

Dorset South & West. Written Service.
Sunday 20th October 2024. "What's in it for me?"
Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



Call to worship.

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart;
I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.
I will be glad and exult in you;
I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. — Psalm 9:1–2

STF 34

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.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession.

Heavenly Father we worship and adore you. You are so worthy of worship! Your blessings are beyond compare! Every moment of our lives you are there beside us. Blessing us everyday with new wonders of your creation. We see your beauty and holiness in the natural world around us and marvel at your intricate care for your world. You guide us and direct us when we turn to you in need. You are high and above all but you care for us despite how lowly we might feel. We bring you our praise and thanksgiving. Our deepest regrets are for the times we are unaware of your existence and we turn our backs on you and try to go our own ways. When we think of how we let you down we are fearful and tremble at our shortcomings. And yet you still love us with all tenderness, you forgive us when we turn to you and confess our sins. You replace our fears with hope and joy. Thanks and praise to your wonderful name. **Amen.**

Mark 10:35-45. The Request of James and John

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?" "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

STF 661

Give me the faith which can remove
and sink the mountain to a plain;
give me the childlike praying love,
which longs to build thy house again;
thy love, let it my heart o'erpower,
and all my simple soul devour.

I would the precious time redeem,
and longer live for this alone:
to spend, and to be spent, for them
who have not yet my Saviour known;
fully on these my mission prove,
and only breathe, to breathe thy love.

My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,
into thy blessed hands receive;
and let me live to preach thy word,
and let me to thy glory live;
my every sacred moment spend
in publishing the sinners' friend.

Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
with boundless charity divine:
so shall I all my strength exert,
and love them with a zeal like thine;
and lead them to thy open side,
the sheep for whom their Shepherd died.

Reflection

I love Pantomime's and I am particularly thinking today about the story of Aladdin. Rub the lamp if you possess it and the Genie will grant you, not all your wishes, but just three. So you have to be careful with your choices. I guess we have all thought about what those wishes would be if we were the owners of the lamp.

In our Bible reading today. James and John seem to be clutching at wishful thinking. It also seems bizarre that they should ask their incredulous question at this point in time. Jesus and the disciples are on their way to Jerusalem and Jesus for the third time is telling them that he is going to face death. Verses 33-34 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

How do you receive a message like that? It might seem absurd that two of the disciples should immediately ask for places of honour in the kingdom of heaven. However when you look at the context of the passage and think about what is happening. It makes you question how you would respond if you are repeatedly told that someone you love is going to face death? Especially if they tag onto that information the idea of facing humiliation and events that are just too awful to think about? In that light perhaps it's understandable why the disciples changed the conversation to something so absurd. Haven't we done that? The conversation is difficult for some reason and so we might switch to something like, "I think it's going to rain." Which might be totally out of context with what has just been said. I wonder what response I might have made if I had been on the road to Jerusalem and heard Jesus say for the third time what was going to happen?

In one of the other gospel's it's the disciples Mother who makes the request for James and John. However just staying with the situation as portrayed in Mark, the important part about this absurd question is the context that is posed in. The sharp contrast of what has been heard and the response. Jesus spoke of his willingness to take on sacrifice at whatever cost to himself. The two disciples were thinking it would seem, only about themselves, even if the question was a distraction from the reality of the difficult news they were hearing.

I read a lovely story about sacrificial response, it is the story of a rice farmer who saved an entire village from destruction. From his hilltop farm he felt the earthquake and saw the distant ocean swiftly withdraw from the shore line. He knew that a tidal wave was coming. In the valley below, he saw his neighbour's working in the lower fields that would soon be flooded. They must run quickly to his hilltop or they would all die. His rice barns were dry as tinder. So with a torch he set fire to his barns and soon the fire gong started ringing. His neighbour's saw the smoke and rushed to help him. Then from their safe perch they saw the tidal wave wash over the fields they had just left. In a flash they knew not only who had saved them but what their salvation had cost their benefactor. They later erected a monument to his memory bearing the motto, "**He gave us all he had, and gave gladly.**" There are not many people in our world like that farmer. He willingly sacrificed himself that others might be saved.

Jesus responded to the disciples seemingly childish request, "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." It's almost pantomime language!

"What do you want me to do for you?". In this passage, we see selfish ambition in all of its ugliness. James and John come to Jesus asking for the top seats in His kingdom. Jesus uses this event to teach us all some valuable lessons about leadership and service to others.

Recently I was in a supermarket and I noticed a young mother trying to contain her little boy who was riding in the shopping trolley. Again and again I heard the words screamed out, "But I want that! I need that!" Each time the mother replied, "No, you can't have that." You could tell that she was growing impatient as her youngster constantly carried on with his demands. He wanted just about everything he could see. The more things they passed the louder he became. Finally, a few seconds before a major temper tantrum, the mother said, "That's it, we're going home. Next time your father can take you shopping."

I am sure that many of us have witnessed this same scenario. Little children want things. They don't understand that they have a cost. The shelves are so full they don't see the problem with having whatever they see. Saying, "No" is not always an easy thing to do when it comes to young children. They live in a society that has a multitude of options. When they see their friends getting things, they want them too. It's not just children who want things. Grownups want things too. The disciples wanted special treatment. They wanted Jesus to guarantee that they would have a seat next to him in heaven. Jesus doesn't say "no" but neither does he promise them they'll get what they want. He doesn't even chastise them. Instead, he invites them to consider the cost to say "yes" to the road that will get them there.

