**Printed material for Sunday 19th September 2021**

**Compiled by Mr David Ward (Over Methodist Church)**

Let us take a take a moment to feel the quiet calm and lay down the thoughts and stresses of our lives as we come to worship. Father, we are here, apart yet together to be attentive to the words of scripture, to sing, reflect and rejoice in your message for each of our lives today. May the spirit guide our minds to your teachings as we discern a direction on the journey to your kingdom.

**Hymn**: 455 StF (63 H&P) [All my hope on God is founded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3LCGh02Vew)

**Prayers:** Heavenly Father, creator of all, the one on who’s love we can always rely, we worship you. We praise your wisdom and your plan for us. Even when we don’t have the eyes to see, we can trust in you to show us the right way. We thank you for sending Jesus to bring us teaching and set the example for how we might live our lives loving each other for your Glory. We couldn’t understand the depth of your sacrifice for our salvation and we don’t have capability to fully appreciate the greatness of your glory but through the glimpses we have, we give you our respect and praise.

Forgive us when we are too afraid to ask for your help, to ask for understanding and wisdom when we don’t understand your message for us. Forgive us when we give precedence to our own worldly influences, get our priorities wrong and favour our knowledge over your wisdom. We look to the times when our neighbours have not been loved as they should, when we have not been the disciples you would have us be. Forgive us and help us to find greatness in your Kingdom. When we have strayed from the path, help us to know and with the guidance of the spirit bring us back to you so that we may know that with repentance we receive your eternal forgiveness, through the sacrifice of your son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Hymn**: 51 StF (H&P 66) : [Great is thy faithfulness](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTKIqmdfHSk)

**Reading**: [Mark 9 verses 30-37](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%25209%253A30-37&version=NIV)  & [James 3 verse 13 to 4 verse 3 & verses 7 to 8a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%25203.13%2520-%25204.3%252C7-8a&version=NIV)

A friend was borrowing my Netflix account this week and looking at my watch list, and they commented that in all the films I tend to watch; Star Trek, James Bond and Marvel comic book films feature prominently, there is force of good which faces up to an apparently more powerful force for bad, and wins, usually because of the principles of the hero. I was thinking that the good guys rarely die - is dying something that anyone might expect from God? We have the benefit of hindsight and therefore might not be so surprised at the words in verse 31 of our reading from Mark, but I have some sympathy with the disciples, Jesus has brought them alone to a place to teach them and again - depending on how you count prophecies, telling them of his coming death and resurrection. Do they understand the duality of Jesus, as man and as God? can they? Perhaps not. Do they think he is not talking literally – maybe. I don’t know what they thought in that moment but we are told directly that they “did not understand and were afraid to ask him about it” - why? Why would they be afraid to ask about such a difficult and foreign event? Maybe they are afraid of the consequences, after all if you are expecting someone like a superhero who will ultimately vanquish your enemies in a worldly, literal way against the odds - how can that be done if he is killed!? Then there is that statement that he will “be delivered into the hands of men” implying he will be betrayed by one of his followers, does that drive their fear?

When I was doing a teaching course last year I went with a question – why does no-one ever ask questions in my lectures? Those present are paying a lot of money to be taught so either I am so clear and concise that everything is thoroughly explained – unlikely, or they are not asking for some other reason. The consensus of the room was it’s the fear of what others will think - that they are stupid or ignorant, maybe even not worthy of the time to teach – is it a test even? Maybe that played a part in the fear of the disciples to ask too.

