

East Durham Methodist Circuit:
On-line Service for Sunday 28th February 2021

compiled by Judy Tasker and Ann Riding

Theme: Faith and Discipleship

Call to worship:

Holy Spirit of God, guide us, for we would follow Jesus.
Open our hearts and minds to his truth
Enliven our imagination to his presence
Excite our emotion to his offered love
Increase our gratitude for his living, dying and rising
And strengthen us in our commitment
That we may walk in step with him, our Lord and Saviour.

Amen

Hymn: **Come, now is the time to worship** Brian Doerksen **StF 24**

Come, now is the time to worship.
Come, now is the time to give your heart.
Come, just as you are to worship.
Come, just as you are before your God,
Come.

One day every tongue
will confess you are God,
one day every knee will bow.
Still, the greatest treasure remains
for those who gladly choose you now

Come, now is the time to worship...

Prayer of adoration and confession

Praise to you, Lord our God - King of creation, Maker and minder of all we know; the very heart of all being. We praise you.

Your glory is seen in majestic grandeur, in intricate miniature, in beauty and truth, love and laughter, in tears and joy. Praise to you, Lord our God - come among us, Redeemer of the world: healing brokenness, speaking truth, showing love, giving self on the cross, in Christ.

Praise to you Lord our God, coming now, giving life, breathing hope, lighting minds, lifting hearts, falling fresh on all who call. Praise to you, Lord our God. **Amen**

Merciful God we have promised to be followers of your son Jesus Christ.

Forgive us we pray for all in our lives that denies our promise:

For being slow to care and quick to criticise;
For being slow to love and quick to despise;
For being slow to give and quick to take;
For being slow to stand for justice and quick to settle for compromise.

Forgive us for being slow to do your will and quick to follow our own desires,
For being slow to worship you and quick to glorify ourselves.

Forgive us we pray and free us from the weight of the sorrow of sin's guilt. Speak to us again your word of new beginning: that if we are truly sorry, you truly forgive, in Jesus' name.

Amen

Let us now say **The Lord's Prayer** together:

**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 this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever.**

Amen

Reading: Romans 4: 13-25 New International Version

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.¹⁴ For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless,¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed - the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead - since he was about a hundred years old - and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

²² This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."²³ The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone,²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness - for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Hymn: To God be the glory Frances van Alstyne (Fanny Crosby) StF 94

1. To God be the glory, great things he has done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
Who yielded his life in atonement for sin
And opened the life-gate that all may go in

**Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;
And give him the glory great things he has done!**

2. O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God!
And every offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives: **Praise the Lord...**

3. Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see: **Praise the Lord...**

Reflection: **Discipleship** by Ann Riding

Have you ever wondered who or what a disciple is?

Maybe someone like a "roadie" or "helper" who makes a person tick!
Or a follower like a football fan who goes to every game – not to play and score the goals but to support the team just the same.

Jesus had disciples named and unnamed, they followed him while the work of God was done. They were not only disciples but friends who gave support and love. We too can be disciples in every way of life, as we speak and work, love and play, worship and pray.

Jesus showed them the way the way to follow Him, the way to teach others, the way to love and accept all. At times they disappointed him, misunderstood his message and even denied him. But he never stopped loving and caring for them. Explaining with great patience his story and calling and that he would not be with them for very long.

After Jesus was crucified the Disciples realised that he had given them the power to tell the story of our Saviour to all and to be able to help all believers to be the followers of their king.

So what is a **DISCIPLE**?

The dictionary says it is a follower of someone or something. For us a disciple is follower of Jesus who loves God, loves people and encourages others to be disciples. So we pray: Lord Jesus, your '**FOLLOW ME**' still echoes down the ages so we are not alone today or any day. We follow you because we trust you.

YOU ARE THE WAY

We follow you because we believe you.

YOU ARE THE TRUTH

We follow you because we cannot live without you.

YOU ARE THE LIFE

We worship you because trust, believe and desire to live your life, bring us to your feet in adoration and praise. **Amen**

Reading: Mark 8: 31-38 Jesus Predicts His Death New International Version

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"

³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Hymn: The Servant King

Graham Kendrick

StF 272

1. From heaven you came, helpless
babe,
Entered our world, your glory veiled,
Not to be served but to serve,
And give your life that we might live.

