

**TAMWORTH AND LICHFIELD CIRCUIT**  
**Worship at Home - Sunday 28 February 2021: Lent 2**  
This resource has been prepared for us by Rev Elizabeth Cresswell

Welcome to our worship at home today. As you share in this reflection, know that you do so with friends and acquaintances from around our Circuit and beyond, and that you are part of a great family and community who love and worship our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, today and every day. You are not alone.

**Prayers:**

Each day and each night, each shade and each light, we bend our knee in the eye of the Father who has created us, in the eye of the Son who has redeemed us, in the eye of the Spirit who has cleansed us; in love and affection, in wisdom and grace, in faith and in fear, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Based on traditional Gaelic prayers to the Trinity*

Lord, be with us on our Lenten journey as we remember why Jesus turned his back on Galilee and strode towards Jerusalem. Help us to see and understand something of his purpose, his dedication, his fears, his love and his sacrifice. Come, by your Spirit, and, as we reflect and pray, speak to our deepest selves so that Jesus' example and commitment may be impressed on our hearts and shown in our lives. In his name we pray. Amen.

**Our first hymn 317** in *Singing the Faith* is a stirring assurance of faith and confidence in Jesus.

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, every tongue confess him King of Glory now.  
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord, who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season, to receive a name from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,  
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last, brought it back victorious when from death he passed:

Bore it up triumphant with its human light, through all ranks of creatures to the central height,  
to the throne of Godhead to the Father's breast; filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue all that is not holy, all that is not true;  
crown him as your captain in temptation's hour: let his will enfold you in its light and power.

For this same Lord Jesus shall return again, with his Father's glory, with his angel train;  
all the wreaths of empire meet upon his brow, and our hearts confess him King of Glory now.

*Caroline Maria Noel (1817-1877)*

**Take a moment to ponder:** Who is this Jesus we worship? What makes him so special? How would you describe him to a friend who knew nothing of him?

Now a reading from **Mark 8: 27- 30**

***Jesus went with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets". He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.***

**1. Caesarea Philippi - Peter's declaration**

We stood, watching the clear cold water gushing out from beneath the rocky escarpment in front of us, water which would eventually join with two other tributaries to become the River Jordan, so important in Jewish faith. We were in Paneas (or Banyas, now a National Park) one of the villages of Caesarea Philippi, an ancient Roman town which had been re-founded by Philip as a Hellenistic city. About 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, it was built in a valley surrounded by the hills at the foot of Mount Hermon. The remains of a temple to the god Pan can be seen on the rock above us, as well as those of idols to the god Ba'al Hermon and a temple dedicated to Zenodorus, the Ancient Greek mathematician. And it was against this background of cultures and religions that Jesus asked his disciples these questions - **'who are people saying I am?'** and **'who do you say that I am?'**

Yes there was a lot of chatter going on about this amazing preacher, teacher, healer and miracle worker who had burst onto the scene and was attracting great crowds. Seeing his calm authority over wind and waves, over evil spirits, over disease and even death, and hearing his radical preaching, the question, "WHO IS THIS?" was on everyone's lips. (A question Mark carries right through his gospel.)

The disciples answered Jesus' first question easily - 'People are saying you are John the Baptist come back to life, Elijah or one of the other prophets.' 'But what about you?' He asked, 'Who do you think I am?' And of course it was Peter who

spoke out without hesitation - 'You are the Messiah'. Had the realisation been dawning for some time or did it occur to him suddenly in this place, amid the temples, idols and waters around them? Whatever, there it was - the word, **Messiah**, upon which hung so many expectations - military, religious, personal - human aspirations and expectations which Jesus did not plan to fulfil. That's why he bound them to silence. He would go on to live out his role as Messiah in God's way.

Let's read on .....

**Reading: Mark 8: 31- 33**

***Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at the disciples he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'***

## **2. Suffering is not part of Peter's plan for Jesus**

Poor Peter! He'd travelled around with Jesus for some time now, watched the amazing things he was doing, listened to his exciting and challenging words to the great crowds who came to him and delighted in the success of their mission. He was proud to head up Jesus' team of disciples; it was cool to be so close to a superhero, basking in his sunshine.

And now suddenly the sunlight had dimmed! Instead of planning the next amazing tour, here was Jesus talking about how the Son of Man would suffer and be rejected and be killed. No! Surely not! They all had a glorious future ahead of them, hadn't they, with Jesus overcoming all the opposition, transforming the hearts and lives of many and reigning as King and promised Messiah. He was shocked, and laid into Jesus for even suggesting such a thing. And Jesus, looking at his disciples, said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan." Could he hear again, in Peter's shocked words, the voice of the tempter with whom his work had first begun? In looking at the disciples as he said this to Peter, was he in fact implying that Peter had no clearer a vision of who and what Jesus was than any of the others, who had remained silent in all this?

