

**Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit.
Worship at Home prepared by Kathy Lowrie
for 21st February 2021**

**1st Sunday in Lent
The Kingdom is near**

As we enter the period of Lent this year, it is hard to think that, like last year, we must celebrate Easter under Lockdown restrictions again. Once more we face the journey to the cross without our usual Lent study groups, Palm Sunday processions, or joyous Easter Day singing. But the journey to the cross is not taken alone, we have online, phone and written support to take us there, and we are guided this year by Mark. He writes our shortest Gospel, it's easy to read the 14 chapters in an hour. But it does mean that Jesus hits the ground running - there's no baby in a manger, or boy in a temple. Jesus is an adult, who we first meet at his baptism by John, when he sets out on his ministry. So, whilst our world has been forced to slow down, let us also say to Mark "Whoa, slow down, you move too fast!". Let us take the time this year to study Mark more closely – we find he's actually a very clever writer when we do that, as he teaches us about Jesus, God's beloved son.

Call to worship

As we come to meet you today, Lord Jesus, help us to believe that you are the world's true king, and to turn back from all that gets in the way of your rule in our lives. *(Tom Wright)*

Hymn StF 272 From heaven you came

1 From heaven you came, helpless babe,
entered our world, your glory veiled,
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.*

2 There in the garden of tears
my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said.

3 Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space

to cruel nails surrendered.

4 So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him,
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Prayers of praise and thanksgiving

Loving, faithful God,
your love is absolute,
your promises will never be broken,
your faithfulness extends to all generations.
Wherever we happen to be –
wilderness, mountain or valley bottom –
your Holy Spirit is with us.
We adore you, our loving, faithful God.

We thank you, faithful Lord,
for your patience, provision and power;
for your tenderness, trust and triumph;
for your security and strength;
for your compassion and wisdom.
We thank you, Lord,
that through your grace and mercy,
the blessings of faith,
and your covenant love,
you equip, teach and guide us
as we traverse today's world,
ever mindful of your steadfast love. **Amen**

Prayer of Confession

Beloved Lord Jesus,
you stepped from water to wilderness,
from God's voice to the taunting voice of the
enemy.
In the wilderness of today's world,
we face many enemies, many temptations.
Forgive us for succumbing to selfishness, greed,
lust, anger, power.

Lord most high, forgive us, we pray.

Forgive us when our minds fail to focus on you
and your word.
Help us to remember that no matter what we're
going through, you've been there before us.
Whether we're swimming in the warm waters of
your love,
or journeying through the arid wilderness,
help us not to lose sight of your
hand guiding us to eternal glory at rainbow's end.
Lord most high, forgive us, we pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, you went from water to wilderness to suffering on the cross. There you, beloved Son of God, died in your physical body for our sins. Through your blood we are washed clean of all our guilt. And we are able to enter the presence of God with whom you now sit, having been raised in the Spirit. All angels, power and authorities submit to you. Because of you, we are forgiven.
Praise be to Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Bible Reading: Mark 1: 9-15

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness for forty days being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come", he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Reflection

Mark's Gospel could be described as a condensed book, yet he packs so much inside, it can be too easy to miss the message he is giving. As an introduction to Jesus, it is a good book to read, being short and snappy, but for an in-depth study a Commentary is definitely needed! Because Mark is a very clever writer, there are echoes he places that are pointers to earlier scripture, and help to prove who Jesus is. Our Bible passage today really emphasises that. In 6 short verses we go from Baptism, to Temptation and then to Proclamation, but the echoes of the Old Testament are hidden there, if we look closely, so let's take them in order for a deeper look, then consider the message for ourselves therein.

Baptism

Mark's Gospel begins (v1-8) with John the

Baptist at work, calling the people to prepare for the way of the Lord – just as Isaiah had declared (40:3). Then Jesus arrives from Nazareth to be baptised, which John does, even though he doesn't understand why. "I'm not worthy to bend down and untie his sandals", he says in v7. Mark doesn't dwell on this, he wants us to note that when Jesus rose from the water, the heavens open and the Spirit descended like a dove. This reminds us of Isa 64:1 'Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down'.

We then hear God speak, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased", which is another reference to scripture - Psalm 2, where God installs his King on Zion, and names him 'My Son'.

So in Mark's short Baptism scene, we can greet the new kingdom to come, as God appoints his beloved son to be the ruler.

There are other OT references too. With Jesus passing through the water, we are reminded of Noah passing through the flood to begin a new creation on earth, and of the Exodus of the Israelites as they cross through the parted sea. Also in Genesis, we read of the Spirit hovering over the waters at creation, and God saying it was good - just as He does as the Spirit descends and He tells Jesus he was pleased with him.

In Mark, Jesus is baptised as an act to show us that this is the start of a new beginning - as our own baptism/entry to church membership is, and that Jesus is identifying with our humanity – our sinfulness. We need to repent from our old ways, there needs to be a change of heart and a commitment to accept the rule of Jesus as our king, and with the Spirit upon him, we also see the Trinity at work - God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit, an important belief for us Christians.

Temptation

Immediately after his baptism, Jesus is sent into the desert. In Mark's version we do not hear how Satan tempts Jesus, just that it lasts 40 days – a significant number to remind us of Noah's 40 days in his wilderness place of the Ark, and the 40 years of Exodus, both times of testing and re-affirming ones faith, something that we all endure too.

