

**Call to Worship** (Psalm 123)

Generous and Merciful God, we come to worship you.  
We lift our eyes to you, giving thanks for your compassion.  
Gracious is the Lord our God, and greatly to be praised!

Welcoming and Empowering God, we worship you.  
We lift our eyes to you, and we celebrate your faithfulness.  
Holy is the Lord our God, and greatly to be praised!  
We lift our eyes, seeking to worship and praise our God.

**Hymn** Today I awake (Tune *Lord of the years* at R&S 603)

Today I awake  
and God is before me,  
at night, as I dreamt,  
he summoned the day  
for God never sleeps,  
but patterns the morning  
with slithers of gold or  
glory in grey.

Today I affirm  
the Spirit within me  
at worship and work,  
in struggle and rest.  
The Spirit inspires  
all life which is changing  
from fearing to faith,  
from broken to blessed.

Today I arise  
and Christ is beside me.  
He walked through the dark  
to scatter new light.  
Yes, Christ is alive,  
and beckons his people  
to hope and to heal,  
resist and invite.

Today I enjoy  
the Trinity round me,  
above and beneath,  
before and behind;  
the Maker, the Son,  
the Spirit together –  
they called me to life  
and call me their friend.

John L Bell & Graham Maule

**Offering**

God, whose giving knows no ending,  
we offer up the treasure that you have entrusted to us;  
we offer up the skills and time that you have graciously given to us;  
we offer up ourselves in service and praise.  
Receive these gifts by your grace.  
Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit  
to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. **Amen.**

**Baptism**

**Sing** - May God's Blessing be upon you now. Red Folder 69

**Hymn** One more step along the world I go R&S 549

One more step along the world I go  
One more step along the world I go  
From the old things to the new  
Keep me traveling along with you  
*And it's from the old I travel to the new*  
*Keep me traveling along with you*  
Round the corners of the world I turn  
More and more about the world I learn  
And the new things that I see  
You'll be looking at along with me

Where I see no way to go  
You'll be telling me the way, I know

Give me courage when the world is rough  
Keep me loving though the world is tough  
Leap and sing in all I do  
Keep me traveling along with you

You are older than the world can be  
You are younger than the life in me  
Ever old and ever new  
Keep me traveling along with you.

As I travel through the bad and good  
Keep me traveling the way I should

Sydney Carter

## **Children leave for Sunday Club**

### **Opening Prayer**

We thank you, loving God, for the surprises which you spring on us!  
You take the unlovely and cherish them, the mediocre and make them gifted,  
the mere nobodies and ordain them your apostles.  
You entrust us with an authority and ministry far beyond our own strength.  
We are reticent. Yet under your patient care  
we discover that all things are possible to those who love you.  
We thank you today for the surprise of a child asking to be baptised,  
for Skylar and her family that they may always know your love and grace.  
Surprise us again, loving Friend. Surprise us with the Christ who believes in us  
and the grace which is made perfect in human weakness. Through Jesus Christ, we pray. **Amen**

**Bible reading:       Ezekiel 2:1-5**  
                              **Mark 6:1-13**

The first part of our reading from Mark, with the people in the synagogue asking “where did this man get all this?” essentially closes a section that began in Mark 4 when Jesus calms the storm and the disciples ask, “who is this” that even the wind and waves obey him? The end of the passage, where the disciples get sent out, opens a new chapter in Jesus’ ministry in which he gives his followers the authority to do what he can do. Just as there is when Jesus intertwines the story of the young girl who dies, with the woman who touches Jesus in the crowd, there is a reason Mark puts these two stories together – that of Jesus returning to his hometown and being rejected, and the sending out of the twelve disciples. Jesus receives a cold reception in Nazareth. That’s familiar to Gospel readers. It is also mentioned in Matthew and John, and in Luke where they ran him out of town and tried to throw him off a cliff! And it reminds us of an earlier scene in Mark, in which Jesus’ own family comes to seize him, questioning his sanity, and he declares himself to be part of a different family – those who do the will of God, in other words his followers, rather than his blood relations.

Jesus’ former neighbours do not deny that he does and says amazing things. Their astonishment is an expression of the annoyance or offence they feel toward him.

