**Worship Sheet for Sunday 27th June 2021 compiled by Pam Siddall of Buckden Methodist Church for the Final Week of ‘Bible Month’ on Mark’s Gospel.**

*Our gospel passage today finds Jesus in Jerusalem the day after his ‘triumphal entry’ into the city on a donkey. With this in mind, let the words of a Graham Kendrick hymn call us to worship this morning:*

**Hymn**: **StF 264**: v.1 **Make way, make way** for Christ the King in splendour arrives;

 fling wide the gate and welcome him into your lives….

v.2 He comes the broken hearts to heal, the prisoners to free;

 the deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance, the blind shall see…

v.3 And those who morn with heavy heart, who weep and sigh,

 with laughter, joy and royal crown he’ll beautify….

v.4 We call you now to worship him as Lord of all,

 to have no gods before him, their thrones must fall.

 (chorus) **Make way… for the King of Kings … and let his kingdom in.**

**Prayer of praise**

King of Kings, you rode into Jerusalem to upturn tables and expectations, to challenge misplaced authority and then to face the cross in order that the people of God might be saved. **We stand in awe and worship you.**

God of Gods, you sent your only son into the world to do all this: to live, to teach, to suffer, to die, for the love of all that you have created. **We stand in awe and worship you.**

Holy Spiritof truth, you seal into our hearts the amazing message of God’s gift to us. **We stand in awe and worship you. Father, Son and Holy Spirit we offer you our love and praise afresh this morning. Amen.**

**The Lord’s Prayer (***remembering, when we pray, all those who worship with us as we say these words)*

**Hymn**: **StF 423 / H&P 134** - **Forgive our sins as we forgive** *(echoing the words from the lord’s prayer)*

**Readings: Psalm 1**

 **Mark 11: 12-33**

**Understanding the scripture:**

Poor old fruitless fig tree! How did it deserve to get cursed and destroyed when it wasn’t even the season for figs? Well, of course, it’s not about the tree itself, it’s an object lesson for the disciples. Mark is in part, after all, a teaching manual for followers of Jesus, showing us who he really is - no “gentle Jesus meek and mild” but indeed God Almighty! Mark shows the would-be followers of Jesus that there are real demands necessary to living a life of true faith.

If we know our scriptures, as those early followers surely did, we’ll understand that there’s a wealth of meaningful allusions to trees in scripture - from the garden of Eden right through to (for us later Christians) the end of the book of Revelation. This last chapter of the Bible looks back to the great vision which came to the prophet Ezekiel, in exile. He pictured a restored temple with a river flowing out from the threshold, on the banks of which (Ezekiel 47 v.12) … “will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.” (Revelation adds: “for the healing of the nations.”)

Psalm 1 compares a righteous person to a tree planted by streams of water. The prophets make it clear that there is no season when the people of God should be at rest from bearing fruit for the well-being and healing of others in his name. The resource for this task comes by being rooted in faith in God, which should be upheld, taught and transmitted with integrity by wise and faithful religious teachers and leaders – a stream of spiritual nourishment.

So now we can look again at what happens between the disciples hearing Jesus curse the fig tree and later seeing its demise. We see Jesus entering the Temple in the important season of Passover and holding the faith-practices of God’s people in his day up to scrutiny. He’d had a look round when he arrived the previous evening and, far from finding a stream of spiritual nourishment flowing from the threshold of the Temple, he found the place seething with exploitative temple trade; not “a house of prayer for all nations” but “a den of robbers” (v.17). Today he deliberately goes in, to take authority over the situation. He “would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.” He strides in to drive out the traders, flinging over the furniture to drive the message home, then settles down to teach and prove his point from scripture, leaving the people thrilled and amazed but the priests and teachers of the law fearful for their own livelihood and anxious to put an end to his life. The shadow of the cross begins to loom. They will question his authority when he returns next day but he cleverly turns the tables on them by asking them whether they thought John the Baptist’s authority was from heaven or from people. They can only feebly answer, “We don’t know.” What *should* be the heart of the nation’s faith is clearly rotten to the roots. The disciples then see how the ‘fig tree’ has withered!

Jesus takes the opportunity to teach the twelve what it is to be spiritually well-rooted. They must have a strong faith in God (v. 22), they must pray with real belief (v.24) and they must be ready to forgive and to receive forgiveness themselves (v.25) i.e. to be made worthy by God’s grace. Let’s pause and allow the words of a hymn to conjure up for us a picture of such faith and compare it to our own church and personal spiritual lives.

