

Call to worship

Psalm 54 v 1 – 2

Save me, O God, by your name, and vindicate me by your might.  
Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth.

Hymn StF 449

Lord of creation, to you be all praise!  
Most mighty your working, most wondrous  
your ways!  
Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,  
and yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.

Lord of all power, I give you my will,  
in joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.  
Your bondage is freedom; your service is  
song;  
and, held in your keeping, my weakness is  
strong.

Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;  
I praise and adore you for all you impart,  
your love to inspire me, your counsel to  
guide,  
your presence to shield me, whatever betide.

Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind,  
rich truth that surpasses my knowledge to  
find;  
what eye has not seen and what ear has not  
heard  
is taught by your Spirit and shines from your  
word.

Lord of all being, I give you my all;  
if I should disown you, I stumble and fall;  
but, led in your service, your word to obey,  
I'll walk in your freedom to the end of the way.  
John Copley Winslow

Prayer of Praise

Loving and ever giving God, we bring our praise and adoration that you never give up on us, your children, your creation, even when we do the things that are directly against your instruction. You carefully and patiently guide us back onto the path, and with compassion allow us to continue our journey with you. We praise you that when our sensibilities fail and our basest humanity rears itself from within, your Spirit can quell and calm our mood and return joy in place of despair and we can return to your love filled ways. We praise you that when we do not know which way to turn and can be beside ourselves in desperation, your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ reminds us of his teachings and example and our energy reappears so we re-turn to you and continue to walk in his Way.

For every moment of our lives, when you are there with us, as you promised, we bring our praise and adoration. Amen.

Reading

Mark 9: 30 – 37

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it, 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." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Then they came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them, and taking it in his arms he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

## Prayer of Confession

Our prayer of confession is the hymn below

### Hymn StF 420

Because you came and sat beside us,  
because you came and heard us speak,  
and we ignored you and we refused you,  
we ask forgiveness, Lord Jesus Christ.

Because you laughed and loved the child-  
like,  
because you lived from day to day,  
and we love status and steady money,  
we ask forgiveness, Lord Jesus Christ.

Because our peace was your agenda,  
because you wept to see us war,  
and we love power, and winning battles,  
we ask forgiveness, Lord Jesus Christ.

Because your Cross compels an answer,  
because your love absorbs our sin,  
and we are wounded because we wound you,  
we ask forgiveness, Lord Jesus Christ.

Because you came on Easter morning,  
because you come at Pentecost,  
and in the Spirit, we are forgiven,  
we live to praise you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Shirley Erena Murray

### Reflection

I sometimes despair of how idiotic we can be as individuals and as a group. We are not stupid, we have knowledge and experience and yet, when the opportunity presents itself, that all goes, and our words and our behaviour let us down completely. Occasionally there may be an excuse, like provocation, but even then we should be able to rise above it. But then I am not surprised when Jesus' disciples speak and act in the way they do because they are like us, human beings, and over the centuries we do not change that much!

In our reading we have lots of different thoughts and happenings all coming together, so we try and make sense of it by being there. We know that Mark's Gospel doesn't hang about so the sequence of events may be condensed somewhat, but we will try to understand it. Previous to the above passage, Jesus and his disciples had been with a family whose little boy was suffering from fits making him deaf and dumb. Jesus had cured him, but he was so still that the disciples thought he was dead, but it was a part of the healing, and they left with the boy standing upright, safely back with his parents. The disciples seemed rather put out that they had not been able to cure him without Jesus and asked him why, but out of earshot of the family. Jesus responds, "This kind can come out only through prayer."

But before all this happened, according to Mark's Gospel, the disciples had witnessed the Transfiguration and the conversation was about what came next. No wonder the disciples were talking and arguing about what they had seen and heard. Jesus tries to get them to understand future events and tells them about his death and resurrection, but the disciples appear unwilling or unable to comprehend this, and they are afraid to ask, so they fall back to their talking and arguing. If you remember Peter, James, and John, were witness to the Transfiguration, and had been told not to talk about it, but they may have interpreted that as 'no-one outside the twelve' and conversation about who was taken and who was not could have easily led to arguments about favouritism and greatness. Although Jesus probably knew this, partly through understanding how people are, and maybe overhearing, he questions them and they are ashamed to admit what they had been doing.

