

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Dan Haylett. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Call to Worship

With all who look to God today: we offer our worship.

With all who acknowledge their need of God's love: we open our lives to God.

With all who seek to do God's will: we turn to Christ today.

God, the Three in One and One in Three, receive our praise and hear our prayers. Amen.

Hymn God who almighty word (Singing the Faith 106)

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaXV_evnGVMube

God, whose almighty word,
chaos and darkness heard,
and took their flight,
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light!

Christ, you have come to bring
on your redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind,
O to all humankind
let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving, holy Dove,
speed forth your flight!
move on the waters' face
bearing the lamp of grace
and in earth's darkest place
let there be light!

Blessed and holy Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might,
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride,
through the world far and wide
let there be light!

John Marriott (1780 – 1825)

Let us pray together

Gracious God, your love is made clear to us amid the chaos of our world. The light that Christ brings puts our fears to flight, and leads us into your perfect love.

When our hearts are breaking, and our plans lie in ruins, God's Spirit of comfort come near.

When our uncertainty and confusion threaten to overwhelm us, God's Spirit of truth shine bright.

When we long to press on, and dream of fresh vision and adventures of faith, God's Spirit guide and lead us on.

We worship you today, our God. You are the God who loves us as we are and leads us into new patterns of living and serving. You are the God of forgiveness, when all seems lost and broken. You are the God who shows patience and brings grace into every life.

In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

Today's Reading from the New Testament:

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture— "I believed, and so I spoke"— we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴ because we know that

the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

5 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Today's Gospel Reading:

Mark 3: 20-35

The crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ When Jesus' family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." ²³ And he called them to

him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸ “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” — ³⁰ for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters^[a] are outside, asking for you.” ³³ And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Time to Reflect

What we are seeing is a homecoming. Jesus the teacher whose words and actions are beginning to have traction is now back on home turf. This is the home town gig by the band with the hit album; this is the football team (sadly not mine) who bring the trophy home all rolled into one. Jesus has raised expectations, eyebrows and hackles alike, and now, coming home, the spotlight is firmly on him.

Mark tells us that the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind”.

Then we are told that the Scribes, the teachers and experts out of Jerusalem come to be part of this gathering too. Everyone it seems has descended to Capernaum to have their say on who Jesus is and what he has been doing.

How we imagine that homecoming depends on our own experience of course: how far the idea of “home” symbolises a place of safety and welcome for us is shaped by our own experience. “Home” might represent a place where we are accepted, and made welcome in love and safety. Or it can be a place of uncertain relationships or even fear and suspicion. How far we are shocked by Jesus’

treatment in what should have been a place of hospitality partly depends on our own experience.

For Jesus, in Mark's telling here, his homecoming seems to be necessitated as a break from the crowds; if so, it is hardly successful. He has previously had to escape the demands of a crowd by a boat, he has appointed the twelve to assist in ministry and has encountered in his whirlwind tour of the Galilee some opposition, with his own authority also being shrouded to some degree by secrecy. So far, it is only the demons who seem to understand and name Jesus for who he is. It is a secrecy though that is becoming harder to contain, and the sense in these chapters is of huge demand and pressure by both the needs and enthusiasm of the crowds and the suspicion of those who were trained to look for God's will and wisdom in the Scriptures.

So Jesus, amidst all this noise and pressure, comes home. The great poet Robert Frost summed up that experience well: "Home is the place where when you have to go - there they have to take you in" (*The Death of the Hired Man*). The great twist in this story – and you can tell it bears the ring of truth because Matthew and Luke coming later to this story seek to water it down. Jesus' own family seem to agree with those who think he is out of his mind. The homecoming dinner is thrown into disarray.

So what are we to make of this, and where does it leave us? What does this strange and uncomfortable homecoming story leave us?

In these three chapters of Mark so far, we find the heart of the controversy around Jesus' ministry is writ large. As he comes home here, the conflict around Jesus' authority comes to a head: how he acts, how he changes lives and relationships, how he teaches. Now that conflict is shifting, it is not just heard as criticism of Jesus himself now, but it is now that people are starting to offer their own explanations for the source of his power and authority.

It comes to the point where even Jesus' own family seek to distance themselves from him and what he is doing and saying.

And yet another layer is added to this: enter the scribes. These are religious experts who are present to add a religious element to these suspicions. They argue that Jesus must get his power somewhere – and as they oppose it, they conclude that this power must be evil, or of the devil.

And know that this is more than just a casual denigration of Jesus – it's not just an act of political character assassination of one man. The implication of course is that

anyone who listens to Jesus, anyone whose life has been bound up, or transformed by Jesus has in effect chosen the wrong path and sided with evil. In C.S Lewis' famous characterisation, if we must say either that Jesus was indeed "the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse", then it is clear that the crowd as a whole seem to be ready to embrace the last two options.

