

28th January 2024 – Morning Service

Andy Haynes

Call to Worship - Psalm 111 : 1 – 3

Praise the Lord. I will extol the Lord with all my heart. In the council of the upright and in the assembly. Great are the works of the Lord: they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are His deeds, and His righteousness endures forever.

StF 55 – Immortal, invisible

- 1) Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.
- 2) Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds which are fountains of
goodness and love.
- 3) To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
In all life thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish; but naught changeth
thee.
- 4) Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
All praise we would render: O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.
- 5) Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Walter Chalmers Smith

Prayer of Adoration

Lord God, we adore and worship You today, for You are worthy of all our praise, we marvel at Your creation, the mystery of it all, the wonder of it all. We ask now Lord, that You move amongst us as we gather in this Your house to praise Your Holy name. We are made in Your image, in Your likeness, we were made to praise and glorify You, inspire us as we aim to do that, for we cannot find the words to express Your greatness, Your majesty, Your power and might, You are an awesome God, an ever present God, an all knowing God, and above all this You are An ever loving God. Help us to realise that without You we are lost, so make us aware that we can only be complete when we seek forgiveness, repenting of our sin, worshiping the God who saves, all made possible by the gift of Your Son, the Lord Jesus; who taught us as we pray together to say:-

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 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.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 518 – Father hear the prayer we offer

- 1) Father, hear the prayer we offer:
Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength that we may ever
Live our lives courageously.
- 2) Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly.
- 3) Not for ever by still waters
Would we idly rest and stay;
But would strike the living fountains
From the rocks along our way.
- 4) Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be there at our side.

Love Maria Willis

Reading: Mark 1:21-28

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

StF 357 – Jesus the name high over all

- 1) Jesus - the name high over all,
In hell, or earth, or sky!
Angels revere, and nations fall,
And devils fear and fly.
- 2) Jesus - the name to sinners dear,
The name to sinners given!
It scatters all their guilty fear,
It turns their hell to heaven.
- 3) Jesus - the prisoner's fetters breaks,
And bruises Satan's head;
Power into strengthless souls it speaks,
And life into the dead.
- 4) O that the world might taste and see
The riches of his grace!
The arms of love that compass me
Would all the earth embrace.
- 5) His only righteousness I show,
His saving grace proclaim;
'Tis all my business here below
To cry: 'Behold the Lamb!'
- 6) Happy if with my latest breath
I might but gasp his name;
Preach him to all, and cry in death:
'Behold, behold the Lamb!'

Charles Wesley

Sermon

Here we find Jesus at the beginning of His ministry. Mark begins his gospel, not with the birth of Jesus as do Matthew and Luke, but with John the Baptist and the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, following on from His own baptism. In Mark 1 v 14 we read “... *Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.*” We then have a record of him calling His first disciples, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. Also James and his brother John. Then at the beginning of our reading we find Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum, where people were amazed at His teaching because, as we are told in Mark 1 v 22 “... *He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.*”

It seems as though they had never experienced anyone like this before, and it gave them food for thought as they asked questions of each other as we find in verse 27 *“What is this? A new teaching ...”* It’s a fantastic start, and Mark goes on to record how crowds gathered as many people were healed, including Simon’s Mother-in-law when Jesus went to her home. A man with leprosy is healed as Jesus and the disciples travel throughout Galilee.

But by chapter 2, Jesus is again in Capernaum when he heals a paralysed man who was lowered through the roof of the house where Jesus was teaching. Some of the teachers of the law were present and accuse Jesus of blasphemy. This is the first indication in Mark’s gospel of the fact that not everyone was going to accept Jesus, or recognise Him as the promised Messiah, the Son of God most high. Even the crowds who flocked around Jesus didn’t know who He was, just that His teaching was amazing, and he even healed the sick!

Therefore if we return to our set reading for today, it is interesting to see who did know exactly who Jesus was, and that was the impure spirit of the possessed man in the synagogue. Mark 1 v 24 *“What do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy one of God!”* And that should be proof enough for us, beyond any doubt who Jesus was, and how powerful He is, when those of the spiritual world instantly knew him. It is also clear that the unclean spirit knew what happens to those who choose to ignore Jesus and follow His teaching, when he asked *“have you come to destroy us?”* Notice how he uses the term ‘us’ and not ‘me’. For it is not only the unclean spirit who is destined for destruction, but the one who plays host to him. But Jesus had come to save the world, not to destroy it, for we read these words in Isaiah 42 v 3 which says *“A bruised reed He will not break, and a smouldering wick He will not snuff out”* So this is not the time to destroy evil, but to lead people to the light, for Jesus Himself is the light of the world. However, it will be different when He returns at the second coming to conquer evil and Satan.

This should be a warning for everyone to heed, an opportunity to get our house in order. But the world is not listening! Are we? For we are dead, destroyed, condemned and Godless if we make the wrong choices in life. And yet still hundreds of people tune in to watch programmes like the ‘Paranormal Caught on Camera’ and ‘Ghost Hunters’ and go to psychic evenings at the pub etc. Plus all the other dangerous phenomena that the majority of people think of as entertainment these days. They are fools, messing with things they don’t understand; no wonder our world is in the mess it’s in today.

