

Welcome to worship today. As we gather in chapels, or join in from our homes over the internet, or even as we read this service at another time, we are gathered together in worship of the creator and king who calls us to take part in announcing the kingdom.

Prayer: (Psalm 145 Common English Bible)

I will lift you up high, my God, the true king. I will bless your name forever and always. I will bless you every day. I will praise your name forever and always. The Lord is great and so worthy of praise! God's greatness can't be grasped. One generation will praise your works to the next one, proclaiming your mighty acts. "The Lord is merciful and compassionate, very patient, and full of faithful love. The Lord is good to everyone and everything; God's compassion extends to all his handiwork!" All that you have made gives thanks to you, Lord; all your faithful ones bless you! Amen

Hymn: StF 25 God is here! - Fred Pratt Green <https://youtu.be/QbkNXq71iis>

<p>God is here! As we his people meet to offer praise and prayer, may we find in fuller measure what it is in Christ we share. Here, as in the world around us, all our varied skills and arts wait the coming of the Spirit into open minds and hearts.</p>	<p>Here our children find a welcome in the Shepherd's flock and fold, here as bread and wine are taken, Christ sustains us, as of old. Here the servants of the Servant seek in worship to explore what it means in daily living to believe and to adore.</p>
<p>Here are symbols to remind us of our lifelong need of grace; here are table, font, and pulpit; here the cross has central place. Here in honesty of preaching, here in silence, as in speech, here, in newness and renewal, God the Spirit comes to each.</p>	<p>Lord of all, of Church and Kingdom, in an age of change and doubt, keep us faithful to the gospel, help us work your purpose out. Here, in this day's dedication, all we have to give, receive: we, who cannot live without you, we adore you! We believe!</p>

Prayer:

Gracious Lord Jesus, we gather because we have heard the Good News for ourselves and desire deep within to respond to your invitation to be part of God's loving reign on earth.

As we come to worship today, we come bearing our own burdens and anxieties. Our lives are never as simple as they seem to be and seldom as simple as we would like. Open our eyes to your manifold blessings and the thousand tiny ways in which you sustain us. Lift the weight of our worries and fill us anew with your Spirit of grace and truth as we worship you today.

Creator of all and giver of life, we come to worship knowing that you have called us to be your servants in our ordinary daily living. Yet, it seems so often we pursue only the things which we most want in the moment. Too often we fail to consider the impact of our choices on our relationships, our spirit, or our planet. Forgive our carelessness and sin, and open our eyes to see our world, our lives, and every living creature as you do.

May we be servants of the Servant, sharing Jesus' Good News of the Kingdom come and the loving reign of God drawing all creation back toward the life giving God.

Say the Lord's prayer

Hear Jesus' words of grace which he spoke so many times to those he met upon the road, 'Your sin is forgiven, go in peace.'

Reading: Mark 6:6-13

Hymn: StF 3 Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory - Alan Gaunt <https://youtu.be/zLnsW6Q8D84>

Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory cascades through life in overflowing grace, to tell creation's meaning in the story of love evolving love from time and space.	as full-grown children, confident and sure.
Eternal Son of God, uniquely precious, in you, deserted, scorned and crucified, God's love has fathomed sin and death's deep darkness, and flawed humanity is glorified.	Love's trinity, self-perfect, self-sustaining; love which commands, enables and obeys: you give yourself, in boundless joy, creating one vast increasing harmony of praise.
Eternal Spirit, with us like a mother, embracing us in love serene and pure: you nurture strength to follow Christ our brother,	We ask you now, complete your image in us; this love of yours, our source and guide and goal. May love in us, seek love and serve love's purpose, till we ascend with Christ and find love whole.

Reading: Mark 8:11-21

Sermon:

Over the last couple of weeks, we have begun to see Mark is very concerned with people understanding the Kingdom of God has come near. This is a kingdom of hope and life and restoration and not a kingdom of this world with governments and wars and revolutions, and so, there is the Good News for each and every person: God's loving reign is breaking into our world in us. I want you to hold this big picture of the Kingdom because it isn't always simple to see the forest for the trees when reading Scripture.

My least favourite subject at school was languages. Not because I found them terribly difficult to pick up, although my spelling has always been awful, but rather because studying languages required me to read books and poetry and try to glean the meaning of things from them. Let's just say that at 16 I would rather have gone for a run than dissect my English set work. And I am no a runner!

I wonder, what you think about when you sit down and read a big section of Scripture. Are you caught up in interesting details? Does it seem like there is just too much information to really understand what is going on, or what God is saying through the text? Are you overwhelmed by the sense that you don't even know where to start?

All of these feelings are valid a lot of the time, and honestly can be expected. Especially if we carry on reading a long section or a whole book of Scripture. But what if you have spent months to years under the direct tutelage of Jesus, surely then you would understand what he is saying? Well, clearly not according to Scripture.

I am one of those people who quite enjoys a good Disciple bashing session. Judas is a crook, Peter only opened his mouth to change feet, Thomas has no faith, and John is the best-loved of all the deserter. That's all unfair of course, except maybe for Peter. But they do come across as pretty dim a lot of the time.

Mark takes special efforts to highlight their inability to understand, or their unwillingness to understand what Jesus is teaching them. It is probably one of the big themes in Mark: those who seek to live life with God and those who seek to follow Jesus are exceptional only at missing the point. And this is what our section this week is all about.

