

This short act of worship has been produced by Revd Dan Haylett for you to use at home or wherever you are and if you are unable to worship in a church building. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

### **Opening Prayer**

O Lord, open our lips

**And we shall declare your praise.**

God of the ages, we praise you, for you hold all things, sending light and bringing love to us in Christ Jesus. We bring our prayers and praise to you, through the Holy Spirit.

We worship you today.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

### **Hymn: Jesus – the name high over all (Singing the Faith 357)**

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3Jpx0Rnmno>

Jesus -- the name high over all,  
in hell, or earth, or sky!  
Angels revere, and nations fall,  
and devils fear and fly.

Jesus -- the name to sinners dear,  
the name to sinners given!  
It scatters all their guilty fear,  
it turns their hell to heaven.

Jesus -- the prisoner's fetters breaks,  
and bruises Satan's head;  
power into strengthless souls it speaks,  
and life into the dead.

O that the world might taste and see  
the riches of his grace!  
The arms of love that compass me  
would all the earth embrace.

His only righteousness I show,  
his saving grace proclaim;  
'tis all my business here below  
to cry: 'Behold the Lamb!'

Happy if with my latest breath  
I might but gasp his name;  
preach him to all, and cry in death:  
'Behold, behold the Lamb!'

*Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

**Let us pray together**

Rejoicing in your love and grace, Holy God, we come to you with all that we are.

You open the riches of your grace and mercy to us, and to all creation: **Receive our praise.**

With open arms you tend and heal, strengthening and guiding us: **Receive our thanks.**

In Jesus, you offer the world a way to live as those who will gain life, real life in all fullness: **We seek to follow in the way of Christ today.**

Come and renew us as you pour out your Spirit upon us. Tend to us in our need and renew our confidence in your purposes for us and through us.

Gracious God, in offering our prayers we seek forgiveness for the wrong we have chosen and for the sin of the world that we are part of. We acknowledge again our need for your saving help and mercy, for courage and determination to take up our cross and to follow Christ. Forgive us, and renew us.

Here is good news for us and for all: Christ died for us while we were still sinners; proving God's love for us.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we find our sins are forgiven!

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

**Today's Gospel Reading: Mark 8: 27-38**

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist, and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any want to be my disciples, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

### Time to Reflect

Half way through the Gospel according to Mark comes Peter's famous confession that is quickly followed by Jesus' teaching about the cost of discipleship for himself and potentially for those who follow him.

This moment of insight and crisis comes almost exactly half way through the narrative. It marks the beginning of the second half of the gospel as the theme of Jesus' pending suffering and death comes to the fore. Peter's answer to Jesus' question "who do you say I am?" is like the last action in the first half of a sports game; or the line in the novel or film that sets off a twist in the plot you would never have seen coming. Failing to read the second half of the Gospel story is like leaving the cinema or theatre half way through the film or play. There is certainly more to come.

It's also true that the questions that Jesus asks of his disciples have been coming for some time during the first half of the gospel. The disciples have been walking with Jesus for a while, seeing and hearing what he has been doing. Now on a journey up into the hillsides of Caesarea Philippi the disciples are given the opportunity to express for themselves what they have seen and heard from Jesus.

The journey has been important. Away from the disciples' home region and into an area that was brimming with people from different cultures, backgrounds and religious beliefs, Jesus offers the disciples the opportunity of responding to him

against the backdrop of all of this popular belief and practice. You have a hint of this as Jesus first enquires who the crowds are saying he is, before sharpening the question to one of a personal response that leads to commitment: and what about you?

What is shared on the journey paves the way, but the location matters too. Jesus' questions are not asked in the comfortable rooms of a theological college, neither are they asked in the familiar life of the Synagogue or Church fellowship. Instead, they are asked in the market places and streets away from the religious elite and in the midst of ordinary people. Jesus is clearly asking for a response of the heart and head.

Right at the halfway mark of the gospel, Peter's words promise to be the game changing response to what we have read so far in Mark. Yet somehow he fluffs his lines; his confession of Jesus as the anointed One of God is followed by the famous attempt to try and somehow protect Jesus from what he says he has come to do. It's all very understandable, very human and very authentic.