The road won't be easy. It is a road which involves dedication, commitment and ultimate sacrifice. If the disciples want to be so close to Jesus they will at least have to assume the role of a servant.

I don't think that James and John or their Mother had that in mind when they posed their question? Who wants to be a servant? I believe we have a real problem with the term, "servant." Historically we think of the servant as one who is totally powerless. We also might think that one who is a servant has no intelligence or creative resources. They are of a lower standing than us. By reminding his disciples that "I came not to be served but to serve," Jesus provides a totally different understanding of what it means to be a person of faith. To help bring that home, he dethrones himself. He refuses to be put on a pedestal. He takes up the bowl and towel and washes his disciples feet on that fateful night of the last supper. Following Jesus is not about seeking prestige and honour, nor is it about special privileges. On the contrary, it is about serving others without being focused on rewards and benefits.

That being said, to be a servant does not mean one is powerless. In fact Jesus taught his disciples to give power away. When a person is able to give power away that is really powerful. Giving away power is not something we are accustomed to. We like to be in control. We are conditioned to be successful. We want others to do what we tell them. We even want God to do for us what we ask. This is exactly what the disciples were doing when they asked Jesus to give them special seats in heaven. They wanted him to arrange it so they could get what they wanted. However a servant may work for someone else, but that doesn't mean that he/she lacks creativity. The disciples wanted greatness but Jesus invited them to pursue a road that led to serving others instead of serving themselves. It was the "servant" who would aspire to greatness, not those who wanted positions of power and prestige.

Actually when you think about it, the servant is one who empowers others. The servant is one who works behind the scenes rather than be in the limelight. A servant's greatest resource is not their ability to produce but their desire to love others.

Oseola McCarty lived in the Hattiesburg, Mississippi and she spent most of her life helping other people to look nice. She took in bundles of dirty clothes, washed and ironed them. She began her laundry work just after leaving school and continued her work long into her eighties. Oseola never married and had no children. Through out her life she rarely spent any money. She lived in her old family home and wore simple clothes. She saved what money she could until her life savings grew to an amazing \$150,000.

Then to everyone's surprise, she gave her entire savings to the state's Black College Fund. She wanted to share her wealth with children less fortunate. Before her death she was able to see many of the students who were awarded scholarships, graduate from college with the help of her financial support. "I came not to be served, but so serve," Jesus said. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant."

In the story of Aladdin, who is your favourite character? There are many versions of the story but I like the version that grants the Genie true happiness. I warm to the Genie who seems to have no desires but to be of service to the owner of the lamp. Despite his own wish for freedom. Aladdin promises to use his third and final wish to free the Genie, but wealth and riches and the prospect of marriage to a princess means he waives on that promise. It's only when the lamp gets stolen by the fiendish villain that the Genie gets his freedom. The villain wants to be the most powerful person in the land and so he is tricked by Aladdin into exchanging places with the Genie and becomes, yes powerful but, the servant with no freedom only to grant the wishes of the holder of the lamp. Well it is only a story and there are no villains in our bible reading today. However the morality is fairly similar. Be careful what you wish for. Examine your hearts desires. Are they full of self-centred ambition or Christ centred? In that Jesus asks us to follow His way of sacrificial giving. Of course none of us are able to follow completely the path Jesus follows. The cup and baptism speak of his sacrificial death and suffering.

What do you want? If Jesus put this question to you what would your answer be? It's difficult to answer especially as we have read and reflected on the way of Christ. We should want to serve Him and others. In answering Jesus' question, the disciples manage to make it all about them and completely miss what Jesus is saying of Himself. Perhaps if we could reverse the question we might find the answer?...

... What do you want me to do? If only we could hold up a mirror to our desires and prayers. And a mirror to Jesus' own question. Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" Let us respond: "No, Jesus. What do you want **me** to do for **you**?"

In the words of Graham Kendrick's hymn

*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*

*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. **Amen.***

Prayers for others

Jesus Christ, Lord of the pain of the cross and the nails, help us to be alongside those in physical and mental pain, to reach out and to bring comfort. Jesus Christ, Lord of the borrowed tomb, help us to weep with those who mourn, to share in their sorrow and to bring them the hope of eternal life. We pray for those known to us who need our prayers today.

Jesus Christ, the servant of all. We pray for all who serve us. For those who Sacrificially give of themselves in our service and in service to others. We pray especially for those who we never seem to notice but without their help we would be lost. Help us to be more mindful of those who serve us in so many different ways and to be grateful.

Jesus Christ, the one who hears all our requests. We pray for those refugees who continue to flee from crises throughout the world. We pray for all those who give their time and energy to serve the most vulnerable, that they will find opportunities to rest and be strengthened for their work. We also remember aid workers throughout the world working in places and situations that are no longer newsworthy; give them the encouragement to continue to show their love and care for those people rebuilding their lives after man-made or natural disasters. In a moment of silence, please pray for any country that is on your mind today.

Jesus Christ, the one who came to serve not to be served. Guide me according to Your will, and help me become a servant whose life is a worthy example to others. Give me courage, Heavenly Father, to claim the spiritual riches that You have promised, and show me Your plan for my life, today and forever. **Amen.**

We say the Lord's Prayer.

STF 611

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey th
When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

The Blessing

Let the majesty of the Father be the light by which you live ,
the compassion of the Son be the love by which you live,
the presence of the Spirit be the power by which you live.
And may The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. **Amen**

