

1st Sept., 2024

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's

Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

Rejoice, the Lord is King:

Your Lord and King adore!

Rejoice, give thanks and sing,

And triumph evermore.

Lift up your heart,

Lift up your voice!

Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

His kingdom cannot fail,

He rules o'er earth and heaven;

The keys of death and hell

Are to our Jesus given:

Lift up your heart,

Lift up your voice!

Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Jesus, the Saviour, reigns,

The God of truth and love;

When He has purged our stains,

He took his seat above;

Lift up your heart,

Lift up your voice!

Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Rejoice in glorious hope!

Our Lord and judge shall come

And take His servants up

To their eternal home:

Lift up your heart,

Lift up your voice!

Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

Read Hebrews 3:1-6 and Mark 1:1-15 – Being ready

Mark's Gospel, the story of the Good News – is breathless – it moves quickly from one scene to another. It's almost certainly the earliest of the four trusted accounts of Jesus' life, written in the lifetime (as were the others) of eye witnesses, and helping spread the news of Jesus.

Matthew and Luke are both supposed to have been familiar with Mark's record and expanded it for their specific audiences. Matthew wrote for the Jewish audience, Luke for the gentiles (Greeks), Mark, some say was written for the gentiles and in particular the Roman world, as an antidote to the claims of the Caesars to be the 'lord'. But it seems more likely that he wanted to get this amazing stuff recorded for everyone. It's raw, but perhaps better put, focussed, it contains nothing of Jesus' birth and childhood, the miracles are played down, and included only in so far that they indicate who Jesus is, that is, both the Lord and Saviour of the World. This seems to be Mark's first purpose in writing, and his second is, 'so what?' In other words, who are we to be, and what are we to do as followers (disciples) of this Lord and Saviour.

Initially, after Jesus' ascension, the disciples thought Jesus was coming back immediately, but slowly they realised they needed to record their eye witness accounts. How else would they be able to, make disciples, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20) In verse 1. *'The beginning of the Good News (Gospel) of Jesus the Messiah (Christ)'*. This is Jesus Christ's Gospel, not Mark's, though that's the name we give it!

We don't know who Mark was – there are possibilities from tradition, such as, the young disciple who ran from the garden of Gethsemane, or the John Mark, mentioned in Acts. And we don't know exactly when it was written, the best we can say is, sometime between 50-75AD.

Today, three things Mark reveals.

Firstly, the way is prepared. Mark begins his Gospel by setting the scene, and John the Baptist's ministry was essentially, setting the scene for Jesus to take centre stage. John the Baptist, as we know from the other Gospels, was clear that his job was to point to Jesus, this is Mark's task too, and also ours.

How might we get Jesus nearer to centre stage in our lives? Are there priorities that might need adjusting? Ask him – read Psalm 139:23-24.

And, how do you set the scene for Jesus? How might we set the scene for people hearing about Jesus, or perhaps specifically, inviting people to Alpha, to the J John carols event, or our own Carol services?

Secondly, *the person is identified.* The central verse in Mark's Gospel and pivotal moment, is Peter's answer to Jesus' question, *'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah.'* Mark 8:29.

Here in the beginning the Mark reveals that the stage is being set by John the Baptist and himself in this book for Jesus, the Messiah.

And Mark alludes and connects Jesus to a number of significant Old Testament moments.

- Isaiah, cries out, *'O that you would rend the heavens and come down.'* (Isaiah 64:1), and here heaven is *'torn open'* (v.10).
- Isaiah again has the Messiah proclaiming *'the Spirit of the sovereign Lord is upon me.'* and here the Spirit descends (v.10).
- Psalm 2:7 has God declare, *'You are my son; ...'* to the longed for King, and here God declares this over Jesus.
- Genesis records God's words to Abraham, *'take your son, your only son whom you love ... Sacrifice him ... '* (Genesis 22); here there are echoes (v.11) of this drama, as we will follow Jesus' story and his sacrifice.
- Isaiah again, records God expressing his delight in his servant (Isaiah 42:1), and we read the same delight in Mark (v.11)
- And the 40 days of temptation, echo the 40 days on the mountain for Moses (Exodus 24:18), and 40 years in the desert (Joshua 5:6) – this is *'Exodus time.'*

This is so wonderful and extraordinary. Just pause and think about what this means – that the Messiah, the Saviour, the King, God himself has come. And he has come for you!

Thirdly, and finally, the message and mission are declared. Galilee, the first place invaded historically by marauding kingdoms, is now the first to hear that God's Kingdom has come near. For people living under the oppression of the Romans the Kingdom of God sounded like great news. But as we are to discover through Mark the Kingdom was not a political, national Kingdom, though it would impact politics and nations.

God's Kingdom strikes at the central human problem. The problem of the heart and of its allegiance. As we will discover God's Kingdom is about finding peace with God. And this found only through Jesus – and making him King, the Messiah, the Lord of His Kingdom. No Caesar, ourselves, or anything can fix the needs and longings of the human heart.

We are introduced to Jesus in Mark's Gospel, and the challenge for the people of Jesus' day remains the same challenge for us: to hear, to turn (repent), to believe, and receive, the Saviour, the Lord, Messiah, and King.

14th Sunday after Trinity: Almighty God, whose only Son has opened for us a new and living way into your presence: give us pure hearts and steadfast wills to worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, St Andrews and The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

At the Church of the Good Shepherd

- Tea and Chat: September 18th at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: September 18th at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: September 25th at 10.30am in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: 3pm Sunday, TBA
- The Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday in Church.

For Further information:

This paper and all parish details are on the website at
<https://www.parishofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>