I had an undergraduate student working with me some years ago and early in the project I had cause to meet their parents, in conversation they said “we have a limit of only 5 why’s a day - since they were little”, I thought it was quite a strange thing to say and when I was back in the lab I asked the student about it and apparently they are well known for constantly asking why. I realised later that they did ask why more than most in the lab and perhaps that’s why I got on quite well with them and they were more productive than most in their project. Do we ask why enough? when we listen or read a part of scripture or listen to the words of a sermon do we ask why? If not of the teacher/preacher/minister, then to God? There isn’t any mention in the passage about prayer and I ask myself if the disciples had prayed before or after the lesson they would have been as afraid to ask for understanding in their path. Has much changed since those times though - one of the things I have enjoyed about online worship opportunities is to listen to different perspectives on the same scripture and I often have a commentary open or search the internet when I have a question – to be honest I used to do that quite frequently after a service too but I don’t think I spoke of them in prayer very often. I was thinking of a piece of advice I was given before my first scientific conference “pretend that you are the chair and will need to ask a question to each speaker, think of your question as they speak” and I am going to do that during the services I go to in future, think of at least one question that I will put to God in my prayers. I invite you to join me and give it a try, I think it will help focus your mind on the message being delivered during the service and through asking for God’s input on our own understanding - we will be opening ourselves to discernment of God’s message for us.

Asking for guidance and input from God puts us naturally in a place of humility, those famous words in Psalm 46:10 “Be still, and know that I am God” recognising that God is God and critically - that we are not! It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking we know it all, know what’s going to happen and planning for it. I think that’s what the disciples are doing in the second part of our reading, despite what Jesus has just said – they have moved on to happier thoughts; namely planning and jostling for position in the post Roman world of Jesus kingdom. Planning for their power, and as those close to Jesus - why would they not be in positions of power when Jesus as the force of good ultimately triumphs? But Jesus rebukes them, they haven’t understood the nature of the kingdom, but more significantly they have ambition for worldly power while dismissing what Jesus is teaching them. The direct message in verse 37 - to help those who have no power is repeated throughout the parables, here the example of receiving a child – is directed to us as much as to the disciples, to welcome or accept into our company those who have nothing, and because they have no power they will come! In doing that, welcoming those without power or worldly status is following the example Jesus sets. If we do so in Jesus name, accepting his authority and power and we open ourselves to God’s direction, by not being afraid to admit we don’t know or understand and asking and praying to God, then through the power of the spirit in and around us we will have the confidence to take up the opportunities God has provided us to act in faith and obedience – and isn’t that the character which will define us in God’s glorious kingdom?

**Hymn:** 443 StF (H&P 691): [Come, let us sing of a wonderful love](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BZfXTCUbr8)

**Intercessions:** Father, hear us when we ask for opportunities to find those who we believe have nothing to offer us. Let us actively find and give them welcome, tell them of Jesus teachings and bring them to you to serve you as we do. Give us the power to heal and reconcile, to support and love, not for reward but because it’s right in reflection of your Love for us.

We pray for those in countries that are wrecked and ruined by war in their pursuit of worldly power, influence and control of which Jesus warned his own disciples. We ask that opportunities are given for them to hear your message and turn their attention to serving those who are most in need, the struggling and suffering people there. We lay with you those who have suffered from the effects of terrorism and war and are left with grief, anger and confusion. May the spirit bring them warmth and their minds be opened as they turn to you and seek the opportunities you offer them. We pray for all of those who are concerned and afraid, afraid to ask why, afraid of the answer to the question. Those who are sick or awaiting the results of tests, let them find the spirit and confidence in you that is lost in an uncertain world.

We take a moment of quiet stillness to know you as God as we think of those who are known to us and the peoples who are in need now…

Lord we bring to you all of those who are in our minds and ask for your love to be known to them through the power of the spirit now.

We pray for the children, who so often have no power to affect their world. Let us welcome them and give them the love that Jesus did. Let your spirit strengthen and empower them with confidence to ask for wisdom when they don’t understand – especially as they find themselves and discern the path you have for them.
We pray for ourselves and those that are dear to us, our families friends and congregations, may our love for each other be strengthened by your Love for us all. Amen

**Hymn:** 545 StF (378 H&P): [Be thou my vision](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIMhshpf0Y4)

**Sending out:** As we leave our worship today, and pick up the thoughts of our lives, let us be fearless as we admit before God the questions that we have and that we may openly ask and seek the opportunities to submit to the will and authority of Jesus Chris our Lord. Amen