



# The Methodist Church

Nottingham North East Circuit - Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2020

This short act of worship, based on the service which would have been held at Church today, has been prepared for you by Rev John Wiseman, to use at home. If you are well enough, why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

## Let's begin by singing together a familiar favourite STF 57

Let all the world in every corner sing:  
my God and King!  
The heavens are not too high,  
his praise may thither fly;  
the earth is not too low,  
his praises there may grow.  
Let all the world  
in every corner sing:  
my God and King!

Let all the world in every corner sing:  
my God and King!  
The church with psalms must shout;  
no door can keep them out,  
but, above all, the heart  
must bear the longest part.  
Let all the world  
in every corner sing:  
my God and King!

## Opening prayer: psalm 26

<sup>1</sup>Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. <sup>2</sup>Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and mind. <sup>3</sup>For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you. <sup>4</sup>I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites; <sup>5</sup>I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked.

<sup>6</sup>I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O Lord, <sup>7</sup>singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and telling all your wondrous deeds. <sup>8</sup>O Lord, I love the house in which you dwell, and the place where your glory abides. <sup>9</sup>Do not sweep me away with sinners, nor my life with the bloodthirsty, <sup>10</sup>those in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes. <sup>11</sup>But as for me, I walk in my integrity; redeem me,

and be gracious to me. <sup>12</sup>My foot stands on level ground; in the great congregation I will bless the Lord. Amen

## This morning's reading: Matthew 16:21-28

<sup>21</sup> From that time on Jesus began to say plainly to his disciples, "I must go to Jerusalem and suffer much from the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. I will be put to death, but three days later I will be raised to life."

<sup>22</sup> Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "God forbid it, Lord!" he said. "That must never happen to you!" <sup>23</sup> Jesus turned around and said to Peter, "Get away from me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my way, because these thoughts of yours don't come from God, but from human nature."

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you want to come with me, you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for my sake, you will find it. <sup>26</sup> Will you gain anything if you win the whole world but lose your life? Of course not! There is nothing you can give to regain your life. <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man is about to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each one according to his deeds. <sup>28</sup> I assure you that there are some here who will not die until they have seen the Son of Man come as King."

## Let's sing again....a new song but to the tune for 'when I survey the wondrous cross'

My Lord and King once gave His life  
that I may live eternally  
He calls me like countless before:  
"Take up your cross, and follow me!"

Lord give me grace to heed your call  
and for your sake leave all behind  
The gloss and glitter of this world -  
They can't give what I seek to find.

I dare not clutch treasures of dust  
which soon rust, crumble and decay  
No! I will cling to Christ My King -  
for he alone can guide my way

I bring my earthly treasures, Lord,  
and sacrifice them to your will.  
Invested in the weak and lost -  
such treasures shine eternally.

### **Today's message**

One of the difficulties for any congregation listening to a reading is the fact that more often than not that reading is read in isolation from the rest of the gospel. It is simply lifted off the page and read as if it is a complete passage with little or indeed no reference to the context from which that passage is taken.

What has just happened before the words you have just heard, what happens afterwards? Where does this particular reading fit within the larger framework of that particular chapter or chapters. Or indeed where does it fit within the context of the overall gospel story that a particular author, in this case Matthew is trying to tell?

One of my Mum's favourite pastimes was watching the soaps...Emmerdale, Corrie, Eastenders. And whenever I went to visit her I would inevitably find that one of these programs was on. Not having watched these programs for years it was difficult to work out what exactly was going on in the various storylines unless my mum attempted to explain the back ground after which I was often more confused than before and realised why I didn't watch these things.

But it is often very helpful especially in these days of multi episode mega series, it is often really helpful to have 60 second review of what has happened in the previous episodes to give context to what is about to occur. In our churches on a

Sunday I wonder how often those leading worship indulge in the same practice by informing a congregation of just where the particular passage they are preaching on sits within the bigger story.

So what has just happened immediately before the passage you have heard. And does that affect how you might read and understand the words you have heard today, words that began 'from that time on'. Surely the question you might be asking is 'from what time on?', 'what has just happened?'

Well for those of you who used the circuit wide Home Worship material last week what has taken place is the incident at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus has asked the disciples 'who do people say the son of man is?' Various answers have been offered by his closest followers...John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. But Jesus is not really concerned with who others think he might be, he is more concerned with who his disciples, his closest followers understand him to be. And it is of course Peter who steps forth to offer an answer. 'You are the messiah the son of the living God,' he answers.

It appears having responded to Jesus' call, having followed him, having observed how he acted and who he associated with, the penny has finally dropped for Peter. The scales have fallen from his eyes. The light bulb has finally been switched on in his head.

Jesus too appears to have been impressed with Peter's God given knowledge and discipleship for he declared that it is upon 'this rock' that his church will be built. And yet one is aware that perhaps Peter and indeed the rest of his followers have not fully grasped just what kind of messiah Jesus is going to be because in the last verse before our reading today we would have read Jesus sternly ordering the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the messiah. Peter has begun to grasp who Jesus is. He appears to have understood and yet his understanding is only partial.

Because within moment we hear Jesus referring to Peter as Satan, denouncing him and his understanding as a tumbling block to his mission, accusing him of setting his mind on human things

not on heavenly objectives by suggesting that Jesus does not have to go about his mission in the way that he sees it.

