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✠ WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Hello and welcome to our online service from the East Solent & Downs Methodist Circuit.

We are delighted that you have joined us.

It maybe that you do not yet regularly attend a church – or you are not able to get back to your church in person.

Whoever you are, wherever you are it is good that we can continue to meet in this way, to worship the true and living God, to listen to His word, to pray for others and ourselves and to remember and rejoice-in together the great salvation story that we are living in.

These are the 1st 6 verses of Psalm 19 (GNT)

✠ CALL TO WORSHIP – PRAISE

How clearly the sky reveals God's glory! How plainly it shows what he has done! Each day announces it to the following day; each night repeats it to the next. No speech or words are used, no sound is heard; yet their message goes out to all the world and is heard to the ends of the earth. God made a home in the sky for the sun; it comes out in the morning like a happy bridegroom, like an athlete eager to run a race. It starts at one end of the sky and goes across to the other. Nothing can hide from its heat.

✠ GOD'S GIFT OF MUSIC

God's great gift of music – a good hymn can make you feel closer to the Lord. When we sing the words, it's can be almost like His strength and love washing over us.

A hymn that I have known and loved since my childhood is 'How Great Thou Art.' It was written Stuart K. Hine - a British Methodist missionary. The 3rd verse was inspired by the conversion of villagers in Russia who cried out to God loudly as the repented and realized God's love and mercy - "And when I think that God, His Son not sparing, sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in."

✠ HYMN How great thy are art

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

When through the woods, and forest glades I wander,
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees.

When I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur
And see the brook, and feel the gentle breeze.

Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee . . .

And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing;
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on a Cross, my burdens gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.

Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee . . .

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation,
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart.

Then I shall bow, in humble adoration,

And then proclaim: "My God, how great Thou art!"

Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee . . .

"How great thou art"

Words: Stuart K Hine (1899-1989) Music: O Store Gud vv 1,2,4 based on O Store Gud by Carl Gustaf Boberg

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Performed by: Pete and Shirley Evans-Jones

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✠ INTRODUCTION TO PRAYERS

We have a privilege – the privilege of being able to come to God – our Father in prayer. We come to God with thankful hearts but we need to come to prayer with repentant hearts - to bring to God the things we know we need his forgiveness for.

✠ PRAYER OF REPENTANCE

Please join in with the responses in bold type.

Let's pray together.

We praise you almighty Father, from whom your whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

**All: Strengthen us with power through your Holy Spirit
that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith.**

Forgive us our selfishness when we have lived for ourselves and not loved one another.

**All: In repentance and trust we turn to Christ,
in whom we have redemption through His blood,
the forgiveness of sins.**

We give you thanks Heavenly Father,
for your immeasurable love and for your mercy.

**All: Living together as the family of God,
may we grasp the full measure of your love,
and your great mercy to all who truly repent. Amen**

✠ ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

As we confess our sins and as we bring them to the cross of Jesus
we hold on to the truth that . . .

*‘But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive
with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions- it is by grace you have
been saved’. [Ephesians 2 v4-5]*

✠ PRAYER AND BIBLE READING

Today’s Gospel reading is St Mark 8 v22-38 (NIVUK)

Jesus heals a blind man at Bethsaida

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged
Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside
the village. When he had spat on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him,
Jesus asked, **‘Do you see anything?’**

He looked up and said, **‘I see people; they look like trees walking around.’**

Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes.

Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything
clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, **‘Don’t even go into the village.’**

Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On
the way he asked them, **‘Who do people say I am?’**

They replied, **‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others,
one of the prophets.’**

‘But what about you?’ he asked. **‘Who do you say I am?’**

Peter answered, **‘You are the Messiah.’**

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus predicts his death

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things
and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law,
and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly
about this,

and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned
and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. **‘Get behind me, Satan!’** he said.

‘You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’

The way of the cross

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said:

'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 and for the gospel will save it.

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'

✠ **REFLECTION** – "Who do you say I am" (St Mark 8 v22-38)

I started the Gospel reading a few verses before the set lectionary reading – why?

Firstly, I wanted us to see the 2 journeys in these verses that Jesus and His disciples made:

Verse 22 tells us that Jesus and the disciples arrived in Bethsaida.

Verses 27 - we heard that they went to the villages of Caesarea Philippi.

Without checking a map, the brief mentions of the group travelling from and to these locations - might mean we miss something significant.

These days in a car - on modern roads - the journey would take between 1 or 2 hours. For Jesus and His followers the journey from Bethsaida to Caesarea Philippi would have been quite a walk! Bethsaida is near the north shore of the Sea of Galilee; Caesarea Philippi is away up north, on the slopes of Mount Hermon.

