

20th October, 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.**

Hymn:

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea,
a great High Priest whose name is
"Love,"
who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on His hands;
my name is written on His heart;
I know that while in heav'n He
stands,
no tongue can bid me thence
depart;
no tongue can bid me thence
depart.

When Satan tempts me to despair,
and tells me of the guilt within,
upward I look and see Him there
who made an end of all my sin.

Because the sinless Saviour died,
my sinful soul is counted free;
for God the Just is satisfied
to look on Him and pardon me;
to look on Him and pardon me.

Behold Him there, the risen Lamb!
My perfect, spotless Righteousness;
the great unchangeable I AM,
the King of glory and of grace!
One with Himself I cannot die;
my soul is purchased with His
blood;
my life is hid with Christ on high,
with Christ my Saviour and my God;
with Christ my Saviour and my God!

The Sermon by Timothy James

Read Hebrews 5:11-6:3 and Mark 4:21-41 – Being understood

This sermon could be called “On Not Understanding”. If there are things about the gospel which you don’t understand, you are in good company. There is a repeated emphasis, from here on in Mark’s gospel, on the disciples not understanding Jesus.

Last week’s lesson made it clear (at vv.9-13) that Jesus was teaching in parables, and the meaning was not always obvious. In today’s reading, we have four more parables (but this time no explanations), and the account of the storm on the lake. It would be easy to break the chapter into vv.1-34 (parables) and 4:35-5:43 (miracles), but that might miss something Mark is showing us.

First we have teaching which mystifies as much as it encourages, then an act of authority, which leads not to understanding and faith but to questions and fear.

With no explanation by Jesus, how are we to understand the parables? Perhaps parables are discussion-starters: you could ask yourself you think Jesus meant by each parable. These ideas might help to get you started:

- vv.21-23: light must be obvious – good news needs to be disclosed, not concealed.
- vv. 24-25: with hearing and attention, more is more, and less is less.
- vv. 26-29: the growth of the Kingdom is mysterious, like germination, and, like growth, depends on more than our efforts.
- vv. 30-32: in the coming of the Kingdom, large results can grow from unpromising beginnings.

But remember that Jesus’ teaching is not simple platitudes, but revolutionary. Where is the revolution in these parables?

But then there is another event which Mark says took place the same day. The disciples’ reactions are interesting: when the storm is at its height, they ask not “Can you save us?” but “Don’t you care? Won’t you

save us?”. They are concerned not about Jesus’ power, a theological issue, but about his care, a personal concern. As Leroy Williams puts it *“we try to wake up God to take care of us”*. And after the storm is over they are not reassured but terrified (vv.40-41).

This passage is structured like this by Mark to show us something about **faith, fear** and **understanding**. Look at his previous miracle stories: somebody comes to Jesus in distress, he heals or delivers them and they are grateful. But here, something else happens: they are terrified and uncomprehending, and he questions their faith. The form of a miracle story is transformed, so that it acts like a parable, to drive home the message that we have to have a great mystery revealed before we can understand..

The disciples did not yet understand who Jesus was (v.41) and what he was here to do. As we go forward, we shall begin to see the answers to these things. As Tom Wright says, Mark is *“eight chapters to explain who Jesus is, eight chapters to explain that he is going to die”*. What we have read so far is not enough for us to understand, any more than the disciples.

How do we respond when we do not understand? Like wrestling Jacob, we hang on for dear life (Gen.32:22-32).

But the whole story can be read as a parable of discipleship (while still being factual). The disciples are called to cross over with Jesus; he is with them in their danger; they cry to him in fear and ask to be saved (Ps.107:28-29); he saves them, and asks for faith. Jesus’ words “interpret” this acted parable. His care has been demonstrated: the choice for those who follow him is a reaction of fear and one of faith.

Mark immediately takes us back to the key question: “who is this?” (v.41). No answer is given (yet), but we know that the answer will be given on Easter day.

21st Sunday after Trinity: Grant, we beseech you, merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve you with a quiet mind; 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: November 20th at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: November 20th at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: October 23rd and November 27th at 10.30am in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: 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.pariahofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>