

# Dorset South & West Circuit Written Service

## by Rev'd Peter Clark - Sunday 19 September 2021

### Call to Worship

At this time, in this place, let us worship God – with open ears ready to listen and hearts ready to receive, minds willing to be challenged and attitudes given to God.

Come, we worship God as one.

### Hymn 1 - He came singing love

1 He came singing love  
and he lived singing love  
and he died singing love.  
He arose in silence.  
For the love to go on  
we must make it our song:  
You and I be the singers.

2 He came singing faith  
and he lived singing faith;  
he died singing faith.  
He arose in silence.  
For the love to go on  
we must make it our song:  
You and I be the singers.

3 He came singing hope  
and he lived singing hope;  
he died singing hope.  
He arose in silence.  
For the love to go on  
we must make it our song:  
You and I be the singers.

4 He came singing peace  
and he lived singing peace;  
he died singing peace.  
He arose in silence.  
For the love to go on  
we must make it our song:  
You and I be the singers.

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### Prayer of Approach

Lord God, you call us to live our best lives – for you, with you, in you.

We may sometimes pause to smell the coffee or the roses, but we are often too busy to take time to be aware of you – that you are with us, in us, and in those around us.

Quieten our hearts now to recognise you in this place today. Help us to reach out to one another with love, care and compassion, so that we can all live our best life for you. Amen.

### Prayer of Preparation

*(Take a moment to think about what jostling for position means to you. Where do you see yourself in relation to others?)*

Jesus said: 'Anyone who wants to be first must be last.'

Lord, for the times I've put myself first, or argued with people, because I think I know better than them or that I am better than them...

For the times when I don't want to be a servant because I think

I'm capable of greater things... Lord, please forgive me, and teach me my rightful place in you.

When I don't recognise Christ in those around me because I'm

too busy looking out for myself... Lord, please forgive me, and teach me my rightful place in you.

When I don't understand what people mean, perhaps not understanding their feelings of fear or inadequacy... Lord, please forgive me, and teach me my rightful place in you.

When I jostle for position, rather than being happy where you

put me... Lord, please forgive me, and teach me my rightful place in you.

*[Pause]*

You challenge us, Lord, when we do wrong. You get us to focus by using questions, even though you know the answers. Your image is present in each one of us. When we confess our faults and mistakes, you are always there to forgive us when we acknowledge them. We stand now, humbly in your presence. Forgiven and acknowledging that you are the greatest. Amen.

## **Lord's Prayer**

### **Scripture Readings**

#### **James 3:13-4:3 & 7-8a**

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. 15 Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. 16 For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

1 Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? 2 You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

#### **Mark 9:30-37**

30 [*Jesus and the Disciples*] went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." 32 But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. 33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" 34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

### **Sermon - Like a Slave or as a Child**

The last time Jesus tried to tell his followers that this wonderful journey with all its fabulous teaching, amazing miracles and incredible healings would actually end in betrayal, death and resurrection, Peter argued that with him ... and was severely reprimanded. Mostly probably because all they heard was the betrayal / death bit of the prediction and they a) couldn't conceive of this rosy period ending so and b) they thought instead of hanging out with the great Messiah as clearly heading towards something much more glorious?

Mind you, if they'd noticed the third bit of his prediction (the rising again after three days bit!) they might have possibly seen something pretty glorious on the horizon?

But that's the human condition isn't it? We often imagine how it will be / might be / could be ... and then interpret the world around us in the light of our expectations / vision rather than in that of the evidence of our own eyes and ears? So it is not surprising that they go silent in the face of this, the second time he predicts the events of Calvary?

And of course another part of the human condition is a desire to compete ... and win? Having recently enjoyed a summer of sport with Wimbledon, the Euros, the Olympics and Paralympics and Cricket, in its many manifestations including the new '100' (if anyone has worked out what was gigot on there, please let me know!!!) - it is evident that sport is a manifestation of our

competitive traits. So in many ways it is also not surprising to us that the Disciples get diverted from Jesus' message with a bit of an argument about who of them was the greatest?

Jesus' response is, though very surprising and deeply, deeply challenging! He doesn't tell them off for not listening. Nor does he castigate them for their argumentative behaviour but, simply and counter-culturally says, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

Bearing in mind that the word translated in the NRSV as 'servant' more accurately should be 'slave,' that is not just surprising and counter-cultural, it is shocking! Slavery did not have the race-based connotations that we moderns understand for, in their time, slaves were widespread an accepted part of society and a simple fact of life. But, undoubtedly they were the lowest of the low in society and being a slave, or like a slave, was certainly not a model to be emulated!

