

## Mark Bible Month Week 4: Mark 8: 22 – 10:52 Jesus teaches about following

By Rev'd Dr Ruth Midcalf

Welcome to worship today. As we gather from wherever we are, we come to worship, to give God, all the glory, all the honour, all the praise. We take a moment in quietness to acknowledge God's constant presence with us, but especially God's presence with us now.

We praise God as we sing our first hymn: Holy, Holy, Holy.

Hymn: StF 11/Hymns and Psalms 7 Holy, Holy, Holy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgHrNNM23p8>

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee:  
holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,  
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,  
who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee.  
though the sinful human eye thy glory may not see,  
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,  
perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!  
All thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and  
sea;  
holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Reginald Heber (1783-1826) (alt.)

Words and Music: Public Domain CCL Song Number 1156

### Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Almighty God, we gather to worship you this day. We come to say that we adore you. We come to praise you, for, as we have just sung, you are both, merciful and mighty. You are the Creator of all that is - seen and unseen. You are awesome and majestic, and yet, you know us better than we know ourselves. You know the number of hairs on our heads. You love us to the uttermost. You delight in us. You want the very best for us.

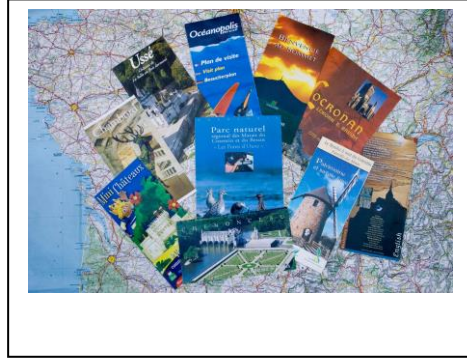
Gracious God, you alone are perfect in power, in love and in purity and we are conscious of those times when by our words, our thoughts and our actions we have not enabled the best for others or for ourselves. We ask your forgiveness for when hurt has been caused to others by our words or silence, by our action or inaction, by what has followed from our thoughts or thoughtlessness. Help us to move forward in the power of your Spirit, living lives that reflect your love and bring glory to you.

We ask this prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus, who taught us when we pray to say "Our Father..."

### The Lord's Prayer

## Reflection

Take a look at the pictures below – a path, a map and a nose! I wonder what they have in common.



If you said that they have the word 'follow' in common, then you are absolutely right!

If you are out walking, then you will probably follow a path to reach your destination.

For longer journeys, you might want to take a map with you so that you can follow your route.

And you might have heard the expression – "follow your nose". It means to trust your instincts, your experience and find your way based on them.

In this context, following is all about seeking direction. We also use the word 'follow' in other situations. We might say that we follow a particular sports team, or when we want to check on progress we will 'follow up'.

In our pictures though, following is about direction. As Christians where do we turn for direction? We can turn to God in prayer, we can turn to Scripture for guidance, we can share with each other, sharing how our stories intersect with God's story. In all these we will be following Jesus and He will show us the way!

**Hymn: StF 50 Great is the Lord OR Hymns and Psalms 792 Fill thou, my life**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlURBqCnm4E>

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.  
the city of our God, the holy place,  
the joy of the whole earth.  
Great is the Lord in whom we have the victory,  
he aids us against the enemy,  
we bow down on our knees.

*And Lord, we want to lift your name on high,  
and Lord, we want to thank you,  
for the works you've done in our lives;  
and Lord, we trust in your unfailing love,  
for you alone are God eternal,  
throughout earth and heaven above.*

Steve McEwan©1985 Body Songs.  
Administered by Song Solutions  
CCL Song Number 10769

**Reading:** Mark 10: 17-31

## Sermon

I really enjoy a good film. I can still remember the excitement of going to the cinema for the very first time as a child and queuing (in the first of many cinema-related queues) to see Star Wars. One of my favourite childhood films (and, if I'm honest, still a favourite) was made over two decades before I was born. It's the original film of the story of a boy who never grew up – Peter Pan. I loved it, because of the animation, the eclectic mix of characters, the storyline, and, probably most of all, the songs! My parents deserved a medal for endurance as many happy hours were spent singing one of my favourite tracks – 'We're following the leader, the leader, the leader, we're following the leader, wherever he may go'.

As we continue our exploration of Mark's Gospel, our focus today is on following Jesus. Almost everywhere he went Jesus was followed. Crowds would gather to hear him, to listen to him, to challenge him. If we skip back just a few paragraphs before the reading we've just read, in Mark's Gospel we are aware that when we encounter Jesus in our reading he is in a similar situation. A crowd has gathered - and into that crowd come people with children. The disciples try to discourage them – we can imagine them saying that Jesus is far too busy...far too important...But Jesus challenges this "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them for the kingdom of God, belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Let's hold on to those words as we explore the passage we read earlier.

Enter stage-left then a man. We find out later on in this encounter that he is a rich man. His respect for Jesus is obvious in his words and his actions. He kneels before Jesus, he calls him 'Good teacher' and he asks him a question - 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'. It is clear from the rest of the conversation that he is devout in his following of the law – the commandments. These are, in his own words commandments he has 'kept since I was a boy'. But more is needed...."One thing you lack' says Jesus....and shares with the man that he needs to put God first. Serving God, needs to be front and centre. This is a step too far for the man at that stage...he may have made it later. For now, his focus on is treasures on earth rather than treasures in heaven.

