

19th January, 2025

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.**

Hymn:

Come, thou Fount of every blessing;
tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.

Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above;
praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
mount of God's unchanging love!

Here I raise my Ebenezer;
hither by thy help I'm come;
and I hope, by thy good pleasure,
safely to arrive at home.

Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
he, to rescue me from danger,
interposed his precious blood.

Come, thou Fount of every blessing;
tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.

O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart; O take and seal it;
seal it for thy courts above..

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

Read Isaiah 53:1-6 and Mark 9:14-29 – Being Healer

Having come from the mountain top experience – the transfiguration, a literal and emotional high – Jesus and the three disciples come down to earth with a bump. They find the other disciples embarrassed and arguing with the religious leaders; and the cause of this argument is a disappointed father and his severely afflicted son.

Let's look at the responses of Jesus and see what we can learn about him and ourselves.

Jesus questions the disciples, about the argument only for the somewhat desperate father to answer – see Mark 9:17-18.

'Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.'

Jesus answers with two, 'how longs?' See Mark 9:19. [¹⁹ *'You unbelieving generation,' Jesus replied, 'how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.'*]

Belief and in particular the lack of it is spoken of Jesus on numerous occasions. Many of us feel a sting of the rebuke in, 'O you of little faith...' which Jesus uses five times in scripture. I wonder whether Jesus says these words like a verbal smack across the head, or with a teasing smile – 'O, come on guys, do you really still not get it.'

Two things I want point out. Firstly, without faith, belief, it's impossible to please God. Why, well because how can you have a relationship without believing a person is there, and how can you have a flourishing relationship unless you believe the person wants good for you, or better put, loves you – in other words is trustworthy. Secondly, note, and the reason this might not be quite the angry rebuke we might first feel in the words, is that Jesus answers his own question, 'how long?' at the end of Matthew's Gospel, when he says '... surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.' (Matthew 28:20).

Without belief, there is no power – do we believe in Jesus for our breath, our life, our future, our healing – do we trust Jesus, with every area of our lives, however desperate?

Jesus asks the 'how long?' question to the boy's father. Mark doesn't mess about with incidentals – he moves fast through the stories, so when he records, a seemingly irrelevant remark like this – it's for an important reason. I think is again about belief. Jesus not seeking a case history, he wants the man to both confess

his need, and to recognise that Jesus can fulfil his longings. He wants the man to know he cares and give the man the chance to share his pain and let him know he is heard. In other words, he's giving the man a chance to know him, to trust him – to believe in him.

The man struggles to believe, 'if you can?' It's no wonder he doubts, the disciples messed up and got into a verbal spat over his boy, can Jesus do better? In Mark 1 a leper comes to Jesus, believing his power, but questioning his compassion with '... if you are willing ...' (Mark 1:40) Here the man doubts Jesus' power. Either doubt undermines trust – does this God have the power, and do they care enough to use it? Both are questions people are asking today, both are questions that appear in our own hearts. Is God big enough for my concerns, and does he actually care about my concerns?

Jesus encourages the man, "If you can"? Everything is possible for one who believes.' Jesus does not say, 'that's not good enough', or 'try harder', and he accepts the father's beautiful and honest response, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!', and heals the boy.

The stubborn disbelief of the crowd is found in their 'He's dead' verdict, but Jesus has healed the boy completely and raises him to his feet. I love the disciples, I love that they are like me, they don't get it, and are at a loss, 'why couldn't we drive it out?' To which Jesus simply replies, 'This kind can come out only by prayer.'

The disciples had healed and cast out demons before (see Mark 6:7-13), but on that occasion they had been sent. This time they'd taken their own initiative without connecting with God through prayer and seeking his will and power. It seems their belief was more in them and their own experience and not in Jesus and connection with him.

So, what does this tell us about Jesus and where does it challenge and encourage us? Jesus loves us – so much – and, Jesus is so powerful. He wants the very best for us, and this includes, eventually, being whole in spirit, mind, and body, but there might be a delay, during which he will be alongside us carrying us through. (See 2 Corinthians 12:7-12). Our job is to keep connected to him, through prayer, through Bible reading, and through service – loving actions – and those places you'll find him, right beside you.

2nd Sunday of Epiphany: Almighty God, in Christ you make all things new: transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory; 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: February 15th at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: February 15th at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: January 22nd and February 26th at 10.30 in the Church Hall.
- 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>