They are probably thinking, ‘who does this guy think he is? We know all about how badly he treated his poor family a little while ago. What kind of son leaves behind his mother and siblings to lead a movement that’s probably going to get him and a lot of other people in trouble?’ He would be better off staying at home and continuing to work as a carpenter. The Greek word used, is actually closer to meaning a stonemason or day labourer, it is probably only because Joseph was a carpenter that we assume Jesus did the same work. Either way, Jesus came from a very humble working-class background. The “offence” the people of Nazareth take entails rejection, the Greek word used means ‘to stumble’, but is used

elsewhere in Mark's gospel to mean, falling away or being a deserter. These people do not follow Jesus, they fall away and desert him, while we are told in verse one that his disciples did follow him. Another reason for their rejection, may have been the scandalous way he treated his family, in their view. Apart from his family thinking he is mad, another hint of division within Jesus' family may be the description of him as "the son of Mary". Unlike in Matthew, Luke, and John, nowhere in Mark is Jesus called "the son of Joseph." Does that imply that had Joseph died? If Jesus was the eldest son of a widowed mother, then leaving her without support while he practiced his itinerant ministry would have been scandalous in that day and age, though consistent with his teaching elsewhere where he tells others to leave everything, including their families to follow him.

Jesus interprets the rejection as part of a prophet's job description, explaining that prophets have no honour in their hometown, referring back to older scriptures and echoing in a way what we heard about Ezekiel that whether people listened to him or not, and probably not because the people were rebellious, they would know that there had been a prophet among them. The people of Nazareth, know Jesus is a prophet, but they choose not to follow him. The negative reaction in Nazareth seem to strangely hinder Jesus' abilities there – "he could do no deed of power", although he does manage to heal "a few sick people" before leaving town. But we would be mistaken if we think that this rejection by the people in Nazareth would inhibit Jesus going forward – he immediately takes steps to expand his ministry's reach. His twelve disciples are sent with authority to do his work. As are we. Baptism by confession of faith means really following Jesus and doing what he does. In Mark chapter 3 Jesus assembled the twelve who would follow him. In Mark there is no walking by the seashore selecting fishermen, Jesus "called those whom he wanted, and they came to him, and he appointed twelve." And he called them apostles, which means one sent on a mission. And in Mark they are named. That calling continues in chapter six. First, we are told they have followed him and then they are sent out. In pairs, probably for safety – first century Palestine was not a particularly safe place as we know from the story of the Good Samaritan. And he gives them authority over unclean spirits. Jesus' disciples are not passive beneficiaries of their teacher; he gives them a mandate to witness and to heal, replicating his own public ministry. Jesus' followers are not self-authorizing; they receive orders directly from Jesus and can execute them only because he has given them the power to do so.

And Jesus instructs them to model simplicity and dependency in what they wear and carry. They are to adorn themselves with the confidence that God or strangers will provide what they need. Interestingly, this is the same model of Buddhist monks and Hindu wise men.

Monks go out with only their robe and a bowl, which people they meet fill. Jesus' disciples are to avoid appearances of seeking personal gain by staying in a single house and avoiding creature comforts. If no one listens to them, they should sever associations, refusing to take even the town's dust with them on their way out. That detail may sound harsh, but so too is any village's refusal to welcome travellers in the first place. The society at that time was very hospitable and it was considered a great honour to welcome guests and feed them, and unthinkable to do otherwise.

The equipment for such ministry appears astonishingly meagre. Some first-century street preachers carried at least a pair of shirts, a staff, and a beggar's bag, but the twelve are forbidden the bag and change of shirt; they must live hand-to-mouth while on the road. In a way their paltry resources echo Jesus's own, which so astound his listeners in Galilee – that this labourer had such power to teach and heal.

Mark indicates that the disciples succeed in performing the kind of ministry Jesus has been doing up to this point – “they cast out many demons” and cure many who are sick. The positive outcomes owe themselves to two main factors. First, Jesus is the source of their authority; disciples are primarily followers. And second, the reign of God that Jesus initiates has a corporate or shared character; it's less about elevating Jesus himself as a figurehead, than about his commitment to create a new state of affairs. But offers of ministry can be refused as well as accepted. While we are told that the disciples were successful, as Jesus had been previously curing many, among his own family and town he was dishonoured, and that rejection short-circuited his ability to do any mighty deeds among them. So, too his disciples were told to shake the dust off their feet if they were not welcomed. No one, neither Christ nor his followers, can ram the gospel down people's throats if they are not ready and willing to hear it. If people repent, turn their minds to God, the conditions for healing are satisfied, but if they refuse to entrust themselves to the good news, then Jesus can do little but marvel at their faithlessness as he does in his hometown.

This pair of stories in Mark illustrates the social consequences of faith or unbelief. The saying about the prophet being honoured everywhere but at home recalls the saying earlier in Mark that Jesus calls, not the familiar righteous, but rather unknown sinners. More than any other Evangelist Mark highlights the poignancy that God's prophet is dishonoured in his homeland, among neighbours. Rejected at home in the synagogue, Jesus directs his followers to outsiders in the surrounding villages. For shelter they are instructed to stay in one house until leaving it for another, dependent on the kindness of strangers. It is a notable feature of early Christianity that so many of its adherents were ostracized by their families and found support among surrogate families in house churches.

