

East Durham Methodist Circuit:
On-line Service for Sunday 4th July 2021

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Theme: The Spirit Within

Call to worship:

Powerful, Almighty God, we turn our eyes to You.

We come to You for protection, from our everyday fears, dangers and the things that hurt us most. We come to You for the benefit of all others.

Lord guide us, strengthen us, bring us hope and have mercy on us.

In complete faith, hope, commitment and trust we stand – vulnerable - in Your power as we offer ourselves to You. **Amen**

Written in celebration of the NRSV Bible being published, our first hymn focuses on the 'Trinitarian' elements of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Through references to both the Old and New Testaments, this hymn enriches the wonder and power of our everlasting God.

Hymn: **God has spoken – by his prophets** George Wallace Briggs **StF 157**

1. God has spoken – by his prophets,
spoken his unchanging word;
each from age to age proclaiming
God, the one, the righteous Lord.
'Mid the world's despair and turmoil
one firm anchor holding fast:
God eternal reigns forever,
God the first, and God the last.

2. God has spoken – by Christ Jesus,
Christ, the everlasting Son,
brightness of the Father's glory,
with the Father ever one;
spoken by the Word incarnate,

God from God, ere time was born,
Light from Light, to earth descending,
Christ, revealing God to all.
We come to God in prayer.

3. God is speaking – by the Spirit,
speaking to our hearts again,
in the age-long word expounding
God's own message, now as then.
Through the rise and fall of nations
one sure faith is standing fast;
God still speaks, the Word unchanging,
God the first, and God the last.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession from Ashleigh Pritchard

Dear Lord, Thank You for Your amazing power and work in our lives. Thank you for Your goodness and for Your blessings over us. Thank You that You are able to bring hope through even the toughest of times, strengthening us for your purposes. Thank You for Your great love and care. Thank You for Your mercy and grace. Thank you that You are always with us and will never leave us. Thank You for Your incredible sacrifice so that we might have freedom and life.

Lord we are sorry that we sometimes forget all that You have provided for us and doubt Your ability to provide for us in the future. We are sorry when we turn to other people or our possessions, believing that they can fulfil us more than You can. We are sorry that it is sometimes easier to put up a wall to protect ourselves rather than surrendering ourselves to You and allowing Your power to work in our lives.

Lord help us to be vulnerable to You. Help us to put our lives in Your hands and know that You are sufficient and provide everything that we need. Help us to set our eyes and our hearts on You afresh. Renew our spirits, fill us with Your peace and joy. We love You and we need You, this day and every day. We give You praise and thanks, for You alone are worthy!
Amen

Hymn: **Forgive our sins as we forgive** Rosamond Eleanor Herklots **StF 423**

1. 'Forgive our sins as we forgive',
You taught us, Lord, to pray,
but You alone can grant us grace
to live the words we say.

3. In blazing light Your cross reveals
the truth we dimly knew,
how small the debts are owed to us,
how great our debt to You!

2. How can Your pardon reach and bless
the unforgiving heart
that broods on wrongs and will not let
old bitterness depart?

4. Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls
and bid resentments cease,
then reconciled by God to all,
our lives will spread Your peace.

Old Testament Reading: **Ezekiel 2:1-5** New Revised Standard Version

The Vision of the Scroll

¹ He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. ² And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. ³ He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. ⁴ The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' ⁵ Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

New Testament Reading: **Mark 6:1-13** New Revised Standard Version

The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

⁶ He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offence at him. ⁴ Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief.

The Mission of the Twelve

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Message:

Our two chosen lectionary bible readings for today bring to attention an important turning point for the characters mentioned. Before, we go on, I would also like to highlight three nouns that crop up throughout this message: **vulnerability, mission, and dedication.**

Let's start off with our Mark reading...

Following recent rejection received, Jesus travelled the 20 or so miles to Nazareth. It's here, at the beginning of chapter six, we find Jesus, offering the people of his hometown a second chance to believe; but instead, he was met with a huge proportion of negativity.

