and tails. Two sides, but one coin.

We rightly talk of love when we come to church.
The love God has for us is one side of the coin.
The other side is our love for God.
Both sides are needed for us to be God's people.
God will always love us whatever, but without our love for God we fall short in our calling to be the people of God.
We pray that our love for God might grow so God's love for all might flow through us into the world.

Junior church, prayer and introduction to the next hymn

Hymn: Big family of God <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUM4AtVHIMA>

Some of us are big and tall	Some of us have curly hair,
Some of us are very small	Some of us have specs to wear
Some of us like pink and some like blue	All of us have different families
Some of us like reading books	Some of us are very loud
Some of us like feeding ducks	Some of us don't make a sound
That's because we're different, me and you	That's because we're different you and me.

But God loves everyone he's made
God loves each of us, in a special way

Nick and Becky Drake

*That's You and You and You and You
And You and You and You and You
God loves you! God loves you!
That's You and You and You and You
And You and You and You and You
We're part of the big family of God!*

Children's Blessing

Introduction to the readings for Bible Month

As you will know by now, this is Bible Month. It's a challenging task to take in the whole of the gospel of Mark in five weeks. But I like the idea. We get to see Jesus's life and mission as a whole. We can see patterns coming through that are missed when we concentrate on a small number of verses. It's usually thought that Jesus's ministry lasted for about three years. Mark concentrates very heavily on the last few weeks. The final week of Jesus's life takes up all of the last six chapters. The two and a half chapters that we're asked to consider cover the previous about two weeks. This means that the second half of Mark's gospel covers only three weeks out of the three years.

The first big event in our two and a half chapters is Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah when Jesus asks him, 'Who do you say I am?' This is immediately followed by the transfiguration when Moses and Elijah appear to Jesus in glory and God confirms that Jesus is his Son.

The remainder of our two and a half chapters is taken up with the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem ending in Jesus's apparently triumphal entry on a donkey. Today's part of Mark's gospel is often given the title 'On the Way'. This has two meanings. First, Jesus and his disciples are on the way to Jerusalem. Second, it is the time when Jesus explains the 'Way of the Cross'. Three

times Jesus explains to the disciples that he must suffer, die and be raised on the third day. Three times the disciples fail to understand. Jesus teaches the disciples about the Christian Way and in so doing he teaches us what it means to follow Christ today.

We cannot hear the whole of these two and a half chapters – it would take too long. We're going to hear the first part when Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus leads them up the mount of transfiguration, and he begins to teach them and us about the Way of the Cross.

Readings Mark 8:27-9:10

Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Messiah

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

²⁸ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

²⁹ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus Predicts His Death

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

The Way of the Cross

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

⁹ ¹ And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

The Transfiguration

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

Hymn: 489 All I once held dear

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLX6MH9hPI>

- 1 All I once held dear,
built my life upon,
all this world reveres,
and wars to own,
all I once thought gain
I have counted loss;
spent and worthless now,
compared to this.
*Knowing you, Jesus,
knowing you,
there is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love you, Lord.*
- 2 Now my heart's desire
is to know you more,
to be found in you
and known as yours.
To possess by faith
what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift
of righteousness.
- 3 Oh, to know the power
of your risen life,
and to know you in
your sufferings.
To become like you
in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live
and never die.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Sermon: On the Way

Getting married involves making promises to each other. These have changed over the years. You can see this if you go back to the marriage ceremony in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. You will find that the woman promises to love, cherish and obey. The man promises only to love and cherish.

There was another asymmetry in the Prayer Book vows. The man promises, 'with all my worldly goods I thee endow.' The woman makes no such promise – but only because before 1882 a married woman did not own property in her own right.

Modern practice is thankfully different and expresses mutual and equal sharing. This can be expressed in many ways. The marriage partners can say together, 'What's mine is yours. What's yours is mine.'

This is a beautiful ideal that forms the bedrock of many loving relationships. But we are fallible human beings, and reality can hide reservations:

'What's yours is mine. What's mine we share.'

Or there's the provisional sharing,

'What's mine is yours, but could still be mine.'

Or even, sadly,

'What's yours is mine. What's mine is mine.'

I've seen it happen.

The fall from the ideal can play out in a number of ways – sometimes undermining even long-lasting marriages. The basis of deep relationship is for each to say to the other, 'What's mine is yours.'