But Mark has another echo of scripture for us. In

v 12, Jesus was with the wild animals, and the angels attended him. In Isaiah there is a vision of a renewed creation (11:6-9; 65:25) where the wolf will live with the lamb, and in Job 38:4-7, God asks, 'where were you at creation, when stars sang and angels shouted for joy?'. So Mark is giving us another pointer to who Jesus is, and what he is offering us in the kingdom to come – when Jesus is Lord of all creation.

Proclamation

The final part of this short passage from Mark also has hidden depths, as Jesus leaves the desert and travels to Galilee. This is the beginning of his ministry among us. 'The time has come', he proclaims, 'the kingdom is near'. This is what the Israelites have been waiting for – the promised Messiah, with more echoes from Isaiah 40:9 (go up on a mountain, lift your voices and say "Here is your God") and 52:7 (how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring the good news, who proclaim peace and salvation).

Mark reminds his Jewish readers how their ancestors came through the water at the parting of the sea, and were tested in the desert before entering the promised land. Now Jesus has done the same, to herald a new land, a new kingdom, one which can now include Gentile (us), when God is the King.

What message does Mark have for us today? From the echoes of past scripture (OT) that Mark gives us, we learn that God is the rightful king of the world which he has made - and of everyone in it. But the OT also teaches that not all people acknowledged and submitted to God's rule, so the prophets spoke of the day when God's rule would be more truly established, and his purpose for his world brought to fruition. With Jesus, the kingdom of God becomes an eternal truth, and also a future hope. And it is that hope which Mark's message really triggers. No Jew hearing these words could have missed the point. All their scripture points to God taking control, and for us, he is doing it through the message and the mission of Jesus, the Messiah, his beloved Son, yesterday, today and tomorrow. The question is - Do you really live as if Jesus is your king?

You may not be familiar with this hymn, so read the words aloud, and ponder on their meaning.

Hymn Before the throne of God above

1 Before the throne of God above
I have a strong, a perfect plea,
a great high Priest whose name is Love,
who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on His hands,
my name is written on His heart;
I know that while in heaven He stands
no tongue can bid me thence depart,
no tongue can bid me thence depart.

2 When Satan tempts me to despair,
and tells me of my guilt within,
upward I look and see Him there
who made an end to all my sin.
Because the sinless Saviour died,
my sinful soul is counted free;
for God the just is satisfied,
to look on Him and pardon me,
to look on Him and pardon me.

3 Behold him there! The risen lamb,
my perfect, spotless righteousness;
the great unchangeable I AM,
the King of glory and of grace!
One with Himself I cannot die,
my soul is purchased with His blood;
my life is hid with Christ on high,
with Christ my Saviour and my God,
with Christ my Saviour and my God.

Charitie L Bancroft

Prayers of intercession

Most holy Lord, you were tempted, as we are;
be our strength in times of weakness.
When we fall lift us up, and direct us.
In our wanderings, be our guide;
that we may be your faithful people. **Amen.**

Lord our God, as we are baptised in your Name,
protect us from all evil
and deliver us from temptation.
May we use this Lent as a time
of dedication and renewal.
We pray that your church may stand
against evil and seek good.
We remember before you all who have lost faith,
Those who no longer pray themselves,
Those who find it difficult to trust in you,

or in anyone.
Lord we trust in you.

Deliver us from all evil.

We pray for all people who are possessed
by greed or selfishness,
For all who have become
insensitive to the needs of others.
Lord, we remember all exploited people:
We pray for those driven off their land
and out of their homes;
For all who are caught up in violence or in war,
For all who feel inadequate or unable to cope.
Lord we trust in you.

Deliver us from all evil.

We give thanks for all who have set us an
example of godly living,
For people of discipline and dedication.
We pray today for athletes and sportspeople,
and all who learn discipline through hobbies or
work.
We pray for those with whom we live and work,
and for our families and friends.
Lord we trust in you.

Deliver us from all evil.

We give thanks for healers and reconcilers.
We pray for relationships that have broken down,
For those full of animosity and hatred;
That we may learn to forgive as we are forgiven.
We pray for those caught up in crime and
wickedness.
Lord we trust in you.

Deliver us from all evil.

We give thanks and praise for all who have
triumphed over evil and temptation and
who now serve you in the peace of your
kingdom.
We pray for those who are departed, especially
remembering
and that at the last we may share with them in
glory.
Lord we trust in you.

Deliver us from all evil.

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus, our
Lord and Saviour who taught us to say:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,

thy kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
and deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn 407 Hear the call of the kingdom

- 1 Hear the call of the kingdom,
lift your eyes to the King;
let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.
- 2 Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ may shine through us.

*King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to
proclaim
salvation in Jesus' name.*

- 3 Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,
and a hope yet to come:
let the nations put their trust in him.

*King of heaven, we will answer the call ...
Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty and Stuart Townend*

Blessing

The Holy and the Strong One, the only true God,
scatter the darkness from before you,
deliver you from the powers of evil,
strengthen you in all goodness,
keep you in life eternal;
and may the blessing of the Father, the Son and
the Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you,
now and always. Amen.