

WRITTEN SERVICE 6 JUNE 2021 (BIBLE MONTH MARK)**Intro:**

Welcome to our service this morning. My name is John Bailey and I'm a local preacher within the Ripon and Lower Dales circuit. At this point I should mention that Methodism is encouraging Bible month, which is a way of studying one book from the Bible in greater depth over one month. This year the focus falls upon the gospel of Mark and the gospel is split into 4 sections, one for each week. There are study notes that will help you to go into deeper study through both the sermon each week and a resource group. The notes for these are in a booklet which allows you to do your own studying should there not be an appropriate group available to you through this month. For this week the focus falls on the first 3 chapters of Mark and the focus is on Jesus's identity and mission.

Whilst acknowledging this, I am not using the set reading for this study but using the lectionary reading which still falls within the first 3 chapters of Mark.

Call to worship

Come to worship the living God,
who calls us to a new way of belonging.
Come to follow Jesus,
whose love is stronger than evil.
Come in the power of the Spirit,
who challenges our fears and renews our purpose.
Come to join God's new family.

Hymn STF 34 O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him:the Lord is his name.

Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,
high on his heart he will bear it for you,
comfort your sorrows, and answer your prayerfulness,
showing the pathway your feet should pursue.

Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
of the poor wealth you would count as your own;
truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,
these are the offerings to bring to his throne.

These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,

he will accept for the name that is dear;
mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear.

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him:the Lord is his name.

John Samuel Bewley Monsell (1811-1875)

Prayers– let us pray

God of all Majesty
you have given us a wonderful world, and have also given us the ability to explore and understand it.
We praise You for the majesty and beauty of creation,
and for the opportunities which we have, to enjoy and appreciate all that you give to us.

As stewards of creation,
we have the responsibility to care for the world You have given.
We can manipulate our environment – for good or for ill,
to the benefit or the detriment of our fellow creatures.
We acknowledge afresh the huge impact that we humans as a species have
and the huge impact on the planet – and repent of the ways in which this has often been contrary to your will.

We pray that You will give guidance and discernment
to all who seek to discern between helpful and harmful applications of human advances and innovations.
We pray for the impacts of technologies in society –
and how we interact,
on how we view ourselves, other people,
all the world around us –
even how we view our Creator.
We give thanks for the opportunities given to explore the issues that technology raises;
we pray for wisdom as we reflect on how those technologies might be used.

As Christ called on his followers to be salt and light,
to have an impact on the communities in which we live,
we pray that, as we seek to witness for God in the world,
we will always do so in a loving and gentle way,

remembering that we need to be faithful to our calling to be salt and light.

Loving Lord,
as we as a church, as society, as a nation,
and as a world, seek to wrestle with the
significant issues,
we pray for wisdom, discernment and
compassion for all.

We pray all these things in the name of your
Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

A prayer of Confession

All loving God,
you know our frailty and our vulnerability
and accept us with all our weaknesses.
Forgive us when we see evil and fail to confront
it.
Forgive us when we allow ourselves
to be tied down by our fears.
Forgive us when we label and reject others
because they are different.
Forgive us when we become divided
by our own prejudice or compromise.
Renew us with your strength to challenge evil,
to overcome our fears,
and to work as one for your kingdom of love.
Amen.

And now for a change I would like us to share a paraphrase of

THE LORD'S PRAYER – Please respond by
reading the bold type

Great eternal One
Creator of the universe, holy is your name.
Your kingdom stretches across the face of the
earth, embracing us all;
Glory and power are yours for ever.
We seek to know your will – **help us.**
We seek to do your will – **guide us.**
The fruits of the earth come from your hand;
we thank you for your mercy.
We are surrounded by your compassion and
love;
Your generosity knows no end.
Give us grace to be generous to others.
You forgive us when we fail you.
Help us to forgive each other
and bring in your kingdom of justice and love,
**that all people may sing of your power and
glory
for ever and for ever. AMEN**

Reading 1 Samuel 8: 4-11, 16-20

New International Version - UK

⁴ So all the elders of Israel gathered together
and came to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵ They said to
him, 'You are old, and your sons do not follow
your ways; now appoint a king to lead^[a] us,
such as all the other nations have.'