The most worrying factor is that many Christians these days do not believe in demons – which give them a great advantage over them. And yet here is all the evidence we need to know about them – they are the polar opposites to Jesus, and they also know that He will one day be victor over them as they face their destruction. More people celebrate Halloween in Britain than celebrate Easter. Whilst it began as a time dedicated to remembering the saints and martyrs of the faith dearly departed, it has become a celebration of all things horror and the supernatural. Are your children and grandchildren guilty too? Have you warned them of the consequences of courting evil? Or do you laugh it off?

Verse 25 of our reading gives us the response to the impure spirits outburst - *“Be quiet!”* says Jesus sternly. *‘Come out of him!’* The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek” Today many do not accept the fact that people can be possessed by evil. We are now intellectually superior to the people of Jesus’s time and we have a great understanding of mental health issues. Or so we think! Actually, it just reminds me of another passage from Isaiah, this time 29 v 14, which says *“...the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.”* Paul backs this up in 1 Corinthians 1 v 20 when he says *“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”* How can we as Christians accept Christ’s teaching and yet think that he didn’t understand mental health? Jesus knew this man was possessed by evil, and He cast out the demon to prove it! There’s nothing more to discuss!

If we say we believe in God and Jesus, what does that prove? James reminds us in James 2 v 19 that *“Even the demons believe that – and shudder.”* We cannot be followers of Jesus unless we show evidence of that faith. If we pick and choose what’s true of Jesus’s ministry and teaching then if we are not careful at the end of our earthly lives we will hear the words of Jesus from Matthew 7 v 23 *“Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers’”*

So be certain of this – there are two forces at work in the world – both good and evil. Life is our God-given opportunity to make a choice, so make your choice wisely, and be sure and certain of your faith. Quoting from Matthew 7 again, in verse 7 Jesus says *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”* He is speaking about finding Him and truly knowing Him. Taking up that same attitude as we find the psalmist speaks of in Psalm 42 v 1 *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you.”*

Are we thirsting for a deeper knowledge in Jesus through the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Because if the church of God in Great Britain were to do more of this thirsting and hungering after all things righteous, we might find we were bold enough to follow the example of Jesus when He went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God! We may then have the same response as did Jesus when He began his ministry as recorded for us here in Mark’s gospel, when the people were amazed! When they asked questions like *“What is this? A new teaching?”* Today’s reading ended with these words *“... and with authority. He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey Him. News about Him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee”*

The knock on effect could be the same for us, when news would spread through the community where our churches are based, if we had the commitment, the belief and the action found in today’s lectionary. Amen

StF 254 – Seek ye first

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|---|---|
| 1) Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
And his righteousness,
And all these things shall be added unto you;
Allelu-, Alleluia: | 2) Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and ye shall find;
Knock and the door shall be opened unto you;
Allelu-, Alleluia: |
| Ch) <i>Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia,
Allelu-, Alleluia!</i> | 3) We shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;
Allelu-, Alleluia: |

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Prayers of Intercession

We bring before You our troubled world Lord, praying for all those who need help this day. Those who are suffering due to natural disasters such as the recent flooding, the earthquakes and the evacuation caused by volcanic activity, and other calamities around the globe. We bring our prayers before you, knowing that the disruption, the worry and heartache go on long after the stories disappear from our news headlines. We also remember the people caught up in the war in Ukraine, we pray for peace to return to the region. We bring before You the troubles in Israel and Palestine where there seems no answer to the violence and destruction taking place. We pray for the terrorist attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and ask that the violence doesn’t continue to escalate in the volatile Middle East, drawing in other nations around the world.

Lord in Your mercy – **Hear our prayer.**

And we also pray for those closer to home who need help, those who are sick and infirm, those from our own congregations who are in need at this time. We pray you will draw close to them and comfort them. We pray for our own circuit, that You will bless all those who work behind the scenes making sure our churches can continue to function providing for those whom they serve. We pray for all ministers, for their workload which continues to increase as things become more difficult, sustain them and strengthen them as they bring us the word of God each week. Bless us all and the churches we serve.

Lord in Your mercy – **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for our Nation, it's leaders and the decisions they have to make. We pray that corruption may be eradicated, that high moral standards will return, and that the post office scandal will be resolved to the satisfaction of all those affected during the past twenty years. We pray for our own local communities, and all those involved in local services such as schools, health care and emergency services to name but a few.

Lord in Your mercy – **Hear our prayer. Amen.**

StF 255 – The kingdom of God

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| 1) The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow. | 3) The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
Believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners brought Christ
to his cross,
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss. |
| 2) The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
The prisoners are freed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share,
And hope is awakened in place of despair. | 4) God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
And all things cry glory to God all in all! |

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The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all for evermore, **Amen**