This idea of Jesus' to head for Jerusalem, thus walking into danger and conflict, suffering and death, was not Peter's idea of a superhero at all. He wanted to make Jesus over in his own image. And he was not alone. We all do it. Here's a poem by the British poet and broadcaster Stewart Henderson called 'Splintered Messiah':

*I don't want a splintered Messiah; In a sweat stained greasy grey robe  
I want a new one. I couldn't take this one to parties  
People would say 'Who's your friend?' I'd give an embarrassed giggle and change the subject.  
If I took him home; I'd have to bandage his hands  
The neighbours would think he's a football hooligan. I don't want his cross in the hall  
It doesn't go with the wallpaper; I don't want him standing there; Like a sad ballet dancer with holes in his tights  
I want a different Messiah; Streamlined and inoffensive; I want one from a catalogue  
Who's as quiet as a monastery; I want a package tour Messiah; Not one who takes me to Golgotha  
I want a King of Kings; With blow waves in his hair; I don't want the true Christ; I want a false one.*

Do we want a false Messiah? Someone on whom we can pin whatever attributes we think he should have? Someone who will fit neatly into our lifestyle? Someone not too demanding and disruptive? As Matt Redman says in his song (452 in *Singing the Faith*), "I've given like a beggar and lived like the rich, and crafted myself a more comfortable cross".

So what IS your Jesus like? In one of her daily readings recently the Revd Jenny Ellis has commented, '*However much we know of God, part of us would still like a Messiah in our own human image: glorious and triumphant with all the trappings of a human leader and with ourselves in honourable positions. Wouldn't it be great if we could have God's kingdom and keep our egos intact? If we could have God's kingdom on our own terms and managed by our ideas and power?*' It has already been suggested that we read right through Mark's Gospel at one sitting - really looking at Jesus, listening to him, trying to understand how he feels and ask yourself if your picture of him is the right one.

In doing God's will Jesus accepted the inevitability of the cross, turned his back on popularity and acclaim, and headed for Jerusalem - and the cross. And Peter chose to put aside his ego and accompany him on that journey - a journey that would test his discipleship to the utmost.

In our next song we meditate on what that meant: Hymn: 274 in *Singing the Faith*

Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice, you became nothing, poured out to death.

Many times I've wondered at your gift of life, and I'm in that place once again. I'm in that place once again.

*And once again I look upon the cross where you died, I'm humbled by your mercy  
and I'm broken inside. Once again, I thank you, once again I pour out my life.*

Now you are exalted to the highest place, King of the heavens, where one day I'll bow.

But for now, I marvel at this saving grace, and I'm full of praise once again. I'm full of praise once again.

*Refrain: And once again....*

Thank you for the cross, thank you for the cross, thank you for the cross - my Friend (2).

Matt Redman (b.1974)

We conclude today's reading:

**Reading: Mark 8: 34- 38**

***He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.***

Or, as **'The Message'** puts it: *Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, 'Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering, embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for? If any of you are embarrassed over me and the way I'm leading you when you get around you fickle and unfocused friends, know that you'll be an even greater embarrassment to the Son of Man when he arrives in all the splendour of God, his Father, with an army of holy angels.*

### **3. The demands of discipleship**

'Nobody ever said the Christian life would be easy!' How often have you heard that? If a new Christian sets out with a bright, shiny faith, confident that God is on their side and will save them from all trouble, then they will probably be disappointed! Life itself is a challenge, but trying to follow Jesus along the way brings its own set of problems.

In 1971 we were returning to Kenya for a second tour after a nine-month furlough in this country. (*interesting that the word 'furlough' is back in common usage again!*) It had been an unsettling time staying with family and friends and, with two small children, we were looking forward to getting back to Kenya and settling down again. However, before we left, the Africa secretary confirmed that we would now be living in Nairobi instead of upcountry and that, as yet, there was not a house set apart for us to live in!! But in faith we went back and, to cut a long and painful story short, we spent the next nine months moving from Methodist Guest House to rented house, to friends' houses, and back and forth. You can maybe imagine the toll this took on us - on Roger as he tried to do his work and on our family as a whole, and especially when I found myself pregnant with our third. We came pretty near to giving up! But by God's grace we persevered and somehow came through it, even returning later for a third tour.

No, the Christian life is never easy and at times can be really tough. But never as tough as it was for Jesus. During his ministry Jesus 'had nowhere to lay his head', he faced bitter opposition not only from the religious authorities but also from those he knew in his home-town; he worked very long hours, which drained him physically and emotionally; he challenged long held religious laws and practices, which angered people; the plight of Jerusalem moved him to tears, as did the death of his friend Lazarus. And all that before Gethsemane, the 'Trial', the Cross and all that involved!! But he persisted because he knew it was God's way for him and for the salvation of us all.

