

17 October 2021

Sentence

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
Mark 10.45

Prayer of the Day

God of unchangeable power, when the heaven and earth were made,
the morning stars sang together and the host of heaven shouted for joy:
open our eyes to the wonders of creation and teach us to use all things for good, to the honour of
your glorious name; through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Job 38.1-7

¹ Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: ² 'Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? ³ Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.

⁴ 'Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. ⁵ Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? ⁶ On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – ⁷ while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

Psalm 104.1-10, 104.26

- ¹ Bless the Lord, O my soul:
 O Lord my God, how great you are!
- ² Clothed with majesty and honour:
 wrapped in light as in a garment.
- ³ You have stretched out the heavens like a tent-cloth:
 and laid the beams of your dwelling upon their waters;
- ⁴ You make the clouds your chariot:
 and ride upon the wings of the wind;
- ⁵ You make the winds your messengers:
 and flames of fire your ministers;
- ⁶ You have set the earth on its foundations:
 so that it shall never be moved.
- ⁷ The deep covered it as with a mantle:
 the waters stood above the hills.
- ⁸ At your rebuke they fled:
 at the voice of your thunder they hurried away;
- ⁹ They went up to the mountains,
 they went down by the valleys:
 to the place which you had appointed for them.
- ¹⁰ You fixed a limit which they may not pass:
 they shall not return again to cover the earth.
- ²⁶ Lord, how various are your works:
 in wisdom you have made them all,
 and the earth is full of your creatures.

Hebrews 5.1-10

¹ Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. ³ This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

⁴ And no one takes this honour on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'

⁶ And he says in another place, 'You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek.'

⁷ During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

⁸ Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ¹⁰ and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Mark 10.32-45

³² They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³ 'We are going up to Jerusalem,' he said, 'and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.'

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.' ³⁶ 'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked.

³⁷ They replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.' ³⁸ 'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said. 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?'

³⁹ 'We can,' they answered. Jesus said to them, 'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.'

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

The Christian faith is opposite to what any person would devise if they were setting up a religion. Whenever one of those cults gets exposed, there is always a leader and perhaps an inner circle who are most important, get all the wealth and benefits, probably use, and abuse their followers and get to sit around and enjoy life while their followers work hard and live at a much lower standard.



In Christianity even Jesus did not live differently to his disciples, he did not elevate himself in any way and came to serve not only his disciples but the whole world. He did not see equality with God something to be grasped but learnt obedience in all things. ⁸ Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ¹⁰ and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

In our church, I am your priest, your servant, trying to live the life that my Saviour and High Priest would have me live; I happen to have studied and know a little more about Biblical subjects and theology than some of you, but I try to use that knowledge to feed you and support you, in your Christian walk. I report to Parish council and ultimately to you all, so none of us is more important than anyone else. Others in the church have other skills and learning which they use to the Glory of God and to bless his people in this place; we are all a team working for the Kingdom of God.

Sure, in the Anglican Church, we have Bishops and Archbishops and all that, but truthfully those are dreadful jobs, so much responsibility, the buck gets passed to them and they must make awful decisions. We need to pray for our bishops.

God said, "Let there be light."

God and God alone gets the Glory because he is God and he make the universe and everything in it.

In our reading from Job, God has responded to his request for answers and his reply is a question about Job's place in the universe. The list is much, much longer than what we read today, it goes on and on, listing just a

few of the things that God does all the time and asking Job what he does to contribute. At the end Job rightly says, I do nothing, I am a nobody, I should never have questioned anything you do, you are God.

The Psalm also lists a few things that God has done and our response with the Psalmist should be one of awe and wonder. I'm sure one of the functions of spring is to remind us every year what an incredible creative God we have. Just walking around our garden or neighbourhood we can see an incredible diversity of tree, plants, and flowers, and each one of them is so different and exquisite. Bless the Lord, O my soul: O Lord my God, how great you are!



