**Morning Praise Sunday 12th September 2021**

*Who do you say I am?*

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**Opening prayer**

O Lord, as Peter confessed that you are the Christ, give us boldness to proclaim your redeeming love and saving power in the world; may we be ready to bear the cross and give ourselves for others and the advancement of your kingdom; we ask this in the name of Jesus our Lord, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit are one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

**Intro. to Confession**

Who do I say you are? What does my life tell people about your life?
When people learn I'm a Christian, what kind of 'Christ' do they see in me?
Where is the road that follows your footsteps?
Why do we forget that your path involves suffering?
How can I lose my life, and find it in you?

**Confession:** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

  **Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  **Amen.**

**Reading Mark 8: 27 - end**

**John’s sermon**

Peter gets the title right, but he doesn’t seem to understand what that title means!

And so, when Jesus starts to talk, NOT about the road to glory, but instead the one that leads to the Cross, Peter rebukes him… and then Jesus rebukes Peter right back.

Which might call into question our own understanding of Jesus. Because Peter’s definition of “Messiah” might be the one we prefer as well.

Peter, we, and just about everyone probably want a God who heals our every illness, provides us with financial prosperity, guarantees our security, cheers our sports teams on to victory and generally keeps us happy, healthy, and wise.

But that’s *not* *exactly* what Jesus seems to offer.

Instead, Jesus points to a God who meets us in vulnerability, suffering, and loss.

A God who meets us in those moments when we really need God, when all we had worked for, hoped for, and striven for falls apart and we realize that we are, quite simply, mortal, incapable of saving ourselves and desperately in need of a God who meets us where we are.

And this means that we don’t necessarily get the God we might think we want, but instead, the God we need.

Bill tells of a friend of his who hit rock bottom. He fell from his prestigious place as a lawyer to the depths of alcoholism.

He’s now on his way to recovery thanks to his loving wife and children and the good work of AA - but especially because God is a God who meets us where we are - when we really need him.

“I’d always gone to church,” the man told Bill, “but always in the back of my mind, I thought Church was for losers, the weak. But you would be amazed at what I’ve learned about God.”

“Like what?” Bill asked him. “Like so many phrases I heard all my life suddenly have become real to me,” he replied. “Like what?” Bill asked again.

“Like take up your cross’ and ‘You can only find your life by losing it.’ Through hitting rock bottom, I’ve met God,” said Bill’s friend.

Thus far in our Gospel Lesson, Jesus has been talking only to his disciples. But after his encounter with Peter, Jesus calls the crowds to come closer and listen. He then takes up the question of the Christian life, stating plain and simple that those who want to follow him must deny themselves and take up their cross.

But we need to slow down a minute here… because we all too often view Jesus’ language of cross-bearing and denial through the lens of…say… “Weight Watchers.”

You know, have a little less of the things you like, don’t over indulge in the things that make you happy, cut enjoyment calories whenever possible because they’re not finally… I don’t know - Christian.

But I don’t think that’s what Jesus is talking about. I think instead, Jesus is saying that the “life” that has been packaged and sold to us isn’t real life and we need to die to those illusions to be born into the abundant life God wants for us.

Here’s the thing: many of us tend to think that life is something you go out and get, or earn, or buy, or win.

But it turns out that life is like love, it can’t be won or earned or bought - only given away.

And the more we give it away, the more we have. In fact, only when we love others do we understand what love really is. In the same way, only when we give away our life for the sake of others do we discover it.

Somehow, in thinking about how to fulfil the needs of others our own deepest needs are met.

It’s the mystery of life and the key to the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus took up His Cross, what did he do? He chose - he wasn’t forced - to carry out the ministry that God wanted him to do. ***That*** is what “take up your cross” means - it is making an active choice to live the ministry that God has called us to, every day.

I think it also means breaking free from the small box we trap ourselves in when “I” is the centre of our universe.

I think it’s what Jesus is getting at when he talks about trying to save your life and losing it.

He said that, in fact, the only way to truly live is to give yourself away for the sake of others.

When we get trapped in the prison of our own self-interest, our own wants, or what “I” deserve, it becomes a place that robs us of life itself. Think of Jesus, who is himself the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Jesus’ commitment to God was so complete that he literally gave up his life for it.