If it's true of marriages, it's also true of our relationship with God. Marriage runs as a thread throughout the whole Bible as an image of the relationship between God and the people of God – both in the old and new testaments. Starting from God's side, it's clearly pressed home in the gospels that Jesus says to us, 'What's mine is yours'. The question is whether we say to Jesus in return, 'What's mine is yours.'

For Bible month we're asked to look this week at chapters 8 to 10 of Mark's gospel. Chapters 11 to 16, the last 6 chapters of the gospel, tell the story of the last week of Jesus's earthly life from his

arrival in Jerusalem, to his crucifixion, and to his resurrection. The chapters we're considering tell the story of the previous about two weeks – of Jesus setting out from Galilee and walking to Jerusalem with his disciples – teaching and healing as he went.

Chapters 8 to 10 begin with Jesus telling the disciples for the first time that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

Mark tells us that

Jesus spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

Even though Peter had only just at that moment acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, he and the other disciples were not ready to understand the cross – and even less 'rising again on the third day'.

This is followed by the transfiguration when Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain.

Moses and Elijah appear and a voice from a cloud says,

"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

The message of who Jesus was should have been clear, but the disciples still did not understand. Twice more on the journey to Jerusalem, Jesus tells them that he must suffer and then rise again. They misunderstand in all sorts of ways.

James and John miss the point about suffering. They argue about which of them will sit next to Jesus in the kingdom of God. Jesus had some pretty serious teaching to do about the kingdom not being about power in the sense of kings on thrones.

Mark tells us that the disciples argued amongst themselves about what it meant to rise again on the third day. Not surprising really. Suffering and the cross was not what they expected of the Messiah.

These were the same disciples that Jesus would depend on to get his church up and running after he ascended to heaven. Jesus had to change their mindset in a week or so as they walked to Jerusalem. In the middle of Jesus's teaching, he said some pretty unpalatable things to get the truth across.

To quote from the passage we heard read to us,

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Equally or even more difficult is what Jesus said as they approached Jerusalem,

And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell.

And when a rich young man asked Jesus what he must do to gain eternal life, Jesus told him,

One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

Sometimes Jesus was speaking specifically to the disciples, sometimes to the crowd, sometimes to individuals. But mostly the way Mark tells it, these are general principles that apply to all his readers – and therefore to us.

So what does it mean for us here and now? There are a number of things to note. Jesus asks nothing of his followers that he was not doing himself. It fits in with the principle of good relationships of each saying to the other, 'What's mine is yours'. Jesus gave everything. He gave his own life that we might find life. To do less ourselves is to choose instead, 'What's yours is mine. What's mine is mine.'

The other thing is that this was a crisis situation. In a few days they would be in Jerusalem. The disciples had to be prepared for what was coming. For the most part we do not live in a crisis.

There may be times when there is a choice that has to be made now at this moment – and the choice can lead us toward or away from God. But mostly, our journey of faith allows more time to respond.

Jesus made great demands of the disciples, but Jesus was more easy-going on others. He healed two blind people, including Bartimaeus, and he threw an evil spirit out of the son of a distressed father. In these cases, Jesus asked nothing of them. He acted out of love, and allowed time for them to turn round their lives as they understood what had happened.

And even in the case of the rich young man, Jesus only came to the crunch point when the young man demanded Jesus said more. Maybe Jesus recognised that for most people it takes time and we're not all immediately up to dropping everything and taking up our cross.

My understanding is that at the end, we find eternal life through a relationship with Jesus. In the end, we let go of everything and embrace him entirely. For most of us this is a lifetime's work that is only complete when we enter his presence at the end of our lives. At that point, his love is so overwhelming that we can hope to easily let go of everything else. You may argue with me, but that's how I understand it.

Having said that, it is surely easier to let go and love Jesus at the end if we have been progressing towards him all our life. And also, the more we let go now and embrace him, the more we discover for ourselves the satisfaction, peace and love that he offers. After all, on the road to Jerusalem, Jesus told the disciples of the rewards of following him:

Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.

I'm sure we all understand how this can be so. Holding tightly on to something breeds anxiety. Letting go brings release and enjoyment.