**Hymn: StF 661 / H&P 767 – Give me the faith which can remove and sink the mountains to a plain**

**Challenges for today’s Church: take time to ponder on some of the issues below.**

It’s an ordinary service of worship on a Sunday morning before the pandemic. Jesus walks in, in person. In your imagination, scuttle in behind him and try to see the proceedings with his eyes. Will he be pleased with what he sees or will he be storming back next week with a plan to move the furniture and take over the preaching??!

As we gradually return to our buildings now that Covid 19 is (please God) coming under control, take time to consider what Jesus will want to find there Sunday by Sunday. (He is, after all, among us all the time.) Will he find us a welcoming, loving community, active out and about in society standing up for justice and equality? How can we make sure he finds in us a true house of prayer for all nations; that we are not distracted from the missional task of loving our neighbour by the need to raise church funds; that we remain rooted and grounded in God’s love so as to be a conduit of life-giving spirituality, streaming out to our communities?

Of course, all of this will be interdependent on the quality of our own personal devotional lives and faith. Are we well rooted or a bit withered? If the latter, what will we begin to do in the coming week to deepen our roots and stretch out our branches. Pray about this quietly for a while.

**Prayer of confession**

Lord, we know how tentative we often are in following your example and how slow to respond to your teaching.
When our worship is unworthy of you; when we are afraid to challenge the wrongs in society and even in our own lives; when we fail to speak out as we should to defend the weak or to advocate for the vulnerable; when we are afraid of those who challenge our faith and we allow that fear to hold us back, please come in and overturn our failings. Forgive us and give us the courage to turn around again to the way of Jesus.  May we feel the assurance of your forgiving and renewing grace and love this very moment and may we be inspired to pass it on to others. **Amen.**

**Hymn**: **StF** **696** / **H&P 402 – For the healing of the nations**

**A time of prayer for the needs of the world:**

Use the words of the hymn to apply to issues in the news currently. Pray for wisdom for the leaders of nations. Pray for the church both locally and around the world that the world may see the love and justice of God writ large in all our actions. Pray for those you know of personally and let them represent all the sick, the sad the poor and needy the lonely and unloved. Pray also for the joyful folk and all who know themselves healed and saved and have so much to be thankful for. Pray your own prayers of thankfulness for all God’s good gifts to us.

**We thank you Lord that you hear and answer our prayers. Help us to know when our own actions are called to be part of that answer and to respond faithfully. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen**

**Hymn: StF 255 / H&P 673 – The kingdom of God** *(echoing the words of the Lord’s Prayer “Thy kingdom come”)*

**Blessing:** (based on Eph.3: 16 - 18) May you be strengthened in your inner being by the Holy Spirit and may Christ dwell in your hearts by faith so that you remain rooted and grounded in all the fullness of the love of God. **Amen.**

*We come to the end of Bible Month. Those of us who have taken this opportunity for in-depth study of Mark’s gospel have found it very interesting and enriching and we thank those who have enabled us to share in this activity as a circuit during June. Mark is, as you’ll be aware, the main set gospel in our lectionary for this year (year B) so we shall be well prepared as we continue to encounter his teachings in our gospel readings week by week.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Any Time | Telephone | 01480 597118 | Devotional Message |
| 7:30pm | Online - Live | Zoom –Bible Month StudyTelephone | Pauline Zähner<https://zoom.us/j/83752592088?pwd=d2NpZzQrTExTRThrVnVlRS9VQVp0QT09> Meeting ID: 837 5259 2088Passcode: 4215100203 901 7895  |
|
| 2:30pm |
| 10:30am | Online –Live | Zoom –Berkley Street | Coffee Morning - Margaret Wilson<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89206584600?pwd=T3FyVjlEM3duUzAxbXpUQVhSRWVVQT09> Meeting ID: 892 0658 4600 - Password: 500135 |
| 3:00pm | Zoom –Sawtry | Tea & Chat<https://zoom.us/j/172859764>Meeting ID: 172 859 764 |
| 7:00pm | Zoom –Praise | Sing along - all welcome – Margaret Wilson<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85653152565?pwd=RkFFVWZhSHAxektUcUFXQ0kwaGsvdz09> Meeting ID: 856 5315 2565 - Password: 387173 |