And Jesus demands equal commitment from his disciples. He tells his followers to expect suffering too: **'Deny yourself, take up your cross, follow me'**, he urges, and it is for each one of us to work out what that means for us, now, at this stage in our lives and as we journey into the future. The Revd David Deeks has written: *'Like Jesus' disciples, we have to leave behind all self-seeking and self-promotion. Look inside yourself and all around you - and, above all, look to Jesus - to discern the signs of God's presence. Entrust your very life to the authenticity, truth and life enhancing potentiality of this gospel.'* And it is the only way, for we discover that to deny self, to leave oneself behind for Jesus' sake is to find one's true self, one's true identity. It may BE tough, it may GET tough, but the rewards are 'out of this world!' David Deeks again: *'Discipleship is a lifetime's journey into the inexhaustible riches and depth of love in the heart of Jesus.'* Can you join me in saying Amen to that?

And now an old hymn which I know very well but isn't in either The Methodist Hymn Book or Singing the Faith! (We tracked it down in the Iona hymn book!) I've chosen it as it perfectly sums up what we've been challenged with today.

**Hymn:** 'Take up your cross', the Saviour said (*Hymns of Glory, Songs of Praise, 402*)

'Take up your cross,' the Saviour said, 'if you would my disciples be;  
Take up your cross, with willing heart, and humbly follow after me.'

Take up your cross, let not its weight fill your weak soul with vain alarm:  
his strength shall bear your spirit up, and brace your heart, and nerve your arm.

Take up your cross, nor heed the shame, and let your foolish pride be still:  
the Lord refused not even to die upon a cross, on Calvary's hill.

Take up your cross, then, in his strength, and calmly every danger brave;  
it guides you to a better home, and leads to victory o'er the grave.

Take up your cross, and follow Christ, nor think till death to lay it down;  
for only those who bear the cross may hope to wear the glorious crown.

*Charles William Everest (1814-1877)*

### **Prayer of confession**

Lord, forgive us that we often make you over in our image, that we are happy to embrace the comfortable side of faith but shy away when it becomes demanding. 'We all have our cross to bear' is a saying which easily trips off the tongue and means so very little. Yet, Lord, when we think of all that you went through for us it makes us ashamed to even begin to measure our suffering against yours. Forgive us, help us to deny ourselves for your sake, to be proud rather than ashamed of you, to serve you unswervingly and to share with joy in the work of your kingdom.  
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

### **And a prayer for others**

Lord Jesus Christ, you lived our life and experienced the anxieties and fears, the pain and suffering we endure. We bring to you now those for whom we are concerned today.

We are all living with the restrictions and anxiety Covid-19 brings. So we pray now for those who have the disease, whether at home or in hospital, and especially for those in intensive care. May they know your healing and peace.

We pray for those who look after them - ambulance crews, doctors and nurses and all who work in hospitals, often risking their own safety. May they know your strength and courage to keep on keeping on even when exhausted and demoralised.

We pray for all those grieving for a loved one, in their shock, fear and sadness, and especially if they have not been able to be there at the end. May they know your comfort and hope of a life beyond this one.

We pray for all those who are working to fight the virus, in science labs, in vaccine production and distribution facilities and in vaccination centres. May they know your inspiration and power to heal.

We pray for the many who are increasingly anxious because of loss of income, the collapse of their business, loss of work or increasing costs. May they be supported and sustained.

We pray for all who are feeling lonely and isolated as a result of the extended lockdown - for people living alone, for those suffering depression and other mental illnesses, for parents struggling to cope with work, home and home-schooling their children. And we pray for all young people, feeling they are up against a brick wall, unable to be with their friends, socialise at school, or pursue their sports and recreations; those facing exams yet not being able to take them, being assessed but having no face to face teaching. May they know your loving patience, strength and calm and may circumstances soon change so they can pick up the pieces of their lives again.

And we pray for our world and its many problems -

for countries in conflict and especially Myanmar at this time and for those ruled by authoritarian leaders and regimes;

for the climate crisis and the destruction of so much of our natural world;

for the uneven sharing of the world's resources and the resulting migrant crises.

Lord, may your kingdom come. May your love, peace and hope rule in the hearts of all people.

*Spend a few minutes now adding your own prayers, for those for whom you are praying at this time, and for yourself .....*

*And now a prayer by the Revd David Moore:*

God whose touchstone is the desert and the cross,  
draw near with your ancient strength.

which we experience but do not understand,  
know, but never see.

Accompany us throughout these weeks of Lent,  
that we may face the demons, fantasies and fears  
which accompany us; so that, journeying with Jesus  
in desert places, we may by your mercy renew  
our commitment to the life of Christ  
and our vocation to the way of the Cross.

We say **The Lord's Prayer:**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come  
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and 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.

A final hymn of commitment - sing it to your favourite tune or just read the words as a prayer:

**Hymn: 563**

O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end;  
Lord, be forever 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.

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.

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.

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 (1816-1874)*

Draw us, O Christ, by grace irresistible, to the centre of all faith and to the heart of all sacrifice; to the deepest of all wells  
and to a work that is not our own; even your holy Cross, to which we cling and by which we are held; for your own name's  
sake.

*A prayer by Dora Greenwell (1812 - 1882)*

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen

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