⁶ But when they said, 'Give us a king to lead
us,' this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to
the LORD. ⁷ And the LORD told him: 'Listen to all
that the people are saying to you; it is not you
they have rejected, but they have rejected me
as their king. ⁸ As they have done from the day
I brought them up out of Egypt until this day,
forsaking me and serving other gods, so they
are doing to you. ⁹ Now listen to them; but
warn them solemnly and let them know what
the king who will reign over them will claim as
his rights.'

¹⁰ Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the
people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹ He
said, 'This is what the king who will reign over
you will claim as his rights: he will take your
sons and make them serve with his chariots
and horses, and they will run in front of his
chariots.

¹⁶ Your male and female servants and the best
of your cattle^[b] and donkeys he will take for his
own use. ¹⁷ He will take a tenth of your flocks,
and you yourselves will become his
slaves. ¹⁸ When that day comes, you will cry out
for relief from the king you have chosen, but
the LORD will not answer you in that day.'

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to Samuel.
'No!' they said. 'We want a king over
us. ²⁰ Then we shall be like all the other
nations, with a king to lead us and to go out
before us and fight our battles.'

Talk

The institution of kingship in other ancient near
Eastern nations such as Egypt and Babylon was
almost 2000 years old by the time of Saul and
David. Of course, there were smaller nations
such as Philistia, Moab, and Edom who also had
kings with permanent bureaucracies and
standing armies. Kings governed human affairs
and often seen either as Gods or as instruments
of the Gods.

The Israelites envied the other nations to the
extent that they disregarded Samuel's
warnings.

Unfortunately for Israel, several hundred years
of monarchy would prove that Samuel's
apprehensions were justified. Wicked kings

eventually that God's chosen nation into foreign domination exile. However, the monarchy would also provide the Messiah through David and his dynasty and God was able to establish the Messiah's kingdom forever. So, in some ways God used monarchy to fulfil his purposes!

Let me now try to set the scene. Mark starts his gospel as Jesus starts his work (there is no reference to childhood). Straightaway he sets out Jesus's identity – "the beginning of the good news of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God". This is rapidly followed by the confirmation of this by John baptising Jesus and as the Spirit descends upon Jesus, a voice from heaven says you are my dearly loved Son... After spending time in the wilderness Jesus starts preaching the word in Galilee – his call "the kingdom of God is near. Repent your sins and believe the good news." Mark has Jesus gathering his first 4 disciples from the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John). Jesus was then preaching in the synagogue when the first person to recognise him for who he was – was a man possessed by a demon – the demon recognised Jesus as "the Holy One of God" and Jesus responds by calling the demon out of the man. Having healed Simon and Andrew's mother from a malaise, Jesus continues through Galilee healing and casting out demons.

By Chapter 3, Jesus has healed on the Sabbath, already making enemies, and is really starting to draw large crowds. Having chosen his 12 disciples, we come to the passage that we are looking at today

Reading Mark 3: 20-35 (New International Version – UK)

Jesus accused by his family and by teachers of the law

²⁰ Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family^[a] heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'

²² And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.'

²³ So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: 'How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ If a

house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. ²⁷ In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.'

³⁰ He said this because they were saying, 'He has an impure spirit.'

³¹ Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³² A crowd was sitting round him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.'

³³ 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked. ³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle round him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'

Hymn STF 685 In Christ there is no east or west

In Christ there is no east or west,
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.

In him shall true hearts everywhere
their high communion find;
his service is the golden cord
close-binding humankind.

Join hands then all the human race,
whate'er your nation be;
all children of the living God
are surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both east and west,
in him meet south and north;
all Christlike souls are one in him,
throughout the whole wide earth.