Jesus' own family agree. They go along with those who see Jesus as a madman. That is what is so hard to hear (you can read up on Matthew and Luke's attempts to dress this up in their accounts). Those who might be thought of as being closest to him fail to see what others have and go along with the suspicion and the assigning of false motives or unholy sources for his authority. Hard to hear, but it feels ever so real.

Let's face it, those who do know us best at home or in our friendship groups, or people we have shared in fellowship with for years can be shocked when things change for us. We get used to the person we knew, to how we fit in with their life; and lo and behold, when God does something new or transforms them, we feel awkward and unsettled. One of the worst social crimes that can be committed in our secular age of course is to be seen to have "gone all religious", as if this is a form of illness! The accusation

levelled at Jesus that he is out of his mind is not an uncommon reaction.

This runs deep. One new convert to Christianity I have met found that their family disowned them as the change that God had brought into this person's life challenged the family's own deeply held religious views. It was far from easy and finds deep resonance with Jesus' extreme language elsewhere in the gospels about the place of family. We know that tragically even today persecution is a reality across the world for those whose faith has challenged expectations and established patterns of living.

Jesus' experience then of being disowned by his family and looked upon with suspicion or hostility for doing the work of God connects in deep ways. And there's comfort too – for Jesus speaks about the new family of those who will do the will the God. Perhaps it's that note of hope that connects with the first reading we heard in Paul's words to the Church in Corinth

"Therefore we do not lose heart... For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

It is not the family and crowds immediately before him that Jesus fixes his eyes on, but rather on those who will serve and follow in his way, those who will be prepared to be thought of as “out of their minds” in order to find the mind of Christ within them. These, like us, will become known as family when we allow this to take root in our lives.

Perhaps for some of us in these weeks and months ahead, there might be some moments of relationships being renewed and refreshed as we begin to slowly and carefully emerge in new patterns of living. We might be able to visit people we have not seen for some time, we might be able to host someone, or to be a guest. It might well feel like a sort of homecoming as we talk about “life getting back to normal”.

In all of that, take from Mark’s description of Jesus’ homecoming the challenge to be open to what God has done, and is doing in our lives. Jesus’ diagnosis of the unforgivable blasphemy of those who disown and discard that which was from God shows us the importance of us getting this in right perspective.

God continues to call, Jesus continues to take hold and transform lives. God’s Spirit continues to flow where she will, weaving new patterns of service and worship. Who

are we to get in the way of that? Who are we to decry who God chooses to be at work in? Who are we to deny that irresistible grace that calls to who we are?

He is out of his mind, they said to him. Well out of that mind, and out of the heart of God comes grace to take hold of us and to work within us. Thanks be to God.

A time of prayer

We pray with all who seek to do the will of God today, for we learn from Jesus that all who do this find a place in his family.

We pray for those for whom doing the will of God is costly: at home, or at work, or in their neighbourhoods. For those whose faith is not welcomed by others and for those who are placed in difficult situations of all kinds.

We pray for those who struggle to offer or to accept forgiveness. We pray for those who imagine that have cut themselves off from God by what they have done. Let your love show them a way to belong and to accept your costly grace.

We pray for all who experience division in their lives,

where conflict and disunity threatens their wellbeing or safety. We pray for all who actively support and encourage people in these profoundly hard situations.

We give thanks for our place in God's kingdom as we seek to do God's will. Give us the wisdom and the courage to know and do the will of God, finding encouragement in Christ for our serving.

We pray for those who have asked for our prayers, and offer our own needs and hopes to the God who knows every heart.

We ask our prayers in the name of Christ. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. **Amen.**

Hymn Come, all who look to Christ today (Singing the Faith 678)

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVRSrxjQCqE>

Come, all who look to Christ today,
stretch out your hands, enlarge your mind,
together share his living way
where all who humbly seek will find.

Come, all who will from every place;
find here new powers of unity,
accept the Spirit's strong embrace
which binds us in community.

Come, young and old from every Church,
bring all your treasures of prayer,
join the dynamic Spirit's search
to press beyond the truths we share.

Bring your traditions' richest store,
your hymns and rites and cherished creeds;
explore our visions, pray for more,
since God delights to meet fresh needs.

Come, trust in Christ and live in peace,
anticipate that final light
when strife and bigotry shall cease,
and faith be lost in praise and sight.

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A prayer of blessing:

May you find blessing as you follow in the way of Christ.
May you be inspired to seek and to do God's will. May the
Spirit's dynamic life be found in you.

May God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless
you today and for ever. **Amen.**

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