You may like to consider why Jesus took the disciples all that way to have the conversation concerning - who He was?

You may know that Chapter 8 of Mark has been described as the '*hinge of the gospel*', because this passage is really the centre-point, a turning-point of the Mark's Gospel.

Standing at chapter 8 *feels* like being at *height* – looking-down the mountain slope giving us a view back through the Gospel story - so far - and also down that same Jordan valley, to where the road - and the story, turn uphill to the final confrontation - in Jerusalem!

We should also consider that the account of what happened at Bethsaida - that is the blind man receiving his sight - can be seen as a *parallel* to the 2nd event at Caesarea Philippi . . . the *blind* disciples gaining their insight; - the 1st account is highlighting what is going on in the 2nd account.

Here are some examples of the parallels:

■ Jesus takes the blind man away from the village.

Jesus takes the disciples away from the lake and the crowds.

■ After the healing of the blind man Jesus insists on secrecy.

After His discourse with the disciples Jesus insists on secrecy.

Lot of discussion about why this secrecy - perhaps it is crucial that wrong information about His reason for coming to this world does not leak out at this time.

Importantly, both accounts tell of a 2-stage process of illumination. The blind man sees people - but they look like trees walking about.

The crowds see Jesus - but they think He is just a prophet!

Jesus touched the blindman twice – and he could see clearly.

And for the disciples - it was - as it were – with the 2nd touch, that Jesus addresses them with the question - ‘Who do you say that I am?’ Now at last their eyes are *opened*. They have understood about the loaves, and all the other signs – the miracles and Peter speak for the other disciples - that they accept Jesus as - the Messiah. ‘You are the Messiah!’

The question – the challenge - we should give the world today is:

‘Who do they say Jesus is – (some might prefer ‘was’)?’

■ Some may think of Him as simply a great human teacher.

■ Maybe some think of Him as a Superman figure, able to ‘zap’ all the world's problems into shape!

■ Or alternatively, Jesus is thought of as a ‘good man’ who is a fine example to humankind.

Of course we too need to examine our own answer to Jesus’ question - ‘Who do you say that I am?’ If we have accepted Jesus as the Messiah – The Son of God – Son of Man then we need to be prepared to be challenged . . . challenged by His way of life and by His teachings.

In some translations verse 31 reads: ‘Then (Jesus) began to teach them . . .’

This implies that it was quite a new point, a point that could only be begun once they had declared that Jesus was the ‘Messiah’.

Note that when Jesus is telling them that -The Son of Man must undergo great suffering Jesus is half-quoting, ‘half-hinting at’, themes from the prophetic book of Daniel.

In Daniel 7 - ‘The son of man’ represents God's people as they are suffering at the hands of pagan enemies. He will eventually be vindicated, after the suffering, as God sets up the kingdom at last.

Jesus is warning – telling - His followers that this is how He understands His vocation and destiny as Israel's representative - that is the Messiah, and that they must be prepared to follow in His steps.

For the disciples this was something new - different. They knew that some people accepted Jesus' teachings – whilst others did not. They knew that Jesus often had disagreements with the religious authorities. But had they ever considered that this good – this perfect man - would be put to death by those who refused to accept Him?!

Yes, the new lesson was not just that there might be danger ahead; the new lesson was that Jesus was going to walk straight – literally walk straight into it! Neither would it simply be a *risky gamble* that might just pay-off. It would be certain death. This was what He had to do.

This is the central point of what is going on here, and it explains the language Jesus uses and the strong negative reaction of Peter.

When reading the Gospels we ought to put ourselves in the disciples shoes . . . *sandals!* - always needing to bear-in-mind that we know what happened! . .

- we have the account of Jesus' death;
- we know that Jesus rose from the dead;
- we have an overview of Jesus' life and teachings;
- we have the letters written by the Apostles that help to shape our understanding of the Christian good news message.

The disciples lived pre all these! For them a 'Messiah' does not get killed by the authorities. A '*Messiah*' who did that would be shown up as a false Messiah.

Why did Jesus say - that He was to suffer and die? St Mark explains this bit-by-bit over the following chapters. But in our reading, there is a *hint* in v38 . . . 'The Son of Man' (will be ashamed of him) when he comes in His Father's glory with the holy angels'

So important is this message - of the death of Jesus, that opposition to the plan - whoever it comes from - must be from Satan - from the Accuser.

Even Peter, - Jesus' right-hand man - is capable of thinking like a mere mortal, not looking at things from what God requires.

