

3rd September 2023 – Morning Service

Mirror, mirror on the wall

Rev Michael Payne

Call to Worship

The Kingdom is at hand, live in the Kingdom and learn of Kingdom life.

Prayer of Approach

Lord God, in humility we come before you. We come that we might worship you and so experience more of your love and grace. Open our hearts and minds that we may draw close to you and be amazed at what we experience. **Amen**

StF 334 – Praise to the Holiest in the height

(Verse 1 sung again at the end)

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| 1) Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise;
In all his words most wonderful,
Most sure in all his ways. | 4) And that a higher gift than grace
Should flesh and blood refine,
God's presence and his very self,
And essence all-divine. |
| 2) O loving wisdom of our God!
When all was sin and shame,
A second Adam to the fight
And to the rescue came. | 5) O generous love! that he, who came
As man to smite the foe,
The double agony for us
As man should undergo; |
| 3) O wisest love! that flesh and blood,
Which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe,
Should strive and should prevail; | 6) And in the garden secretly,
And on the cross on high,
Should teach his followers, and inspire
To suffer and to die. |

John Henry Newman

Prayers of Praise and Confession

Lord God we praise you that though you are Almighty you are not beyond us; though you are more than we can imagine you are experienced in our lives; though your ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts you make yourself known to us; though we often desire to go our way you always welcome us back. We praise you for the limitless love you express to your creation. It was out of love you created and in love you created us. In love you created us to live in love with you and the whole of your creation. Human history is full of stories of us living in other ways. In time you came amongst us in your Son Jesus. We praise you that he showed us what true love and life is like. We praise you he chose your path, even the path to the cross, because of love. We praise you that your love is the strongest force in the world and love conquered death. As we worship this day once more we come to admit our failings and sin, to confess our need of your grace. In silence we pause and reflect upon our life.....[*Silence.....*]

Lord Jesus, you know the thoughts of our minds hear us with your mercy and forgive us through your grace. Speak into our spirit, by your Spirit, those amazing words, "Your sins are forgiven." **Amen**

Reading: Romans 12:9-21 – Love in action

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another.

Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

StF 272 – From heaven you came

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| 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. | 3) Come see His hands and His feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice,
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered. |
| Ch) <i>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.</i> | 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. |
| 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. | |

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Reading: Matthew 16:21-28 – Jesus predicts his death

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Sermon

This section of the Gospels is a turning point in each of the Synoptic Gospel's, Matthew Mark and Luke. After Jesus asks the disciples "Who do people say that I am" and "who do you say I am" there is a shift in emphasis and direction.

Simon Peter's declaration about Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Is affirmed by Jesus - *Matthew 16:17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."*

With this background we get to the Gospel passage from Matthew for today. "If this is the case, if you are the Messiah we need to work on it" seems to be the response of the disciples. "OK," thinks Simon Peter and the other disciples, "that being the case we need a plan". I have a strange picture now of Blackadder walking up to Jesus and saying, "I have a cunning plan, my Lord."

You could imagine the disciples, after the affirmation given to Peter, of going away for a couple of hours to plan their strategy. If Jesus is the King, and if his people are to be like a house built on rock then they must work out how to get rid of the present kings and priests who are ruling – or rather mis-ruling – Israel and put in a new control. “Ok, let us march on Jerusalem, pick up supporters on the way who will follow us along, choose our moment, say our prayers, fight a surprise battle, take over the Temple and install Jesus as King. QED.” QED is an initialism of the Latin phrase *quod erat demonstrandum*, which translates as “which was to be demonstrated” or more colloquially “Quite Easily Done!” In earthly terms and Peter-thinking, that is how God’s kingdom will come. That is how the Son of Man will be exalted in his Kingdom – “that is my cunning plan, my Lord.”

This worldly thinking of Peter was quickly challenged by Jesus. Jesus has another way of doing “things”, God’s ways are not our ways.

A number of years ago there was a BBC series called “Ocean Giants.” In one episode there was a section where the scientists were seeing the reaction of dolphins to mirrors and whether they realized that it was themselves that they were seeing. The dolphins did work it out. . It is reckoned that a child will be about two before they understand it is a reflection of themselves that they are looking at. In our garden Anita has placed mirrors on the fence and many people looking at them from the house think there are holes in fence looking into the neighbours garden – untrue. Mirrors can play with our minds.