I guess in essence, preconceptions of Jesus were all those that scorned Him needed to fuel their stubborn resilience and disbelief of something great, something truly great that could change their lives. The people of Nazareth mocked and rejected this prophet who had grown up among them. Who does this Jesus think he is? "We know his family, we watched him grow up. He's no better than the rest of us. What gives him the right to talk in this way?"

Don't forget, the circumstances of Jesus' birth would have been remembered and rebuked by many, perhaps bringing great feelings of disdain.

Jesus would have been aware of how the people of Nazareth felt about him. Yet he showed true dedication and still chose to go back to his hometown to preach.

How do you think Jesus might have felt? Reluctant? Anxious? Determined?

Verse 6 tells us He was amazed at their disbelief. This shows a vulnerable side that perhaps we don't often associate with Jesus.

We often see vulnerability as a shortfall, a sign of weakness. Personally, this feeling washes over me when I'm a bit overwhelmed by things going on around me, or I'm doing something that's really difficult and sudden doubt in my own ability kicks in.

As Christians we are told to be prepared to be vulnerable. When feeling this way, our vulnerability can be a good thing. God can raise us above those feelings if we open ourselves to Him and allow his Holy Spirit inside us to prepare us to be fit for mission and a lifelong dedication.

We know that Mark would have been very familiar with the stories from the Old Testament and we certainly know that Jesus had a close relationship with it and based His teaching on the Old Testament.

Like Jeremiah, Amos and Isaiah, Ezekiel begins his book by talking about the disobedience and delusion of God's people and God's call to stand firm and tell the truth.

Our verses (2:1-5) on Ezekiel's vision illustrates the moment when Ezekiel is called by God to be a prophet.

This vision is quick to show Ezekiel as weak, mortal and vulnerable. Yet, as we read further, we see that by standing up, his renewed and strengthened posture would prepare him – mission ready – for lifelong dedication as a prophet.

God will speak to **us** when we acknowledge our vulnerability and stand strong. God sends his Holy Spirit into **us** and gives **us** the will to do our duty to God.

Ezekiel, now strong, determined and fired up for the task in hand, is sent with a message. We are told that not everyone will believe and live by the message... however, they will have taken in enough to know that a prophet from God is among them.

I wonder how much of this Old Testament passage Jesus was reminded of when He was rejected on returning to his hometown? People's stubborn resilience and disbelief of something great, something truly great that could change their lives.

Jesus, filled by God's Holy Spirit, continued his mission, regardless of what others might think.

Moving on to the second part of our Mark passage, 'The Mission of the Twelve'.

You might think it would have made more sense for Jesus to send the disciples out individually. For one thing, they would have been able to get round more people more quickly. However, Jesus chose to send his disciples out in twos. We know it's easier and more enthusiastic for us to have someone with us to lift our mood and help out when things don't quite go according to plan.

In verse 8, Jesus is asking His disciples to go about their mission without any of the usual material possessions. This may seem a strange thing to ask, but Jesus wanted them to have to rely on others. Hence the instruction to wear sandals and only one tunic. The people were more likely to be instantly hospitable towards them. More likely to invite them indoors, away from cold night-time temperatures. The disciples were instructed to reach out for hospitality.

An invitation into the heart of the villages on their route gave them the opportunity to speak directly and personally to people about the good news of the Kingdom of God. This method of delivery was neither pre-packaged nor intended to impress.

In these five verses of this fast-paced book of Mark, you can feel the tempo slow and the slight pause as Jesus' instructs the disciples before they begin this mission.

Is the pause also intended for us? To get us to pause and think about what we need to take along with us to live a life of dedication to God?

When you have a spare moment today, have a think about what you take with you when you pack for an overnight stay away from home. What would you not leave home without?

Now think about reducing that list to three items... then two items... What is the absolute minimum you would need? The absolute essential items for your Christian journey?