It almost seems to me like a bit of sibling rivalry, and there are brothers within the group, trying to get the most attention, but Jesus' words turn their thoughts on their heads. What does it mean if everything is topsy-turvy? Everything they had known in their lives, everything they had been working towards didn't make sense – but then maybe it illuminated other things they were already confused about. If the world was upside-down, or the wrong way round, then dying and being resurrected could make sense; helping and healing ordinary people along the way was the path to take instead of going straight to the top people and dazzling them with power; a groundswell movement rather than an enforced takeover would be more effective.

To emphasise the point Jesus takes a small, innocent, guileless child and says: "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

A child who would normally be ignored, unless they were direct family, until they became an adult and made something of themselves in the world, were exactly the ones to be welcomed, accepted, and normalised as part of the Kingdom of God, in fact anyone who was on the bottom of the pile was to be treated likewise.

Jesus obviously broke the unwritten (and written) rules of society by going to the physically and mentally ill to heal and help them, the Samaritans and Romans to talk to them and explain to them, he treated women as equals, he travelled without perceived certainty, he spoke and taught with authority, he pointed out blatant hypocrisy, and he did all this without fear or favour. He showed his disciples, the twelve and the wider group, how the world could be so much better, kinder, more peaceful, if we all followed the golden rule of treating others as we would wish to be treated. And yet here are the disciples missing the point again completely.

It gives me hope, that I too can get it wrong, totally wrong, but if I listen to God's voice, Jesus; teaching and allow the Spirit to regrow within me, I can learn and understand, and return to trying to live out my Christian discipleship in today's world. I hope you can feel that too.

#### Hymn StF 518

Father, hear the prayer we offer:  
not for ease that prayer shall be,  
but for strength that we may ever  
live our lives courageously.

Not for ever in green pasture  
do we ask our way to be;  
but the steep and rugged pathway  
may we tread rejoicingly.

Not for ever by still waters  
would we idly rest and stay;  
but would strike the living fountains  
from the rocks along our way.

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 Thanksgiving and Intercession

Compassionate God, we thank you for each and every opportunity to be your presence in the world, to live out our lives as obvious disciples of Jesus Christ, to share your Spirit with those whom we meet and bring your Spirit into every situation.

We thank you that your Gospel writers saw fit to record not only the wondrous and awesome nature of Jesus, but also the humanity of the disciples so that we are not aspiring only to be perfect in your sight, but to know that we can be imperfect and still be considered children of God. We thank you for your endless patience with all your creation. Help us to continue to do better each new day. Amen.

When we cast our minds around the world, we see the folly of humanity seeking false gods of power, status, money, and possessions, often to the detriment of those who have little and are considered the least... so we pray...

May your teaching of 'the first shall be last and the last shall be first' bring comfort and consolation to those in your world, including ourselves, who feel that they are neglected and left behind, who feel that they, and we, have nothing to offer, have nothing to share.

May your teaching of 'the first shall be last and the last shall be first' bring challenge and change to those in your world, including ourselves, who feel that they are superior and in front, who feel that they have everything they want and do not need, or want, to share.

May we seek a more equitable world, where everyone is valued, each has enough, and all are ready to help their neighbour, whoever their neighbour is.

May our world be turned upside-down, we pray, so that we are awakened to what is truly possible for our planet, our sisters and brothers, ourselves and our futures. Amen.

Lord's Prayer – please use whichever version you prefer

Hymn StF 682

God of grace and God of glory,  
on your people pour your power;  
crown your ancient Church's story;  
bring her bud to glorious flower.

Grant us wisdom,  
grant us courage,  
for the facing of this hour.

Heal your children's warring madness;  
bend our pride to your control;  
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,  
rich in things and poor in soul.

Grant us wisdom,  
grant us courage,  
lest we miss your kingdom's goal.

Lo, the hosts of evil round us  
scorn your Christ, assail his ways!  
Fears and doubts too long have bound us;  
free our hearts to work and praise.  
Grant us wisdom,  
grant us courage,  
for the living of these days.

Harry Emerson Fosdick

Blessing

God of the Sabbath, please bless us  
as we take time out to spend with you.

Help us to slow down, to use this time wisely,  
to take in the peace, to listen to your voice.

Nurture us, re-create us, energise us, give us fresh vision,  
so that we may leave this time ready to give you our all. Amen.

