

**East Durham Methodist Circuit:**  
**On-line Service for Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021**

compiled by Joan Murray and Heidi Ure

**Theme: On Whose Authority**

**Call to worship:**

We are called to recognise God's authority and to submit to it in every area of our lives.

Let us invite God to direct our thinking and our prayers.

Let us give God the highest place in our lives.

Let us worship the living God!

**Gathering Prayer:**

Almighty God, we recognise that all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to you.

We pray that you draw near to us today, to impart your truth and show us your way.

**Amen**

Our first hymn is as powerful read as a poetic creed as it is sung to the tune NICAEA. Whichever you choose to do, let the strength of the words fill you with the Holy Spirit.

**Hymn:    **Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!**    traditional    **StF 11 / H&P 7****

1. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee:  
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,  
God in three Persons blessed Trinity!

3. Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,  
Though the sinful human eye they glory may not see  
Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,  
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

2. Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,  
Casting down their golden crowns around the  
glassy sea;  
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee  
Who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

4. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!  
All they works shall praise thy name in earth and sky  
and sea;  
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

We come to God in prayer:

**Prayers of Thanksgiving and Confession**    from Heidi Ure

God, we thank you for this extraordinary world and its reminders of resilience, grace, hope and life:

For when grass shoots break through concrete, when the sun emerges after storms, for when people offer laughter in deep sadness. In these moments we see glimpses of who you are – and we are grateful.

Yet if we reduce you to being like the cycle of nature or the best of humankind, we diminish your power to make the impossible real: to break apart the impenetrable evils of oppression, to cast out the very real fears that paralyse us, to banish the insidious demons of judgement and worthlessness.

Forgive us God when we do not trust you to deal with the unspeakable awfulness in our lives and world. In the silence we name the parts of our lives and our world that we believe are too broken to ever be made whole.

Cast out our demons, Lord, **Make us new again**

Forgive us when contribute to the brokenness of the world; the lives of people around us. In silence we name the things we have done that separate us from you and from others.

Cast out our demons, Lord, **Make us new again**

Forgive us when we trust darkness more than we trust your light. In the silence we name the things we think we need to keep hidden.

Cast out our demons, Lord, **Make us new again**

Scripture says that those who are in Christ are a new creation and everything old has passed away. See: the new has come!

Hear then Christ's word of grace to us: 'Your sins are forgiven.'

**Thanks be to God. Amen**

**Old Testament Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-20** New Revised Standard Version

### **A New Prophet Like Moses**

<sup>15</sup> The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. <sup>16</sup> This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the LORD my God anymore, or ever again see this great fire, I will die." <sup>17</sup> Then the LORD replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. <sup>18</sup> I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. <sup>19</sup> Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. <sup>20</sup> But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die."

**New Testament Reading: Mark 1: 21-28** New Revised Standard Version

### **The Man with an Unclean Spirit**

<sup>21</sup> They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup> They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup> and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup> They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." <sup>28</sup> At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

1. Speak O Lord, as we come to you  
to receive the food of your holy word.  
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;  
shape and fashion us in your likeness,  
that the light of Christ might be seen today  
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.  
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us  
all your purposes, for your glory.

2. Teach us, Lord, full obedience,  
holy reverence, true humility.  
Test our thoughts and our attitudes  
in the radiance of your purity

Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see  
your majestic love and authority.  
Words of power that can never fail;  
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

3. Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;  
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.  
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time  
that will echo down through eternity.  
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,  
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.  
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built  
and the earth is filled with your glory.

**Message:**

The lectionary this week brings us back to the opening chapter of the Gospel of Mark.

Remember the urgency and excitement you can feel when reading Mark's words and the way in which he wastes no time in getting to the real Jesus; the Jesus he wants us to know and to follow.

This account of 'The Man with an Unclean Spirit' is the first mention by Mark of Jesus' healings.

During this period, the Jewish people would have been brought up in a strong and substantial religious environment and time in the synagogue - on the Sabbath - listening to the teachings of the Scribes was an important part of their learning.

I guess, a bit like us Methodists, visiting speakers would have been invited and it's from within this synagogue in Capernaum that we witness the people's reaction on hearing Jesus teach.

Verse 22 - he wasn't like the teachers of the law;... .. he taught with authority.

We are already, beginning to get a hint of what life was like in Capernaum. As the main base for many Roman troops, it had become a busy, bustling city.

This in turn would have brought an element of wealth and with it, arrogance, sin and corruption. It's here Jesus chose to make his home, after leaving Nazareth and being tempted in the wilderness.

The scribes were the law, the ones who had authority to teach, but were they doing this to the best of their ability; accurately and without prejudice? Or had an agenda of greed and self-gain crept into their work?

Laura shared with us this account set within the synagogue. Mark delivers an urgency on how quickly we get a feel of the people's reaction on hearing Jesus teach.

He wants us to witness the immediate effect Jesus has on his listeners. Mark chose the word 'authority'... the power to make a difference... to deliver...

To reinforce this authority, we are told about the man who went into the synagogue with an unclean, or evil spirit. This is a theoretical demon, symbolising, not one man; it's a 'save' for many people. The passage gives insight into the type of healer Jesus is. His authority is open and honest. He isn't afraid of who or what he comes up against, he doesn't try to disguise... to self-promote... he shows no fear towards the man and his demon.

Whenever Jesus heals, he does so with authority and backs it up with a positive action. Salvation for all who suffer, starts right here.