So, one day the Son of God, our High Priest, is walking the dusty road with his first disciples and explaining for the third time that his destiny on this earth is not glory and fawning crowds, but an agonising death on the cross but just like us, when the Lord is trying to explain something out of our world view, his disciples just do not hear him.

The brothers James and John see Jesus' messianic journey to Jerusalem as a march to *Glory*. They have heard all the words about suffering, death and rising again as simply a set of pictures, perhaps meaning 'its going to be tough, but we're going to come out on top'. They could not imagine a world where the Son of God, would need to suffer and die. They could not see the Big picture.

But the cross is not, for Jesus, just a difficult episode to get through on the way to a happy ending. The cross is the point of it all. When Jesus uses present tense to talk about his sufferings ('Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?') it is because he is already enduring the cross. Jesus carried the cross from his baptism until his death, he knew what was coming and that knowledge was an awful burden to bear, when he asks us to take up our cross and follow him, he is only asking us to do, in a small measure what he did every day of his earthly ministry.



This is God's way of standing worldly power and authority on its head. At the end of our passage Jesus is quoting from the prophet Isaiah: the chapters known as the Suffering Servant, 'to give his life as a ransom for many', he is making the point that the kingdom of God

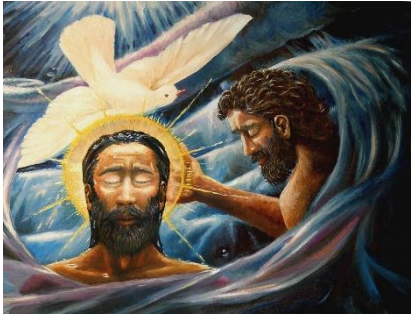
turns the ideas of power and glory upside down and inside out. This is unlike every worldly up rising, which claims to be putting the world to rights but really is just putting a different set of people on top. The cross calls into question all human pride and glory, it puts us all at the bottom as servants to everyone else.

Those metaphors describing the suffering of Jesus also remind us of different



facets of it: The 'cup' occurs throughout the passion, both as a physical cup which Jesus shares with his disciples at the last Supper "this cup is the cup of salvation, the covenant of my blood" and again as a metaphorical cup when Jesus prayed in the garden 'let this cup pass from me' meaning all the suffering to come. 'cup'

is also used in the OT as a symbol of divine punishment or wrath, so we might say that Jesus drank the cup of divine wrath.



Baptism is also used as a metaphor of his suffering which probably comes from the image of waters overwhelming the sufferer in the lament Psalms as well as looking to Jesus' baptism where Jesus was committed to his vocation of suffering messiahship. His forthcoming death can be seen as a sort of baptism - going beneath the waters of death, so that sins can be forgiven. This is how some Christians see Baptism, as their own death and new life in Christ.

James and John have not understood this concept and are looking for a bit of reward for what must really have been a difficult life. Jesus asks if they can share in his suffering and in the confidence of youth, they reply that they are capable, [Church history tells us that they were martyred, and Mark's original readers would have known that.] but even so Jesus acknowledges that he does not have the authority to decide who will sit where in glory.



This reminds us that the failures of the disciples during Jesus' lifetime are not the final word about their faithfulness as followers of Jesus. Although they often fail to understand, and run away when Jesus is arrested, these same disciples will later share the sufferings of Jesus because of their loyalty to him. There is hope for us yet.

In response to the understandable pique of the other disciples Jesus reiterates that his followers must be servants of all. The self-denial associated with the cross does not always mean martyrdom. Another form of self-denial has been emphasised through all the passages we have read in the last few weeks: denying the human demand for honour, power, and status.

This has been a theme through all our reading in the last weeks, it is not that I am nagging you or that this is all I preach about but this is the theme of Mark and I rather think a definite theme of Jesus so perhaps if we learn this lesson and do what he says He will teach us new things.

Since the first meaning of participating in the death of Jesus is the renunciation of ordinary greatness to be a slave in the service of others, all Christians (except the weakest or oppressed who have nothing to give) have an obligation to serve. How is Jesus calling you to serve Him and his people this week?