**This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering,
Of worship to the Servant King.**

2. There in the garden of tears
My heavy load he chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will, but yours,' he said. **This
is our God...**

3. Come see his hands and his feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice,
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered. **This is...**

4. So let us learn how to serve
And in our lives enthrone him,
Each other's needs to prefer,
For it is Christ we're serving. **This is...**

Intercessions:

Loving God, we pray for your followers across the world. We especially remember those who live in fear of persecution, because of their faith in you. May they feel your presence with them through the power of the Holy Spirit. May we never become complacent about our freedom to worship you. May we always strive to show the world that we are your disciples.

Merciful God, we pray for those who have power and influence in government, locally, nationally and across the world. May they govern with wisdom, working for justice and peace.

We remember all who support or work for fair trade across the world. We pray for those places where there is suffering because of natural disasters, many of which are caused

by climate change. Help each one of us to consider how we can make small changes in our own lives which can make a difference for the good of our planet.

Compassionate God, we pray for all who are sad, lonely or bereaved, those who are ill, waiting for tests or for the results of tests, remembering also those who care for them, at home or in hospital or care homes. At this time of this pandemic we give thanks for the NHS workers and all who have given so much of themselves in fighting this virus. May they feel appreciated and strengthened.

Gracious, loving God, we bring these prayers in Jesus' name, Amen.

Message:

On this second Sunday in Lent we're looking at faith and discipleship. As Christians what do we mean when we talk about faith? Maybe it is saying 'yes', when you want to say 'no'. Perhaps it is believing all things are possible when it looks like they're impossible. Perhaps it's trusting and believing that God/ Jesus knows best.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, holds Abraham up before us as a wonderful example of someone having faith in God; of believing and trusting that God will keep his promise to him. Despite him and his wife being very elderly, God promised that Abraham would be the father of many people. He didn't give up believing that what God promised would become a reality. His faith in God was key to his life.

This is what is required of a disciple of Jesus – having faith in Him: believing that his way is the right way, even when things are difficult, or even seem impossible. So what is the author of this gospel, attributed to someone called Mark, telling us? He doesn't waste words. Commentators say the gospel was written in Rome, around 65–67 AD. It's the earliest of the gospels and it wasn't written simply as a biography of Jesus' life. It was written to share the Good News of Jesus Christ; to say who Jesus is and what it means to follow him.

The author was certainly a first century Christian who fervently wanted to share his faith with others. He got straight to the point. Chapter 1:1 '**The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**' And from there on he tells us just what we need to know about being a disciple, a follower of Jesus.

For three years Jesus had been teaching and showing by his actions just what discipleship meant. In the previous verses to our scripture reading, Jesus asked those who were close to him, '**Who do people say that I am?**' And we know their answer. They replied, John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets. But then he put them on the spot and asked, '**But who do you say that I am?**'

Peter answered for them, '**You are the Messiah.**' It seemed that they had got it! Or it seemed that Peter had! So then, in the next few verses that we heard, Jesus began to teach the disciples that the Son of Man must suffer and die and rise again. But Peter, his outspoken friend of almost three years, just couldn't bear to hear it. Mark tells us that Peter took Jesus to one side and spoke sternly, disapprovingly to him.

Like all the Jewish nation, Peter was expecting a Messiah who would lead them in rebellion against their Roman oppressors and free them. He expected a mighty, powerful Messiah. But here was Jesus speaking in this way, where he would seemingly

be the loser. He would be killed. Peter couldn't understand it and obviously couldn't bear it. He was appalled at the idea.

Poor Peter, what a shock he must have had when Jesus – in front of all the others – shouted, '**Get behind me, Satan!**' Such harsh words!

But, for Jesus, those struggles he'd faced at the beginning of his ministry, in the desert, battling the demons, it was like they were tempting him again. Take the easy way, the way of fame and fortune. He knew he had the power to do that; to resist the way of death; the way of the cross. Here was his friend, Peter, making him face them again.

So speaking to the disciples and the crowds that were following, Jesus tells them all what is expected if they become his followers. Mark makes sure his readers, both then and now, can know that the things that are important in God's kingdom are love, justice and peace. He told them that their lives could never be the same, if they followed him; if they walked with him; if they call him the Christ. It was only after the resurrection that the disciples would begin to comprehend all that Jesus was teaching.

The theme of suffering predominates and the first readers of this gospel would be able to understand this, this need for self-denial; giving up on one's own idea of what life should be like. Not putting yourself first; making life cosy for you and yours. Peter had to realise that his dream of the future wasn't God's.