Moving further through our Gospel passage, we hear Verse 27 'They were all amazed'... ..What was this? A truth... a truth about Jesus. The people liked it; the scribes didn't.

How does our Old Testament reading fit into this?

Our speaker is Moses, a prophet with huge authority as a leader gained by action; deliverance.

Well-deserved don't you think?

He had led his people out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, through the wilderness to the promised land. He too backed his authority with positive action. People understood him, because he spoke to the people of God using words familiar to them.

In Deuteronomy 18, Moses prepares the people for God's gift of another prophet like him. Just like they did in our Mark reading, the people react in fear. Moses consoles them with reassurances that the new prophet, like him will stand fearlessly before God on our behalf and speak the words God has given to him. During today's service we have witnessed both Moses and Jesus standing fearlessly before God on our behalf.

What about life going on around us today?

Whether it's climate change, life-changing diets, or dealing with the economic fallout from the Coronavirus pandemic, we are surrounded by experts who speak with authority on their given subject. And don't you find on the news, this is often followed by another expert speaking with authority on the same subject – but with a completely different view! On social media, it is even worse; we have no idea whether the person speaking is an expert or not – but you can probably guarantee there will be a lot of people shouting at each other! The new buzz words for it: '**Fake News**'. reference Roots

This doesn't look like changing for us any time soon. It can and certainly does in our house, leave us longing for genuine authority. This was why Jesus' teaching received the reaction that it did. He not only spoke with certainty and confidence, but he backed up his teaching with actions that confirmed his authenticity and authority. He really did hold power! An unclean spirit looked to heckle him, but was firmly rebuked and sent packing.

As Christians, we recognise God's authority, and we look to both the words and actions of Jesus to reveal it. If someone claims to have authority today, we are right to ask: do their actions match their words? And what is the fruit of those words?

Being honest, open and pure in how you treat others. Follow Christ with truth and integrity and you too will be saved. **Amen**

## **Prayers of Intercession & The Lord's Prayer:**

from Heidi Ure

In faith, let us pray to the Lord, saying...

Jesus, light of the world **May the whole earth know your brightness.**

We give you thanks, O Lord, in this congregation,  
And we delight in your marvellous works.  
You are gracious and full of compassion;  
Your righteousness endures forever.  
The works of your hands are faithfulness and justice;  
All your commandments are sure.  
Send forth your redemption, gracious Lord,  
That all people everywhere might partake of your everlasting covenant,  
And praise your glorious name forever.

### **Silence**

Jesus is the light of the world **May the whole earth know his brightness.**

We pray for the world,  
For the many people who do not yet know you,  
For those who scoff or think lightly of the precious name of Jesus,  
And for those who have not listened to your teaching.  
Lord Christ, you are the Holy One of God.  
One who teaches with authority,  
And your voice is the voice of the Lord our God.  
May all nations hear your life-giving word  
And follow you alone.

### **Silence**

Jesus, light of the world **May the whole earth know your brightness.**

We lift our voices with your worldwide church,  
And we praise you that you have bought us at great price, Lord Christ.  
Teach us to love one another in humility.  
Forbid it, Lord, that, because of our knowledge,  
We might wound and destroy one another.  
Unify your church in one spirit,  
For we desire to build one another up in love.  
Give us your grace to shine forth your light to the people around us.

### **Silence**

Jesus, light of the world **May the whole earth know your brightness.**

We pray for the poor, the oppressed, the hungry, and the sick;  
The broken and despairing;  
The lonely and those afflicted by doubt and fear.  
We think of orphans and widows, prisoners and slaves,  
Those struggling with addiction and pain.  
The burden of the world is too great for us,

And the groaning of suffering too much for us to bear!  
Have mercy on all that you have made, O Lord!  
In your infinite compassion and wisdom,  
Proclaim your rule of righteousness to the ends of the earth.  
Lift up those who are bowed down,  
Set their feet on sure ground,  
That many would see and put their trust in you.  
For you alone are the hope of the afflicted,  
You alone are the one who restores all things.

### **Silence**

Jesus, light of the world **May the whole earth know your brightness.**

We thank you for your church. How beautiful is the bride of Christ, stretching back throughout the ages and across the world, crossing boundaries of time and place!  
We remember now those who have gone before us, those who have died in the faith, trusting that they are in your care.

### **Silence**

Jesus, light of the world **May the whole earth know your brightness.**

Transform us, O Lord, to be a people who clearly and brightly reflect the light of our Lord Jesus Christ, Through whom we humbly pray. **Amen**

**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 confirm our commitment to you as we sing, or read the words to our final hymn:

**Hymn:**      **This is our God**      Reuben Morgan

Your grace is enough; more than I need  
At Your word I will believe  
I wait for You; draw near again  
Let Your Spirit make me new

**And I will fall at Your feet  
I will fall at Your feet  
And I will worship You here**

Your presence in me; Jesus light the way  
By the power of Your word  
I am restored; I am redeemed  
By Your Spirit I am free

**And I will fall...**

Freely You gave it all for us  
Surrendered Your life upon that cross  
Great is the love poured out for all  
This is our God;

**And I will fall...**

Lifted on high from death to life  
Forever our God is glorified  
Servant and King rescued the world; this is our  
God

**Blessing:**

Almighty God, be with us this week. Meet with us each morning and in every situation throughout the day. Whoever we are with help us to draw on your strength and wisdom, that we may be faithful and true in following the example and pattern given to us by Jesus.

**Amen**