This was a particular moment in history. It was a crisis moment. Jesus called the disciples and demanded much of them because he had a job of work that needed doing. It required self-giving and even suffering. Jesus still calls disciples today who must be prepared to pay a cost. If we're called we should count it a privilege and willingly step forward.

I've been exploring old Methodist hymn books recently. I quite enjoy getting on the piano and singing through hymns - especially late in the evening. I have a copy of the 1933 hymn book that belonged to my grandmother. And then there's the 1983 hymn book that's still in use in some churches in the circuit. And finally, published 10 years ago we have the present hymn book, *Singing the Faith*.

Hymns have changed over the years. They reflect changes in belief and practice. I've been going through the section on Growth in Grace and Holiness in the old hymn book. There are hymns in there I would not choose for a modern service – and not just because musical tastes have changed. They contain expressions of commitment going beyond what might be considered reasonable today.

The obvious question is whether such commitment has faded away. Where are the hymns today that express deep commitment? The truth is that they are still with us using modern words and set to modern music. There are modern hymns that are just as challenging as the old ones.

To quote from number 452 in *Singing the Faith* – it's a song of commitment by Matt Redman.

Show me the way of the cross once again,
Denying myself for the love that I've gained.
Everything's you now, everything's changed;

It's time you had my whole life, you can have it all.

Yes, I resolve to give it all; some things must die, some things must live,
not 'what can I gain' but 'what can I give'.

Echoes there of not 'what's mine is mine', but 'what's mine is yours'. And a telling line in the second verse:

I've given like a beggar but lived like the rich,
And crafted myself a more comfortable cross.

Yet what I am called to is deeper than this;

It's time you had my whole life,

You can have it all.

I find this very challenging. I have to acknowledge it's beyond me. But still we can sing it because this is where Christ is leading us. Maybe we're not ready now, and maybe will be ready at no time in this life. Thankfully, our Lord knows this and takes us gently in hand – leading us towards the goal as we are ready and able.

The Matt Redman hymn is a musical challenge to sing as well as a challenge to our level of commitment. Maybe we can sing it after lockdown when we're allowed to sing in church.

Instead, we will sing a hymn by John Bell that challenges us to follow Jesus. It begins,

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?

The first four verses ask us whether we are willing to follow Jesus. In the final verse, we answer the question and commit ourselves to joining Jesus on the way:

Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.

In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show.

Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

Hymn: StF673 Will you come and follow me? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_KR9f-7a7o

1 Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?

2 Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?

3 Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?

4 Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?

5 Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (1958-2019)

Prayers

Lord, you spoke to your disciples on the way to Jerusalem. You spoke to the crowd. You speak to us, and you speak to all people. Lord, help us to hear what you say. May we respond in our hearts, speak to others of what we know, and act out the love you have for us all.

Lord, we bring to you a world in need - those inflicted with Covid, those who mourn, those whose livelihoods are threatened. We especially think of the poorer parts of the world that lack the vaccine. Inspire us to share what we have and to recognise that all people, without distinction, are equally loved and valued by you.

We pray for peace in the world, between the powerful nations who hold in their hands the ability either to destroy or to develop togetherness as we face the great challenges of the future. And we pray for peace in the overlooked parts of the world where local conflicts and self-seeking governments bring suffering to many.

Lord, we thank you for attention given in the national discourse to discrimination through race, gender, sexual orientation, inequalities of wealth, and abuse of power. We pray that this may bear fruit and lead to an increase in justice and fairness to all. May we learn collectively to live by the value of your kingdom.

Lord, we bring before you those in our communities and amongst those known to us who are in need. In our hearts and in the silence, we name them now before you...

Lord, we thank you that you care deeply for those we name in your presence. May they be aware of your love and the prayers which hold them before you.

Lord, we thank you for the love divine that enfolds us. Carry us forward as we commit ourselves to following you in our daily lives. We ask in confidence that you hear the prayers we make this morning and the prayers we will make to you through the coming week. We pray in faith, believing and trusting in Jesus who gave his life that we might find life.

Amen.

Hymn: StF503 Love divine <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LASSGifk9DM>

1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art ;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

3 Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be ;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee :
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise !

2 Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive ;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Blessing (based on 1 Timothy 6 by Michael Perry):

Strive for righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness; Run the race of faith, Take hold of eternal life to which God called you when you confessed his name.

And the blessing of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – be with you now and always. *Amen*