Is anyone one being struck with a sense of déjà vu I wonder? Cast your minds back to chapter 4 of Matthew's gospel and straight after the spiritual high of his baptism, Jesus is faced with a challenge, with temptation as to how his ministry will proceed. Will he take the easy route, will he perform cheap tricks, flashy displays of wonder, put god's love to the test in order to achieve his goal. On that occasion Satan is sent packing with three swift rebukes quoting back passages of scripture. On that occasion Jesus has made a decision regarding which route his ministry would take.

Now it is Peter who perhaps unwittingly offers another alternative way to glory than the one Jesus describes...one that will not involve going to Jerusalem, suffering at the hands of the elders, chief priest and scribes and ultimately giving his life.

Peter has just been told that he is going to be the rock, the foundation on which Jesus is going to build his church...one of only a handful of occasions in the NT that the word church is actually used...now it appears that this rock is in danger of being reduced to dust. The ground on which the church is going to be built looks decidedly shaky.

This moment in Matthew's gospel, this encounter at Caesarea Philippi is a huge turning point. From chapter 4 right up to near the end of chapter 16 Matthew have been concerned with Jesus' mission, a mission carried out in the northern territory of Galilee. Now at Caesarea Philippi, situated in the extreme north, things begin to change direction. The direction of movement is southwards, the destination is Jerusalem, the aim is a clash with those who hold power in the Temple. The direction or way that Jesus is going to travel is about to become clear. And let's remember before we go any further. Because it's important, that the first followers of Jesus were not known as Christians at all but rather as followers of 'The Way'

The way...which allows me to pose an interesting question. If I were to ask you what way might I go

from wherever you currently are into the centre of Nottingham...one possible answer would be geographical....you might tell me which direction you would go...from here, go straight, then left, across at the lights, third exit at the roundabout

Or you might well tell me that the way you can get to Nottingham is you could travel by car, you could catch the bus, you could jump on a tram, you could walk, you could cycle i.e. you could tell me how I might get there

The way can be both geographical i.e. the direction where you are going and also describe how you are going to get there.

This is what Jesus is trying to say to his disciples. Geographically they are going to go south, south from the northern location of Caesarea Philippi, south to the capital of Jerusalem, to the heart of the Jewish faith, to the temple.

That's the way they are going to go, the direction they are about to travel but there is also the matter of just how or what that journey will entail. It will entail difficulties, it will involve hardship, it will involve challenge, it will involve suffering.

In Jesus' own words it will involve the disciples having to pick up their cross if they want to follow him....because that is what lies ahead for Jesus...the shadow of the cross....a punishment reserved for those accused of opposing the ruling powers.

If the first 16 chapters of Matthew's gospel are concerned with Jesus' ministry, following the revelation at Caesarea Philippi the rest of Matthews account builds with increasing momentum towards Jesus passion.

Peter's declaration at Caesarea Philippi has revealed that he understands who Jesus is....God's anointed, the messiah. And yet at the same time his understanding is human, it is incomplete. His attitude is still not in tuned to Jesus', his will is not God's.

Peter's faith has grown but such growth often leads to a new challenge, to a fresh struggle, to a deeper understanding...Peter has realised who Jesus is but has yet to grasp what following him will mean

Peter like the majority of the Jewish people have their own understanding as to how the long awaited messiah will act, how this great warrior will deliver them from oppression, how this king from the line of David will restore Israel to glory by kicking out the occupying Roman army.

Yes Jesus is heading to Jerusalem. Yes God's kingdom is going to be revealed. Yes the son of man will be exalted by a select few as king, yes God's glory is about to be revealed but the way this is to be brought about is not the way the disciples expect. Not in the way Peter expects.

It will be a victory brought about by love not legalism. By serving and suffering not being concerned with self. By offering freedom but force. Indeed initially it will appear that the religious leaders of the day, the Roman authorities have won the battle, have been victorious. It will appear that evil has defeated good, that darkness has overcome light, that death has overcome life.

The challenge to the disciples as they began to head to Jerusalem is the same challenge that faces us today. To lose our life in order to find it. To allow his will to become ours. To deny ourselves for the sake of others. To pick up our cross and all that will entail. Because to follow Jesus means to walk in his footsteps, to walk in his way. To walk both in the same direction that he is going but also to walk in the same manner. To walk in the way, to be a member of the way, to be true member of the church means that we too must be prepared to share in Jesus' suffering. Because it is only by being prepared to lay down our life for others that we are able to share with Jesus in his triumph. **Amen**

### **Prayers of Intercessions**

We pray for...

- The stories that have been dominating our newspapers over the past week
- Those struggling to make difficult decisions
- Those having to make sacrifices during these times of restricted social interaction
  - All those struggling with their faith
    - For our local communities
    - For ourselves

And finally we join our voices to say The Lord's Prayer together...Our Father

**Let's conclude this worship by singing STF 566**

Take my life and let it be  
all your purpose, Lord, for me;  
consecrate my passing days,  
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move  
at the impulse of your love;  
take my feet, and let them run  
with the news of victory won.

Take my voice, and let me sing  
always, only, for my King;  
take my lips, let them proclaim  
all the beauty of your name.

Take my wealth all I possess,  
make me rich in faithfulness;  
take my mind that I may use  
every power as you shall choose.

Take my motives and my will,  
all your purpose to fulfil;  
take my heart it is your own,  
it shall be your royal throne.

Take my love my Lord, I pour  
at your feet its treasure-store;  
take myself, and I will be  
yours for all eternity.

### **A final blessing...**

As our worship concludes, then let us during the coming week strive to put our faith into service in all that we say, do and be, to all that we meet.

**Amen**