Ezekiel in our bible reading was vulnerable. The disciples were prepared to be vulnerable and rely on God and other people to be successful. A lot of the world may consider vulnerability a weakness. However, for those who choose to follow Jesus, it can start a hope in us. It can create opportunities for God to be at work in and through us in our daily lives. It can help us to recognise the value and virtue of hospitality and generosity.

Stand by what you believe in and use those vulnerable times to feel closer to God and as part of your mission, think about the people you might come into contact with this coming week and who may well be quite grateful for something you could offer to them.

But it's not just for this week... this is a lifelong dedication.

Amen

Hymn: **The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want** Stuart Townsend **StF 481**

1. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want
He makes me lie in pastures green,
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

2. He guides my ways in righteousness,
and He anoints my head with oil;
and my cup – it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights. **And I will...**

**And I will trust in You alone,
and I will trust in You alone,
for Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.**

3. And though I walk the darkest path –
I will not fear the evil one,
for You are with me, and Your rod and staff
are the comfort I need to know. **And I will...**

Prayers of Intercession and The Lord's Prayer: from Ashleigh Pritchard

Lord Jesus, we come to You today and thank You for the privilege of praying for others. We lift up those in our neighbourhood, in our town, and in our church.

Beginning with those who follow You, help them influence others for good. Let them be the light guiding others to You. Deepen their love for You and for the people around them. Raise up leaders who will serve You faithfully. Turn the hearts of fathers toward their children, and families toward You. Help them to exemplify Your values and make them bold in their faith. Strengthen our families and those closest to us Lord. May our love for You help us to love others and make a difference in our world.

Lord, as you are aware, Covid 19 has affected each of us in so many different ways throughout the pandemic. We pray for those whose lives and families have been

devastated by the pandemic, both at home and around the world, particularly those in developing countries. Our hearts are breaking to see those who are already vulnerable and who face poverty, unjust systems and marginalisation, suffer even more during this time.

We pray for our doctors and nurses and all those whom You have called to study and practice the arts of healing the sick. Strengthen them in body and soul, and bless their work, that they may give comfort to those under their care.

We pray for teachers, for students, and for all those in authority and leadership, both locally and throughout the world. Give them Your mind and surround them with godly counsellors who will exercise integrity and work for justice, morality and freedom. Help them to grow the potential of everyone they meet.

We pray for the lost, the hurting, the lonely, the sick, the bereaved, and those who are imprisoned - whether behind visible or invisible walls. Send Your comfort, Your peace and Your calming presence to those who are without hope. Protect the vulnerable and hold them close to Your heart.

So many needs Jesus, but You are adequate for every need. Your name is powerful and Your power is great.

Amen

So 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**

Hear us Lord as we confirm our commitment to You by singing or reading the words of our final hymn. As we do so, we ask that You take our vulnerability and use Your Holy Spirit to strengthen and guide us on our lifelong mission and dedication to You.

Hymn: Make us your prophets, Lord

Alan Gaunt

StF665

1. Make us your prophets, Lord,
who truly hear your word,
which fires us with your Spirit's inspiration.

In all we say and do
prove that your love is true,
the hope and source of peace for every nation.

2. And when we fail to love
or set ourselves above
our neighbours with their different ways of
seeing,
bring us with all our pride
where Jesus, crucified,
for love of all committed his whole being.

3. Give us his love that shares
our neighbours' pain, and dares

Whether we live or die
help us to prophesy,
proclaiming peace and reconciliation.

4. Though we live quietly,
with no authority,
yet feeble faith in us may show your goodness;
and though we may not see
how crucial it may be,
our faltering love may show your loving kindness.

5. In faith and hope we pray,
use us to serve that day
when bigotry and hatred are defeated,
when perfect peace is won
and lasting justice done,
with love's eternal promises completed.

to suffer enmity and condemnation.

Blessing: Roots

Lord, You sent your disciples into the world to share Your word with those in need - may we approach this coming week with a similar desire.

You sent them carrying little but trusting much - may we live this week with a similar attitude.

May our lives be less about us and our needs and more about You and Your love and care for all people in all places and circumstances.

May we love as You love.

We ask this in Your name.

Amen