This is a challenge to all of us, as the church in every generation struggles not only to think - but to live – in the way God requires, in a world where such a thing is madness!

This is the point at which God's kingdom, coming 'on earth as it is in heaven', will challenge and overturn all *normal* human assumptions

- assumptions about power and glory,
- assumptions about what is really important in life and in the world.

The end of our Gospel reading makes it clear that following Jesus is the only way to go. It might be said that – put simply - St Marks definition of what being a Christian means is - ‘following Jesus’. And we are told that following Jesus is not about leading us on a pleasant afternoon hike, but on a walk into danger and risk. Or did we suppose that the Kingdom of God would mean merely a few minor adjustments in our ordinary lives?

The way we follow Jesus . . .

- acknowledging Him as the Son of God
- following His example and teachings
- demonstrating His love in both word and action
- telling others of the salvation He offers, through His death - that opens the way to the right relationship to God, . . . this may look to others as though Christians are wasting their lives - but followers of Jesus – the Way, the Truth, the Life - will be rewarded with life - in the Kingdom of God.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘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 and for the gospel will save it.

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?

Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? [Mark 8 v34-37]

✠ **HYMN:** Here I am Lord (I the Lord of sea and sky)

I, the Lord of sea and sky
I have heard my people cry
All who dwell in dark and sin
My hand will save
I, who made the stars of night
I will make their darkness bright
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?
*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night
I will go, Lord, if you lead me
I will hold your people in my heart*
I, the Lord of snow and rain
I have borne my people's pain
I have wept for love of them

They turn away
I will break their hearts of stone
Give them hearts for love alone
Who will speak my word to them
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I, the Lord of wind and flame
I will tend the poor and lame
I will set a feast for them
My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide
'Til their hearts be satisfied
I will give my life to them
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?

✠ PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

In our prayers
there will be short times of silence
a time to silently name people known to you.

We pray in the name of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

For those who are unwell

We pray for those who are unwell.
In your compassion,
grant them strength in their pain and healing in mind and body.

A short time of silence

For our health workers and carers

We pray for all who care for the sick throughout our health service
at this this time when the resources and staff
are not able to meet the needs of so many requiring of treatment.
We pray for those who care for relatives.
Parents who care for their children who are seriously ill.
Children and young people who care for elderly or infirm parents.

A short time of silence

For the lonely and the isolated

We pray for all those who feel isolated or alone.
We ask that those who seek may experience your loving presence.

A short time of silence

For the children

We pray for the children in the start of this new school year.
For those who feel lonely.
For those who feel vulnerable.
For those who have faith in you – but find their faith challenged

A short time of silence

For those in authority

We pray for all in authority who face difficult decisions that affect the
lives of many; grant them wisdom and courage.

A short time of silence

For the Church

We pray for you throughout the world Church.

For those who are persecuted for faith.

For the churches in our own communities.

For leaders, ministers, local and visiting preachers in our Methodist Circuit.

For all Christians - that through the power of your Spirit - will proclaim in words and action - your unchanging love

A short time of silence

Lord. Hear our Prayer. Amen

✠ OUR LORD'S PRAYER

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

✠ REASSURANCE

I want to end this time together with those wonderful, amazing words from Paul's letter to Romans chapter 8 (38,39).

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For those of us who have been saved by the precious blood of Christ, we have confidence - not in ourselves - but in God's eternal love. A love demonstrated in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our saviour.

So whoever you are wherever you are you can step out in faith knowing that nothing absolutely nothing can separate you or me from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Hallelujah!**

✠ HYMN Before the throne of God I stand

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 written on His hands,
my name is hidden in His heart;
I know that while in heaven He stands
no power can force me to depart,
no power can force me to depart.

When Satan tempts me to despair
and tells me of the 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.

Behold Him there! the risen Lamb,
my perfect, sinless Righteousness,
the great unchangeable I AM,
the King of glory and of grace!
One with my Lord, I cannot die:
my soul is purchased by His blood,
my life is safe with Christ on high,
with Christ, my Saviour and my God,
with Christ, my Saviour and my God.

"Before the throne of God I stand"

Charitie L. Bancroft

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✠ FINAL PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,

you humbled yourself in taking the form of a servant, and in obedience died on the cross for our salvation: grant us the faith to know you and love you, that we may be found beside you on the way of the cross, which is the path of glory; give us the mind to follow you and to proclaim you as Lord and King, to the glory of God the Father. Amen

Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might;

Let the word of God dwell in you;

and may the blessing of God Almighty,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among us and remain with us always. **Amen**