Neither, in a society where children were not only particularly valued but, with massively high mortality rates, almost disposable (yes I know - a horrible thought!). So Jesus' rubbing in his message by taking a small child on his knee and telling them that anyone welcoming and valuing one such as that infant was in fact welcoming and accepting not only Jesus himself, but his message, his mission and indeed his Father in heaven - the one who had sent him. It is a message that would have reinforced the shock of his reference to slavery.

If the Disciples were challenged by this betrayal and death predictions, they would've been doubly so by the suggestion that the way of the Kingdom wasn't one of glory, victory and lording it over others but, rather about self-abasement, humility and being not first but 'last of all!' It was a message that Jesus later reinforced (as recorded by John) by washing their feet at the end of their final meal together and, ultimately by his self-sacrifice and humbling death on a rubbish tip outside the city walls.

I confess that I do love a beautiful and spectacular church building and will often include a church or, even better, a cathedral in my itinerary when on holiday. And yet I do wonder if perhaps the Christian church has put too much effort over the years in erecting buildings that are effectively saying "I am the greatest' rather than (as they no doubt intended) pointing towards our great God? Likewise when the church authorities take themselves to be more important than what (and who) they actually represent or have become too closely allied with the secular powers, then they have, I feared, veered off the path set out by Jesus in this key message.

We are, after all, the followers not of a ruler who took control of a city or a nation by force of arms. We're not the disciples of a leader who was rich, powerful or strong in any way that the world we live in now understands ((or as would our forebears lived in the past). We are, rather the ones whose faith is in one whose definition of greatness was different, challenging and very probably contrary not only our own instincts but the whole understanding of humanity.

Greatness is more about serving, helping, supporting and self-sacrificing, surely?

As it says in our reading from James, "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace."

And I know James gets a bit of criticism because it is implied that he is saying "Do these things, behave like this and earn your salvation that way by such works." And it is equally possible to interpret this all as simply boiling down to 'Being nice!' or 'Being good!'

But I don't read it nor the teaching of Jesus that way at all. I read it as saying we need to be giving, loving, supportive and, indeed behave self-sacrificially for no reason other than, as James indicates, because it is **wise!**

It is the way Jesus taught us. It is based on Kingdom values.

It is the way God wishes us to behave

It is, to quote Joshua's words from the Old Testament reading from a few weeks ago why I say "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord! Amen

## Prayers

Lord, we pray for all who have decisions to make today, or who face difficulties or challenges in their lives.

We pray for those who are making decisions on behalf of others, and those whose decisions affect lives other than their own.

We pray that they may have courage to do what is right, and the vision to see what is important, when there are so many other distractions.

We pray that they may all have the wisdom that comes from you – pure, peace-loving, gentle and merciful.

We pray for your Church, in all her diversity, that she may seek you above all, that you may grant her discernment and compassion.

We pray that we may yield good fruit in our lives, not 'lording' it over others or squabbling about what we deserve but instead considering the needs of others first.

Let us receive as we have been received, forgive as we have been forgiven, and love as we have been loved. For Jesus Christ's sake.

Amen.

## Hymn 1 - Beauty for brokenness (God of the Poor)

1 Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,

Lord in the suffering this is our prayer

Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,

Sunrise to sunset your kingdom increase

2. Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,

work for the craftsmen, trade for their skills.

Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,

Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak.

*Refrain:*

*God of the poor, friend of the weak,*

*Give us compassion we pray,*

*Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain.*

*Come change our love from a spark to a flame.*

3. Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,

Cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.

Peace to the killing fields, scorched earth to green,

Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain.

4. Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams,

plundered and poisoned, our future, our dreams.

Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;  
Make us content with the things that we need.

*Refrain*

5. Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame,

until your justice burns brightly again;

until the nations learn of your ways,

seek your salvation and bring you their praise.

*Refrain*

*Words & Music: Graham Kendrick © 1993 Make Way Music*

## Blessing

Lord, Jesus, may we go out into the world to shine with your love, listen with your ears and speak words of kindness and hope to everyone we meet – in your name. Amen..