John Oxenham, pseud. (1852-1941)
Words: (c) Desmond Dunkerley

Sermon

There is a lot happening in those 16 verses. There are crowds following Jesus around Galilee and they have in general greeted his actions with adulation but now rumour and innuendo creeps in. Is he out of his mind? His own family

seem to have their doubts and then the scribes from Jerusalem Temple weigh in. Their worry is that Jesus will start a revolution which could lead to the Romans banning Jewish religious practices and they tried to discredit him claiming that he must be a demon to cast out demons. Jesus highlights their lack of logic – why would Satan turn on himself, a house divided would be doomed. It is the work of God, not Satan and Jesus says that by misinterpreting the situation the scribes are blaspheming against the Holy Spirit which he says is an unforgivable sin. What Jesus is saying is if they can't recognise the power of God revealed in him, they are unable to receive God's forgiveness because they cannot recognise God at work.

Jesus then follows this up with the parable of the strong man, bound by one who is stronger. The battle between Jesus and Satan is laid bare. Jesus is the one who is binding back Satan and setting people free from the evil forces that dominate their lives.

And then in the last part of the reading, when Jesus hears that his family are looking for him, his only recorded response is that those gathered around listening to his teaching are his true kindred – "whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." There is therefore a strong emphasis that following Jesus should be at the very top of our approach to life. Any broken relationships arising will be compensated for, not only in the life to come, but also in this life that we find new kindred in Christ. I shouldn't need to point out that Jesus family comes round in the end – his mother Mary was there at the foot of the cross and is mentioned among the believers on Easter Sunday, while his brother James became leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem.

I think there are 3 points I would like to pick up on.

How do we confront the fear and rumours that abound?

How can we help in Jesus battle to set people free from evil forces that dominate their lives? What happens if we, like the scribes, ignore the God perspective and go our own way, not doing the will of God?

Firstly, you don't confront rumours by repeating them. The tongue can be an incredible weapon and as I have often been reminded, you really do need to engage brain before engaging speech. We also need to ensure that we are working with the Spirit and not against what God is wanting us to do. Being in a relationship

with God and listening to what he is saying to us is the important guide for our lives. We need to continually work on that relationship so that when we find problems, we are able to quell fears and help people understand the way forward.

Secondly, how do we help Jesus to liberate people who feel trapped in situations beyond their control. We have to be aware of those particular situations, for example: addiction, debt, exploitative labour or human trafficking. I think over the past few years I have talked on each of those subjects but of course there are other things like mental and physical illness, social exclusion, economic disparity, possibly even misplaced familial or religious loyalties. We can obviously work with specific help groups formed to tackle each separate subject maybe it is worth saying that you don't want to spread yourself too thinly just focus on one or two issues if you possibly can.

Thirdly what happens if we like the scribes ignore God and go our own way. The other day I caught the last half what I think was a panorama programme on artificial intelligence (AI). I found it, to say the least, somewhat mind-boggling. An apparently benign use of AI occurs in Japan, where robots designed to be as humanlike as possible, help care for an ageing population. I'm not sure whether I look forward to that or not. Some people may see robots as creepy especially when some are designed to be relatively small and cute – one company advertises that their helpful mini robot "loves to be around people, and relationships he forms are the most important to him," which could lull you into believing that the machine has a personality. Many of us are, of course, already aware of such devices has Amazon's Alexa, Google's Home and Apples' Siri which provide a technological presence in home, workplace and vehicle. They listened to our conversations and respond to instructions.

The late Stephen Hawking worried pessimistically that AI might one day end humankind. A more immediate issue may be who wields the power that the new technology undoubtedly brings. As C S Lewis said decades ago with remarkable prescience (using the non-inclusive language of his day): "man's power over nature turns out to be power exercised by some men over other men."

What really frightened me was looking at the issue of battlefield robots. I acknowledge that as an ex-member of the Royal Air Force I was trained to deliver weapons if necessary, that

would kill. The idea of dropping mini robot flying machines from aircraft that are pre-programmed to attack specific objects, even personnel worked out on recognition features left me worried. Where is the ability to stop an attack midway through or even pull away before it happens. When this technology is weaponised and is, through its programming, utterly fearless and emotionless, I believe significant moral, ethical and spiritual questions are raised.