I think one of the reasons why the early Christians cherished this very challenging teaching of Jesus is because they literally faced the same fate. The persecution they underwent for their faith, in many cases, put them in a place where they had to choose between their faith and their lives.

And when the time came, many of them chose to go to their own deaths for the sake of the life and love God offers us all. They had experienced something that was worth everything.

Have you? Jesus calls all of us to take up our cross and follow him.

Jesus calls all of us to choose between the life this world offers and the life of the Kingdom of God.

Between heaven and hell.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: “The cross is laid on every Christian.”

Remember the Rich Young Man who came running up to Jesus asking how to get eternal life?

Jesus said to him, “Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

But, “when the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth…”

“He went away sad, because he had great wealth…”

…how radically strange this one sentence sounds to a world obsessed with money, fame, and power:

He was sad because he had great wealth that he wanted to hold onto more than he wanted to follow Jesus.

How many people are “sad” because of the things that have them imprisoned to this world?

How many successful folks, in the worldly sense, are not experiencing ***real life***, true freedom and salvation?

Indeed, how many unsuccessful folks, are not experiencing real life, true freedom and salvation either because they’re running after all the wrong things?

Jesus Christ is “the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through” Him.

No one passes from death to life apart from Christ. We live in a world that is so messed up, so unhappy, so lost. And the Son of God has come into this world to save us from the results of following it.

The sadness, the loneliness, the darkness, the lostness, the hell. All we must do is forsake all else, take up our cross and follow Christ.

When we are giving up the rotten ways of the world, we really aren’t giving up much. The devil would have us think otherwise, but it’s true. And what we are gaining is worth everything!

Because in following Jesus to the Cross, we are also following Jesus to the Resurrection, and in doing so, we find that the way of the cross is none other than the way of life and peace and love and freedom.

God comes to us as One of us and calls us to follow. When we respond with obedience, we learn who Jesus truly is. We are most fully ourselves when there is less of Self and more of God, when we embrace the will of God, however painful, daily, hourly, continually it might be - when we move forward in the way of the cross toward the Resurrection Life.

Self-denial and cross-bearing are not about being less happy, but about discovering the real and abundant life - a kind of life the world can’t even imagine - that comes in and through merciful love and service to God and people. And this is what it’s all about.

Have you found this yet? Its available to anyone who will follow Him. **Amen**

**Affirmation of faith**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,** **who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,**

**born of the Virgin Mary,** **suffered under Pontius Pilate,** **was crucified, died, and was buried;**

**he descended to the dead.** **On the third day he rose again;** **he ascended into heaven,**

**he is seated at the right hand of the Father,** **and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,** **the holy catholic Church,** **the communion of saints,** **the forgiveness of sins,**

**the resurrection of the body,** **and the life everlasting.** **Amen.**

**Prayers of intercession**

*As children of our heavenly Father, let us bring our needs and concerns…..*

*Today begins a week of prayer for the elderly*…

Father God, thank you that we are never too old to walk in faith with you. Encourage those whom we know, the older saints, as they follow you each day, growing in wisdom and knowledge of you. Bring comfort to those who feel isolated or lonely and may we be ready to be there for those in need.

We pray for the staff, care givers and residents of our local Nursing Homes, Chapel House and Plessington Court, Elderholme and Crabwall, thank you for all those who volunteer, giving freely of their time to serve others. Thank you for the work of the Pilgrim’s Society which helps in many ways to support older people, through churches and their own homes.

**Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer**

Help us Lord to seek and chose to live in your ways, desiring to fulfil your will in our lives, that even if it means suffering, that we will still be willing to follow cheerfully and in obedience.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

We pray for the powerful, that they may use their influence based on mercy and justice, that wealth may not hold more influence than what it right and that the whisper of truth will be heard above the clamour of expediency, especially with regards to use of the earth’s resources and provision of vaccines, homes and shelter to the vulnerable and refugees. We pray for Afghanistan and all those left in fear for their protection and safe passage.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

We know the hardest place often to really walk in your ways is in our homes and places of work, may we be self disciplined in what we say and the tone we use, may we speak wisely, positively and with love in our hearts.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

We remember before you those who are ill in body, mind or spirit, receiving treatment, recovering from surgery or grieving. May they be given courage and hope, ease from their pain and healing to wholeness and that we may know best how to help and support them.

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**The Lord’s Prayer *Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer:**

The Lord touch your heart with His love and open your life to His glory and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**