Rejection from familiar people in Nazareth is in contrast to hospitality from strangers elsewhere in the villages of the region. This juxtaposition makes a powerful statement about Jesus' tendency to frustrate conventional expectations. It should make us wary about presuming that we have Jesus all figured out or that he must serve the way we think Christianity and church should be. The best way, to find and bring about the reign of God is to stay close to Jesus and follow where he goes, and do what he does – loving the stranger, caring for the sick and persecuted.

Jesus' authority is an important concept in Mark – Jesus has authority over the Sabbath, and over the wind and waves, and to forgive sins and cast out demons - so it is significant that he bestows authority to his followers to perform the same kind of ministry. As followers of Christ, we are a community authorised to speak and act on his behalf, which is a huge responsibility. We should remember that Jesus does not authorise us to know everything. The disciples were sent out in great humility, with nothing but the shirt on their backs. They were not to change the culture, or convert people, but were sent to heal people, in body mind and spirit. They were sent as guests, humbly willing to live by the kindness of strangers and commit themselves to the well-being of the people they encountered. We do well to remember how Jesus sends us out, and how he does not send us out.

**Hymn** Now in the name of him, who sent R&S 425 omit v 3

Now in the name of him, who sent  
to preach by word and sacrament,  
upon this new-born child we pray  
the strength of God in doubtful day.

This water is a seal and sign  
of costly love that makes us clean;  
this love we see in Christ portrayed,  
who rose triumphant from the dead.

Our names are written in his hand;  
he leads us to the promised land.  
We rise in wonder from the flood  
and love becomes our livelihood.

We sing our thanks that old and young  
so to the Church of Christ belong.  
This is the covenant of grace;  
we look salvation in the face.

Fred Kaan

### **Prayers of intercession**

God of all, we know you send us out to do your work, to face rejection, to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God, to have people turn their backs on us, to be your prophets, to be laughed at, to heal the sick, to be dismissed, to travel light, sometimes broke and sometimes penniless, and sometimes rich and wealthy.

We are reminded to shake the dust off of our shoes when we are not welcome and not listened to. We are reminded that in our weakness you are strong. We are reminded that in all of this Jesus, too, was rejected and a scandal to many.

Holy One, today some of us will step into pulpits as your prophets in places where we have been treated less than kind, and sometimes outright rejected. Lord, pour your healing salve into the wounds we carry.

Today, some of us may feel like total failures or like giving up. Pour your steadfast love into us that we may see ourselves as you see us, and not give up as you yourself did not give up.

Christ Church, 7 July 2024

Today, as we baptise a new follower, help us all to remember the promises we made when we were baptised or received into membership, to follow you, to love others, even our enemies, to bring wholeness and healing, and to spread your good news.

On this Sunday following the election, we pray for our country, our leaders and politicians - those newly elected that they may be guided by your wisdom and values. And that under a new government the country may come together for the good of all, putting aside differences of the past. We pray for healing, reconciliation, forgiveness and peace in all countries, but thinking especially of the Middle East and Ukraine.

God of creation, we pray for all those affected by storm Beryl in the Caribbean and Jamaica. And we pray for the many people across the world affected by climate change caused by our lack of care for your creation. Forgive us and help us to do better to sustain and preserve the planet.

Lord of peace, we pray for your compassion and healing for those individuals in our congregation who need it. We pray for your comfort and presence for those who are grieving, lonely and oppressed. We pray for warmth, shelter, clothing and food for those who are without those essentials of life. We pray for all those who are ill, especially those known to us – SILENCE.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn** O thou who camest from above R&S 433

O thou who camest from above  
the fire celestial to impart,  
kindle a flame of sacred love  
on the mean altar of my heart!

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire  
to work, and speak, and think for thee;  
still let me guard the holy fire,  
and still stir up the gift in me.

There let it for thy glory burn  
with inextinguishable blaze,  
and trembling to its source return  
in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Ready for all thy perfect will,  
my acts of faith and love repeat;  
till death thy endless mercies seal,  
and make the sacrifice complete.

Charles Wesley

### **Blessing**

Go now, and wherever people will hear you,  
proclaim the life-changing love of God.  
Do not fear your weakness,  
for when you are weakest, Christ's strength is known.  
Travel lightly, live simply,  
and honour those who welcome the gospel.  
And may God be your protection and safe haven;  
May the power of Christ Jesus dwell in you;  
and may the Holy Spirit be your guide forever.

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