There was a simple definition made by Cappadocian Fathers in the fourth century that a person was someone who had the ability to be in a relationship with another person. Last thinking about the Godhead relationship with us as humans being an I-you relationship. Any human relationship with AI, no matter how sophisticated the technology, can only ever be and I-it encounter. A comment by Alastair Donald that I read said that "Any technology from the simple knife to advance nuclear energy can be used by humans for both good and malign purposes. There is no doubt that AI and robotics have great potential for good and for the flourishing of humanity. But there also significant challenges that need to be carefully thought through." We can never allow God to be taken out of the equation of human life.

Which in essence brings us back to the last verse in our reading. Jesus says "anyone who does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." While still a beautiful world, we humans have created many disasters within it. We need to refocus our minds, our hearts and our actions towards doing God's will. By focusing on one or 2 subjects at a time, we may well find that we understand things better, create opportunities for change and come closer to God. I pray that we can all mean it we say your kingdom come.

Amen.

Prayers for others

– there is a response – when I say: **Your Kingdom come your will be done**, your response is: **on Earth as it is in heaven**.
Let us pray,

Lord Jesus Christ,
we pray, week in, week out, that your Kingdom will come and your will be done.
It is easier to say the words, far harder to mean them,
for they are concerned not just with you but with us.
Help us to understand that your Kingdom is not just in the future,

but something that begins with us, here and now,
and so help us to recognise our role in bringing it nearer,
through the love we show, the care we display,
the seeds we sow and the service we offer.

Your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

So now we pray for our world and for an end to all that frustrates your purpose.
We think of those in countries wracked by conflict, Covid, famine, and poverty;
we think specifically of – India and all countries that have seen little vaccination – of those places with disasters that have fallen out of the news but still have work to do and for many regions of Africa
we think of those who face repression and discrimination,
persecuted for what they believe or who they are;
and of those who are victims of crime, violence and war.

Your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray for the unemployed and homeless, the sick and suffering,
We especially think of those still suffering from Covid and those affected by its aftermath.
We think not only of our country but of the many countries in Europe where there are continuing problems.
We also think of the lonely and unloved, the disabled and disadvantaged.
We think of the many who cannot afford homes and search for whatever cover they can find
we think of those who find the benefits system cannot help sufficiently with their problem
and of all those who have lost heart in a world that does not care

Your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray for those who work to build a more just and loving world,
all who strive to bring help and healing to those in need –
ministers, preachers, missionaries and evangelists,
doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, councillors.

Your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

We think, too, of aid agencies, pressure groups,
charities, churches,
politicians, police and members of the Armed
Forces –
these and so many others who, in different
ways,
contribute to the fulfilment of your purpose.

Your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Lord we think of, and thank you for, all those
who support us:
our families and friends,
those who encourage and advise,
those who share their knowledge and lives with
us

Your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we look forward to that day when you will rule
in splendour,
when you will establish justice between the
nations
and there will be an end to sorrow, suffering,
darkness and death.
Until then,
Help us to commit ourselves to your service and
to work for your glory
so that we may honestly say and truly mean:

Your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

In your name we pray. **Amen**

**Final hymn STF 403 God is love, his
the care**

God is love: his the care,
tending each, everywhere.
God is love -- all is there!
Jesus came to show him,
that we all might know him:

Sing aloud, loud, loud!
Sing aloud, loud, loud!
God is good!
God is truth!
God is beauty! Praise him!

None can see God above;
neighbours here we can love;
thus may we Godward move,
finding him in others,
sisters all, and brothers:

Sing aloud, loud, loud!

Sing aloud, loud, loud!
God is good!
God is truth!
God is beauty! Praise him!

Jesus came, lived and died
for our sake, crucified,
rose again, glorified;
he was born to save us
by the truth he gave us:

Sing aloud, loud, loud!
Sing aloud, loud, loud!
God is good!
God is truth!
God is beauty! Praise him!

To our Lord praise we sing --
light and life, friend and king,
coming down love to bring,
pattern for our duty,
showing God in beauty:

Sing aloud, loud, loud!
Sing aloud, loud, loud!
God is good!
God is truth!
God is beauty! Praise him!

Percy Dearmer (1867-1936)

Blessing/The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, ever more.

Amen