Followers of Jesus are required to do just that – follow, copy, live in the way of Jesus' example. At that time, in the Roman Empire, when Nero was the emperor, it really did literally mean risking losing one's life if you called Jesus '**Lord**'. Only Caesar was Lord! It really did come down to that for many of those early disciples for whom Mark was writing.

Sadly, as we know, many have died because of their faith in Jesus through the centuries and up to today. The Christian charity, Open Doors, produces a World Watch list every year, showing the dangerous places in the world to be a Christian, where bullying and beatings, intimidation and discrimination are the least problems. Persecution, imprisonment and death are often a reality.

Jesus had to make choices. His disciples then, and through the centuries have had to make choices. And so, whose side are we on? Whose side am I on? Whose side are you on? It's a challenge for us to work out. What are our values? If we're followers of Jesus, our values must be God's Kingdom values, as Jesus demonstrated. He expects us to live our lives following his example, in faith, working for his kingdom of love, justice and peace.

We have to make choices. Which choice will demonstrate God's love for all and lead to justice and peace?

One simple example is how we spend our money in our daily living. Will our spending help or hinder the lives of others? It may cost a little more to buy fairly traded items, but it will certainly make life better for the producers and their families, to be able to send their children to school, with their uniforms, books and equipment. They'll also have some money to reinvest in their business. At the moment, we're in the middle of Fair Trade Fortnight and this raises awareness of the choices we have at the supermarket.

Of course there are other times when we have to make choices. Speaking up for what we believe, when controversial topics arise in conversation, can make us stick out like a sore thumb. For example, in these days, with regard to the coronavirus, there are

discussions regarding richer countries giving poorer nations their spare vaccines. Some think we should keep the spare doses, stockpiled for ourselves. Others believe we should share what we have. Whatever the subject under discussion, if our faith in Jesus causes us to be in a small minority, and we speak out, we can be ridiculed, ignored or called names. It can cause friction and divisions between family members. But our faith in Jesus gives us strength, courage and comfort.

If our thinking isn't in line with Jesus' example, is it because we're ashamed to be his follower? Are we denying him? He told the disciples and Mark's gospel is telling us, just what Jesus expects of his followers. Life isn't meant to be easy because we're Jesus' disciples. This isn't a soft, woolly piece of teaching he's given the twelve and the crowd. No-one can say they haven't been warned! Life does change when we decide to walk Jesus' way.

The words of Singing the Faith 662 speak eloquently about this:

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred? Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve though the way be rough and narrow?

Will you walk the path that will cost you much and embrace the pain and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you the disciples of tomorrow?

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down when the multitudes are silent?

Will you make a choice to stand your ground when the crowds are turning violent?

In your city streets will you be God's heart? Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start, will you share your faith with the faithless?

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith and believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of grace? Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

We will walk the path that will cost us much and embrace the pain and sorrow.

We will trust in One who entrusts to us the disciples of tomorrow.

As followers who live after Jesus rose from the dead, we're at a much greater advantage. We know the Good News. We know he died for us, to take away our sins, so that we may have eternal life. We believe he rose from the dead, as he said he would and now reigns with God in heaven.

We know our God makes the impossible possible. Our journeys may not be easy. Many Christians have difficulties to face, but as we walk with Jesus, we know he's been through every kind of situation we may meet in life. Whether it's bereavement, rejection, desertion, physical and mental pain and torture, injustice and death, Jesus has suffered all of these and through the power of the Holy Spirit we know he is with us.

We can travel in hope – able to show the world who we are – followers of Jesus. May our faith in him show in our lives by what we say; what we do; how we treat others; how we copy Jesus, our Lord.

Through faith in Jesus, no matter what life brings, there's help for our journey from our Lord and Saviour. So as we travel through Lent towards Good Friday let's keep in step with him.

Amen

Hymn:

Knowing You

Graham Kendrick

StF 489

1. All I once held dear,
built my life upon,
all this world reveres,
and wars to own,
all I once thought gain
I have counted loss;
spent and worthless now,
compared to this.

**Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you,
There is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness,
And I love you, Lord**

2. Now my heart's desire
is to know you more
to be found in you
and known as yours.
To possess my faith
what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift
of righteousness. **Knowing you...**

3. Oh, to know the power
of your risen life,
and to know you in
your sufferings.
To become like you
in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live
and never die. **Knowing you...**

Blessing:

Remember all God has done. Rejoice in all he is doing. Receive all he shall yet do.
Put your hand in his, the God of past, present and future and walk with him wherever he
may lead, knowing that he will walk with you, this day and always. **Amen**