

## Circuit Service for 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2022

Prepared by Revd David Shaw

In this service there are different options reflecting the different contexts in which this service may be being used – in a home setting or as a Local Arrangement. Please consider what is most helpful for your situation.

Drawing close to God – pause for a moment and remind yourself God is with you. You might like to say the following words of a hymn (grammar slightly adapted) to yourself:

‘God is here, as we his people meet to offer praise and prayer.’

These words remind us not only that God is here, but we meet with other Christians even when we’re physically on our own.

Hymn Singing the Faith 55/Hymns & Psalms 9 ‘Immortal, invisible’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zd0FyrzVUCM>

<p>1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes, most blessèd, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>5 Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes, most blessèd, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.</p> <p>Walter Chalmers Smith (1824–1908)</p>
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Prayer

Let us pray:

We praise and adore you God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We have glimpsed who you are and our lives are being transformed by the unfolding vision of you. For you are

Loving

Gracious

Generous

Forgiving

Hospitable

Challenging

Creating

Holy

Beyond and yet close

Discovered in Jesus

Known by the Spirit.

Come Spirit to fill this worship that it maybe acceptable to you. Come Spirit that this worship maybe a time of encounter. Come Spirit that we may hear the words we need to hear to be encouraged and challenged in our faltering discipleship.

Blessed be God forever.

Amen

Lord's Prayer

## Activity

Let your hearts sing for a minute!! If you're sharing this service with others (eg Local Arrangement) turn to the person next to you and share what you have seen and smelt in nature – blossom on trees, daffodils in flower, the scent of spring or the singing of the birds. Describe in detail including how it made you feel. Enjoy the sharing. If you're on your own take time away from this paper and go to your window – what do you see? Why not open the window feel the freshness, hear the sounds. Breathe deeply, take it all in. Enjoy the moment. It is God's gift.

Hymn Singing the Faith 100 /Hymns & Psalms 330 'All things bright and beautiful'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPMA5I3-0Jw>

<p><i>All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.</i></p> <p>1 Each little flower that opens, each little bird that sings, he made their glowing colours, he made their tiny wings :</p> <p>2 The purple heathered mountain, the river running by, the sunset, and the morning that brightens up the sky :</p>	<p>3 The cold wind in the winter, the pleasant summer sun, the ripe fruits in the garden, he made them every one :</p> <p>4 He gave us eyes to see them, and lips that we might tell how great is God Almighty, who has made all things well :</p> <p>Cecil Frances Alexander (1818–1895) <i>(alt.)</i></p>
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Reading Mark 8 v 27 – end of the chapter

## Sermon

This story marks a turning point in the gospel. The New Testament training book for Local Preachers when I was 'On Trial' was by Morna Hooker and it was she who first drew my attention to the change of focus that occurs with this passage.

Jesus and his disciples are walking together near the villages around Caesera Phillippi. Walking is a good time to talk. Being alongside someone and not facing them allows for deep conversation. Jesus asks his disciples 'who do people say that I am?'. I imagine that when Jesus was speaking to the crowds his disciples were mingling and mixing, overhearing snatched conversations. They're catching the comments of those in the crowd. So, to Jesus' question the disciples respond with what they're hearing 'on the streets.' So, I wonder if Jesus were to ask us 'who do people say that I am?' what we would say. What are people 'on the streets' saying about Jesus?

Pause for a moment and think – what are people saying about Jesus? The people you know, perhaps family members, friends you have coffee with - do they say anything at all about him? Have we asked? I suspect for many people Jesus doesn't even cross their consciousness. Is that a fair assessment? Maybe there is work for us to do to ask folk, - family members, friends, work colleagues. It might lead to an interesting conversation and you, and I would be better informed and so would our mission.

'To be or not to be?' according to Shakespeare's Hamlet is supposed to be 'the question'!! I beg to differ with the great bard. The second question Jesus asks in this passage is the question. After the replies to the general question Jesus gets personal. He asks the disciples 'who do you say that I am?' Peter jumps straight in with his inspired answer. I wonder if the other disciples breathe a sigh of relief that they don't have to reveal their hand! What's your answer to this question Jesus asks? Please don't rush on to read any more until you've answered the question Jesus poses. It doesn't have to be set words like 'Messiah' or 'Saviour'. What words describe who Jesus is to you? Having a clearer idea of your answer will help in conversations which result from asking others the first question.

In the Bible story there's some toing and froing between Jesus and Peter before Jesus speaks not just to the disciples but to the crowd as well (v34). I believe Jesus is saying your answer to who I am requires more than just a verbal answer. The consequence of what you answer is discipleship. If we believe Jesus to be the one who we have just described. For me that is in terms of 'Son of God', 'the one who offers life in all its fullness' 'purpose giver' then I/we can't leave it at that we must listen and respond to what Jesus says next:

'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'

I've often thought of those 3 phrases as separate. As I was preparing for this sermon, I've come to see them as different facets of the same thing – denying oneself, taking up of one's cross and following Jesus. These 3 aspects – self-denial, cross bearing and following are not immediately brilliant selling points. A marketing expert would be suggesting more attractive options. In the biography of John Wesley, I'm reading, Wesley was struggling with the concept he'd been reading in Thomas a Kempis' 'The Imitation of Christ'. In this book, which became precious to Wesley, a Kempis was saying Christians would find life in a 'vale of tears'. Christians could look forward to being miserable!! Is that what Jesus is saying here 'being a disciple is a miserable existence marked by suffering and no joy?'!!! Wesley renounced the notion, as should we.