So, I am going to ask you to do something that may come across as a little strange. Sit as comfortably as you can, maybe close your eyes (unless you are reading that is), and imagine you are in the scenes we read from Mark's Gospel today. Almost like you are watching a film or are a fly on the wall and you can hear and see and taste and smell everything.

You see Jesus having one of his many discussions with the Disciples about their failure to understand. The Disciples are afraid because Jesus has started talking about the 'yeast of the Pharisees,' whatever that is supposed to mean, and they realise someone has forgotten to pack enough for dinner. Naturally, they frantically discuss the problem of what they will eat today. They wonder, is Jesus angry because he is expecting to go hungry today as a result of their mistake?

“Why are you talking about dinner? Do you still think you are going to go hungry? How many baskets of food did you pick up when God fed the 5000 and when God fed the 4000 with few loaves? Are your hearts so hardened to what God is doing in the world? Do you still not understand that the Kingdom is near?”

Imagine how they felt. What they thought... now imagine they have a flash of memory to a time before this confusion when everything seemed to be going brilliantly. Just like a flashback in a film, they remember Jesus giving them instructions to go share the Good News. They feel the trepidation they felt at going with nothing to offer but God's blessing, the Good News of the Kingdom, and who God had made them. They remember returning to Jesus and laughing together as they share the stories of their adventures and the deep sense of God's hand on their journey, guiding them as they shared the news of God's Kingdom and saw lives changed. They remember living our God's loving reign, but what on earth are they going to eat for dinner!?

Now think a second about what it would be like if those memories of sharing our faith were your memories...

Naturally, most of Mark's Gospel so far is a description of the loving reign of God breaking into our world. And most of that is played out in its stories of lives changed, bodies healed, minds restored, and spirits set free. It is mostly miracle stories of God touching lives.

But alongside these is a picture of the Pharisees challenging Jesus at every turn. They have chided him for daring to care more about life than the rules and healing people on the sabbath, for eating with the people who most need to hear about God's love, about not fasting enough, and about eating with hands that haven't been 'ritually cleansed'. Jesus sees something in the Pharisees that the disciples do not: you can be so 'religious' as to be utterly useless to the coming of God's Kingdom.

This is what Jesus is wanting us as his followers to beware of. There is a natural tendency for religious life to become about rules and purity and what we think about God. It is clear that the Pharisees are not bad people, but they believe that their journey with God is about the wrong thing, doing nothing wrong.

I would hope you have noticed 2 things about Mark's Gospel over the last two weeks: the Good News is that the Kingdom, the loving reign of God, is near and is worked out in the restorations of minds, hearts, souls, and bodies in the most practical ways. Jesus has been actively living God's love into the lives of people who need God most.

So why is he warning the Disciples about this attitude of the Pharisees that can permeate our entire experience of God? And more than that, why is Jesus a bit annoyed that the Disciples have missed the point?

Simply, because the Disciples haven't only seen him do it, eaten the miraculous bread at the feedings and seen the healings, but the Disciples have gone out and done it. They have gone into the places of need and shared the Good News and seen God working.

Maybe Jesus is reminding the Disciples that this invitation to live with God is about going and living the loving reign of God into reality. In the places that need it most. And it is certainly what this section of Mark's Gospel is reminding us as Jesus' followers today.

Intercessions:

God, you love the world and its people like a mother. No action or inaction or failure can turn your love away from your creation. Enable us to see other people with the eyes of your love and grace, and give us the courage to live our faith for all to see. In the silence, we lift up all people, and those we can name, who do not yet know God's love and care...

Your Kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

Creator God, you have made all things and called them good. Yet so much is damaged and so much is broken. People's lives are in tatters because of the pandemic or other tragedies. People's bodies are broken or failing. People's minds are strained to the breaking point by stress and anxiety and pain. In the silence, we lift up all people, and those we can name, who are unwell in body, mind or spirit...

Your Kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

King of the universe, who rules in justice, mercy, and love which is unending, we live in a time which is not just. Some have too much while others starve, some nations are strong while others can not afford to care for their people, some leaders are good but too many are greedy or corrupt. In the silence, we lift up governments and the nations of the world, may all who lead work for justice and opportunity for all...

Your Kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

Jesus, saviour and head of the Church, you have called us to be a people of prayer and action, not a people of ritual and rules. Yet too often we have made our life about gathering together and not about going and sharing the Good News of your Kingdom come near. In the silence, we lift up the whole Church, fill us with dreams of your mission to our communities and with the courage to step out, as the 12 did, to live your Kingdom come...

Your Kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

Hymn: StF 658 A Charge to Keep I have <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8w-m4JKiy4>

<p>1 A charge to keep I have : a God to glorify ; a never-dying soul to save, and fit it for the sky ;</p> <p>2 To serve the present age, my calling to fulfil ; O may it all my powers engage to do my Master's will !</p>	<p>3 Arm me with jealous care, as in your sight to live ; and O your servant, Lord, prepare a strict account to give !</p> <p>4 Help me to watch and pray, and on yourself rely, so shall I not my trust betray, nor love within me die.</p> <p>Charles Wesley (1707–1788)</p>
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Blessing: (2 Corinthians 13:14 'The Grace' from The Message)

The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you. Amen

Go in the knowledge of our calling into the needs of our world, to live God's love there.