And here friends, I suggest is the first of three ways in which I believe this passage continues to be relevant for us today thousands of years later as we seek to follow Jesus. If we are to follow Jesus, then our lives need to be Christ-Centred. So often we can be tempted to shift the focus from following Jesus or Christ-centred living to letting something or someone else take the central place. We can be tempted to trust our 'earthly riches' whatever they may be, rather than trusting God. Central to Jesus teaching about following is that our lives are to be God centred, Christ-centred – as Jesus says (recorded in Matthew's Gospel) "...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well". This is not about storing up treasures on earth but riches in heaven. Jesus teaches that following him is about Christ-centred living.

Jesus also teaches that following is about change – change that is possible with God. We can imagine the disciples standing or sitting with their bottom jaws getting closer and closer to the floor as Jesus shares about the challenges of entering the kingdom of God and they imagine squeezing a camel – humps and all - – through the eye of a needle. We can imagine them looking in bewilderment at each other and, perhaps even despairingly saying – "Who then can be saved?". And Jesus replies – "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

As followers of Jesus, we are called to open ourselves to change, to transformation – to be childlike, acknowledging our dependence upon God as creator, as sustainer. We are called to be childlike – yes – but we are not called to be childish in our faith. We are called to change, to grow, to deepen in our discipleship as we follow our leader Jesus and grow in our relationship with him. As we do so, we realise more and more that the kingdom of God we are called to receive as little children turns worldly values on their heads – and involves change and transformation of heart and mind. To follow Jesus is to focus on

servanthood rather than status, to focus on others rather than ourselves, to focus on the margins rather than the mainstream – the first will be last and the last first.

Jesus teaches that following is about putting God first – Christ centred living. Jesus teaches that following is about change and requires change. And Jesus teaches that following is about commission. We remember when Jesus gave the disciples the ‘Great Commission’ before he ascended into heaven – telling them to go and make disciples. Here in our reading from Mark’s Gospel, Jesus shared with his disciples then, and shares with us as disciples now that to follow Jesus is about ‘going’...taking action that spreads the gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ. That could be through a card or a telephone call, it could be through leaving our homes to share in conversation. We are to follow the call of our leader, Jesus - to share his love, - his peace, his hope, his healing, his joy.

To follow our leader is about Christ-centred living; a desire, a hunger, a thirst, to be changed and transformed into Christlikeness; and an active obedience to Jesus’ commission to share the good news of Jesus Christ and make disciples. Sing with me friends and let us follow Jesus our leader, wherever He may go. AMEN

**Hymn: StF 447 Jesus be the centre OR Hymns and Psalms 524 I need thee every hour**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=884tPls01e0>

Jesus, be the centre, be my source, be my light, Jesus.	Jesus, be my vision, be my path, be my guide, Jesus.
Jesus, be the centre, be my hope, be my song, Jesus	<i>Be the fire in my heart, be the wind in these sails; be the reason that I live, Jesus, Jesus.</i>
<i>Be the fire in my heart, be the wind in these sails; be the reason that I live, Jesus, Jesus.</i>	Jesus, be the centre, be my source, be my light, Jesus.
	Michael Frye©1999 Vineyard Songs UK/Eire. Administered by Integrity Music CCL Song Number 2650429

### Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Loving Lord, we bring you our thanks, that in your great love for this world, you did not leave us in darkness, but sent Jesus Christ, your Son, to be the Saviour of the world – our Saviour. We thank you that each day is an opportunity for growing in our relationship with Jesus. We thank you that we do not have to do this by ourselves, but with the Holy Spirit as our guide and counsellor.

We thank you Lord that you have placed us as your people in your world for such a time as this. We bring your world before you. We bring those areas where there is war and where relationships are at breaking point, praying for your peace and reconciliation. We bring all those areas of your world that continue to be impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. We give you thanks for all who have been involved in facilitating the vaccine programme here in the UK and we pray that a way will be found for the vaccine to be made available across your world.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray Lord for your church throughout the world. On this Conference Sunday, we especially pray for the Methodist Conference continuing to meet this week in Birmingham and on-line. We pray for all those presbyters and deacons being received into Full Connexion with the Methodist Church and ordained today, that you will pour out your blessings upon them, their families and the congregations they serve.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray Lord for all those we know – all known to you and loved by you – who are in any kind of need at this time. We take a moment of quietness to name them before you.....

Loving Lord, we ask that all we have named before you and in all in any need this day, will have a deep sense of your presence with them, your love surrounding them and your strength sustaining them.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Finally, we pray for ourselves. Open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts we ask, that, in the words of the hymn, we might see you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly, day by day.

**AMEN.**

**Hymn: StF 563/Hymns and Psalms 704 O Jesus I have promised**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trs17OEHe7E>

<p>O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end; Lord, be for ever near me, my master and my friend; I shall not fear the battle if you are by my side, nor wander from the pathway if you will be my guide.</p> <p>O let me feel you near me; the world is ever near; I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear; my foes are ever near me, around me, and within; but, Jesus, now draw nearer, and shield my soul from sin.</p>	<p>O let me hear you speaking in accents clear and still, above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will; O speak to reassure me, to hasten or control; Lord, speak, and make me listen, O guardian of my soul.</p> <p>O Jesus, you have promised to all who follow you, that where you are in glory your servant shall be too; and, Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end; O give me grace to follow my master and my friend.</p> <p>John Ernest Bode (1816-1874) Words: Public Domain CCL Song Number: 2399773</p>
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### **Blessing**

We share together in the Grace. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. AMEN.