'Denying oneself' is not about losing one's identity. Far from it. It is about bringing everything about ourselves under the influence and into the use of Christ. Bringing skills, personality and experience into the service of the kingdom. What is denied is the self-focus, the idea that life revolves around us. Self-focus is denied in favour of the needs of kingdom and in the service of Christ. To do this daily is to take up one's cross. For taking up one's cross is to choose the way of Jesus, the way of justice, the way of loving God and our neighbour, the pattern of resisting everything and everyone which works counter to God's purposes. It's a daily choice which lies before those of us who have recognised who Jesus is. In making that daily choice we are following Jesus, who made those choices before us. Jesus explains that it is making these choices that we gain life. To do anything otherwise results in loss of life and soul. Jesus came to bring life in all its fulness, and that life is found in him and in service of the kingdom.

Prayer- taken from Circuit Service 20<sup>th</sup> March prepared by June Hardcastle

Lord our God, where we have made wrong choices, forgive us. Where we have failed to bear the fruits of discipleship, forgive us. We confess before one another and before the whole company of heaven that we have sinned in thought, word and deed and what we have left undone. We thank you that in your graciousness you forgive us and open before us an open door to heaven which no one can shut. Renew us, remake us until that day when we stand before you in the Heavenly Jerusalem and worship you with the angels and the saints from every age. Amen.

Hymn Singing the Faith 432/Hymns & Psalms 538 'O the bitter shame and sorrow'

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

<p>1 O the bitter shame and sorrow, that a time could ever be when I let the Saviour's pity plead in vain, and proudly answered : none of you and all of me !</p> <p>2 Yet you found me ; there I saw you dying and in agony, heard you pray, 'Forgive them, Father,' and my wistful heart said faintly : some of you and some of me !</p>	<p>3 Day by day your tender mercy, healing, helping, full and free, firm and strong, with endless patience brought me lower, while I whispered : more of you and less of me !</p> <p>4 Higher than the highest heaven, deeper than the deepest sea, Lord, your love at last has conquered ; grant me now my spirit's longing : all of you and none of me !</p> <p>Theodore Monod (1836–1921)</p>
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Prayers

Firstly, a prayer for Ukraine by David Thomas, Ireland's Church and Community Manager for Christian Aid

Lord of all people and all nations,  
 We lift before you the people of Ukraine and the people of Russia,  
 Each girl and boy, each woman and man living in fear of what tomorrow might bring,  
 We long for a time you spoke of through your prophet Isaiah,  
 When weapons of war would be beaten into ploughshares,  
 When nation will no longer lift up sword against nation,  
 We cry out to you for peace,  
 Protect those who only desire and deserve to live in security and safety,  
 Comfort those who fear for their lives and the lives of their loved ones,  
 Change the hearts of those set on violence and aggression,  
 Fill earthly leaders with great wisdom to find paths to peace,  
 Please Lord come and have your way in your world,  
 May your will be done here, on earth as it is in heaven,  
 May your peace reign. Now and always,  
 We lift this prayer to you, our God who is able to do  
 more than we can ever ask or imagine,  
 In the name of Christ our saviour,  
 Amen

The in the silence of your home or your church bring to mind those people and situations which need your prayers. Here are some areas for prayer you may wish to remember in the silence:

Family & friends      the Circuit as it grapples with challenges & opportunities      the environment  
 Those facing daunting bills & struggling to make ends meet.

Silence

Encircle Lord all those we have remembered. In your encircling may they receive what you know they need.

In the name of Jesus, we pray.      Amen

Hymn Singing the Faith 498 /Hymns & Psalms 726 'God of all power, and truth and grace'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lp5E8QA-LI>

<p>1 God of all power, and truth, and grace,          which shall from age to age endure,          whose word, when heaven and earth shall pass,          remains and stands for ever sure ;</p> <p>2 That I your mercy may proclaim,          that all the world your truth may see,          hallow your great and glorious name,          and perfect holiness in me.</p> <p>3 Your sanctifying Spirit pour          to quench my thirst and make me clean ;          now, Father, let the gracious shower          descend, and make me pure from sin.</p>	<p>4 Give me a new, a perfect heart,          free from all doubt and fear at last ;          the mind which was in Christ impart,          and let my spirit hold you fast.</p> <p>5 O that I now, from sin released,          your word may to the utmost prove,          enter into the promised rest,          the Canaan of your perfect love !</p> <p>6 Now let me gain perfection's height,          now let me into nothing fall,          be less than nothing in your sight,          and feel that Christ is all in all.</p> <p>Charles Wesley (1707–1788)</p>
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Blessing (Methodist 'Breakthrough Prayer')

God of love, God for all,  
your purposes are more beautiful  
than we can possibly imagine.  
Fill us with your Holy Spirit.  
Help us to let go of all that holds us back.  
Open our lives and our churches to new seasons  
of humility and faith, of change and growth.  
Shake us up with the good news of Jesus  
and show us the way.            Amen