To do things whilst only looking in a mirror can be quite difficult until we get used to doing it, then we get on with it without thinking. But some tasks are more difficult; how good are you at writing backwards whilst looking in a mirror?

When Lewis Carroll had become famous through his story of “Alice in Wonderland” he followed it up with a second book, “Through the looking glass.” In it his readers needed to learn how to think inside out. In order to get somewhere in that world you discover it is no good trying to walk towards it; if you do you’ll look up presently and discover you are further away than ever. In order to get somewhere you have to set off in the opposite direction. It takes a sustained mental effort to imagine all ordinary activities of life working in a mirror.

Jesus, in the days following Simon Peter’s confession of faith, asks his disciples to think in a similar inside out manner. To begin with they cannot cope and find it completely impossible to believe that the way Jesus suggests can be right at all -

Matthew 16:21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Matthew 16:22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

The route Jesus suggests does not fit with the ideas of Peter and the disciples and Peter lets Jesus know. Jesus’ proposal is a through the looking glass version of the “Peter plan”. Yes, we’ll be going to Jerusalem. Yes, the Kingdom is coming, coming soon now. Yes, the Son of man will be exalted as king, dispensing justice to the world, but the route to the Kingdom is the exact opposite road to the one the disciples have in mind. The route of Jesus was the route of suffering and death. Jesus will indeed confront the rulers and the authorities, the chief priest and legal experts, in Jerusalem, but they, not he, will appear to win the battle. He will then be raised from the dead, so Jesus says, but neither Peter nor the other disciples can figure out for the moment what he means by this. They see him talking nonsense; Peter blunders in with his best feet forward in a two footed lunge tackle liable to receive a red card. We see him moving from rock to shifting sand and Jesus uses words for Peter he has used for his arch enemy.

This passage holds a warning for all of us who are involved in the life of the Kingdom, particularly in leadership roles, that the one to whom so many of the greatest promises and commissions were given earned the sharpest rebuke.

Like Paul in his letters and the prophet Isaiah, Jesus insists that God thinks differently from how we mortals think. God sees everything inside out; or perhaps God sees everything the right way round and we are looking at things back to front, inside out.

1 Corinthians 13:12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.

In Romans 12:20 Paul quotes Psalm 25

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you."

The message is that the Church is called to think God's way not man's way and that is not always easy or comfortable. Jesus then goes on to talk about following –

Mathew 16:24&25 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."

This is not the Peter method of people casually joining in a gentle procession into Jerusalem like the Pied Piper of Hamlyn. But to follow Jesus will cost everything but will give you everything as well. There are no half measures in this journey. To truly follow Jesus is a bit like learning to swim - you cannot do it whilst one foot is on the bottom. To follow we must learn to think "inside out" for what the world counts as foolishness is true wisdom. Cling to your life and you will lose it – let go of your life and you will truly live. Kingdom thinking is what we are called to be involved with. God's Kingdom is different to earthly empire. We can easily seek earthly empire and miss God's Kingdom.

StF 518 – Father hear the prayer we offer

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| 1) Father, hear the prayer we offer:
Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength that we may ever
Live our lives courageously. | 3) Not for ever by still waters
Would we idly rest and stay;
But would strike the living fountains
From the rocks along our way. |
| 2) Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly. | 4) Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be there at our side. |

Love Maria Willis

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for the leaders in society, in the life of faith, government and business that they may lead in the ways of love and grace not profit and power.....

Let us pray for those whose lives are difficult through the environment in which they are living, Lord we pray that relief may come to the needy and strength given to those taking aid.....

Let us pray for those starting back in education this week may there be a growth in respect for one another and a desire to learn from each other.....

Let us pray for those unwell in hospital or home, remembering before God those who we know particularly as we name them before him.....

Let us pray for ourselves as individuals and congregation that we may follow the way of Kingdom and not the way of self.....

We bring our prayers together as we say with each other the prayer Jesus taught his disciples:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 563 – O Jesus I have promised

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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.
- 3) 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.
- 4) 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!

John Ernest Bode

Benediction

May we go from here and take up our cross and follow Jesus, knowing that as we do so, we will be blessed by our Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit to be a blessing to others. **Amen**