

O God  
be all my love,  
all my hope,  
all my striving,  
let my thoughts and words flow from you,  
my daily life be in you,  
and every breath I take be for you.  
Amen

**You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.**

Most of us, at some point, will have been in meetings or conversations where suddenly somebody says something that cuts right across the conversation and silences the room.

And you sit there, and think, ‘Woah! Where did that come from?’

That’s precisely the situation in today’s gospel reading when Jesus causes the shock. Peter goes from hero to zero in a few verses. He’s just spoken a momentous truth to Jesus, in the preceding verses: **you are the Messiah**. He’s spoken it out, the great secret; it’s out there. The next thing Jesus rebukes him for another response that he’s made. And it’s a rebuke in the strongest possible terms: **get behind me Satan**.

And I think you can forgive Peter for going away and muttering to himself, “you know what, I don’t get this.”

What’s happened in between is that Jesus has spoken to them about his forthcoming suffering and execution, followed by His resurrection. We know that story. The disciples hadn’t a clue about that narrative. They didn’t know it. And suffering Messiahs were not in anybody’s script.

A suffering Messiah meant a defeated Messiah; a defeated Messiah meant a false Messiah.

And so Peter and the disciples are thinking to themselves, ‘we’re barking up the wrong tree here’. And as for resurrection, well, that was completely outside their experience

In Chapters 8-10 of Mark's Gospel, this scenario of Jesus speaking about his suffering and death is played out three times. He says exactly the same thing and the disciples then behave in a way that shows that they don't get it. What is it that they don't get?

They don't get that this is the way that the Messiah will bring in the new age of God's future. This is the way that redemption happens. This is God doing God's greatest work. This is the way God is.

So, when Peter says in effect 'you can't talk like this, Jesus, Messiahs don't suffer.' He is becoming the very voice of the deceiver, the Satan, who, as we heard last week, made the enticing, short cut, pain free offer of all the nations that can be for Jesus, if he would worship him. Down that road, of course, is darkness, not redemption.

And Mark is making a critical point in these chapters. If you want to understand God, you need to understand the suffering of Jesus. And if you want to follow Jesus, to be with Jesus, where Jesus is, you will find yourself taken to the cross, because there you will find your life.

That idea of following Jesus carries with it the image, in these verses, of joining the cross-bearing procession, not as one who observes, but as one who actually carries their own cross behind Jesus.

And just as Jesus carried his cross, that we might live, so our cross centred life is also that others might live. As it has been said, the church is only the church when it is there for others.

So how might the church be there for others as we begin to emerge from this pandemic? Will the focus of our mission look different? In what ways will it look different? What have we learned about being church through these months? What is the Spirit saying to the church today?

This week Bishop Nick wrote to the clergy and he included four formational questions that he invited congregations to reflect on:

- (a) What have we lost that we need to regain?
- (b) What have we lost that needs to stay lost?
- (c) What have we gained that we need to keep, and build upon?
- (d) What have we gained during the emergency that we now need to lose for the future?

Now, I do not want to pre-judge the outcome of that conversation, because they are very fine questions for us to be reflecting on. I simply want to invite you to put your answers to those questions, next to today's gospel reading.

And this quote from the WW2 martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

**“The emerging church of the future will be more modest, an intense community loyal to Christ, nourished by the arcane disciplines of the liturgical life. It will be a poor, apparently powerless church, experiencing, and distributing, costly grace.”**

Mark’s theology of life is grounded in the paradox, that if you want to find your life, then offer it up, generously, sacrificially, humbly.

Yes, you can gain great wealth; yes, you can gain the whole world. The Satan will make you a great offer, but you will wake up one morning to discover that it is like sand, falling through your hands.

So, like Peter and the disciples, we are faced with Lenten choices about following Jesus.

There are two other places in the gospels where the invitation to follow Jesus happens. The first is when he calls the fishermen to make the huge leap from their profession, to following Him. The second is at the end of the Gospel, in the resurrection story, when he issues the invitation again.

On both occasions they do not know the narrative. It is completely new territory. They have to trust the one who makes the invitation.

Professor Tom Wright puts it this way: **“Mark calls the church to become for the world what Jesus was for the world. That is what discipleship, following Jesus, really means.”** Amen.