It's an important moment, marking the first time Jesus begins to share openly with the disciples about his own calling. The shadow of the cross comes into view in a way that shapes the second half of the gospels.

Along with the disciples we learn that following Jesus is an active and potentially hazardous way of life. The language of "taking up our cross" is now overlaid with thousands of years

of Christian reflection on sometimes brutal experience. Yet the immediacy and starkness of what Jesus is saying is remarkable. The disciples themselves would have seen convicted criminals being made to carry their own instrument of torture and death. The reality of such suffering for disciples and followers has been shown to be, and continues today to be, a real possibility for some who are linked to Jesus, even if we ourselves might not face those extreme forms of persecution. In the light of Peter's confession, Jesus shares some home truths that will shape the second half of the gospel. We too are invited as followers to take up our cross. As we consider what that means for us today, I've found a reflection of Francis Young ("God's Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity", Cambridge University Press, 2013) to be helpful.

Think about the difference between a photocopier and an artist. The photocopier turns out a mass of copies that are identical to the original. The artist works lovingly and carefully on a faithful representation of what is in front of them, but produces a work that is necessarily different from the subject. Is Jesus asking his disciples to be as photocopiers of his life and experience? Or is he in truth giving the creative tools to us to become as artists, faithfully working our own God-inspired patterns and images of faithful, compassionate, justice seeking lives? Instead of simply making brave and bold confessions like Peter's, might we be encouraged to work out how the image of

God within us helps us into patterns of obedience and self-denial in order for the fullest life of God to be found in and through us. Might we be encouraged to reimagine what taking up our cross means in the light of our work, volunteering and how we spend our time and resources; our commitments to friends and family and others? Are we living only out of the first half of the gospels – filled with activity and action, or are we content to live with the truth of the second half themes of sacrificial living and giving?

Jesus, calling the crowd with his disciples said to them, "If any want to be my disciples, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me".

May we find courage, strength and imagination to follow in the way of Christ. **Amen.**

### **A time of prayer**

This morning take time to pray with a cross before you. You might have an image that you have to hand, perhaps a holding cross or maybe even a palm cross from a previous year. Whatever cross is available to you, use in this prayerful reflection today.

Holding or looking at the cross, we notice the sharpness of the corners, or perhaps the roughness of the material in our hands. It reminds us of the reality of the cost of God's love, and the implications for our own response to Christ's self-offering.

We pray today for all whose lives are hard and filled with pain or suffering.

Holding or looking at the cross, we remember what courage and strength has been given and received through the ages in the light of what this symbol represents. We remember God's self-giving for us and for all creation.

We pray today for those whose lives are at risk, or endangered and for all who offer themselves for others.

Holding or looking the cross, we give thanks for the message of life through death, of resurrection promise and power broken open for us and through us.

We pray for the Church and for the world in its need and fragility. We pray for those who need to know God's power and closeness and for all who seek to follow in Christ's way of love, whether they recognise their cooperation with you or not.

God of love, as we pray for the world and for others, we offer our lives in a humble response. Take and use us as those who are ready to walk the way of Christ today. In Jesus' name. 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 for ever. Amen.**

### **Hymn: Have you heard God's voice? (Singing The Faith 662)**

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQ\\_TRU6aPbY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQ_TRU6aPbY)

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,  
though the way be rough and narrow?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace the pain and sorrow  
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?*

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down  
when the multitudes are silent?  
Will you make a choice to stand your ground  
when the crowds are turning violent?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace the pain and sorrow  
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?*

In your city streets will you be God's heart?  
Will you listen to the voiceless?  
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,  
will you share your faith with the faithless?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace the pain and sorrow  
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?*

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith  
and believe it could be different?  
Will you share your views using words of grace?  
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace the pain and sorrow  
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?*

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### **A prayer of blessing**

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to himself; may the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen us in his service; may the joy of the Lord Jesus fill our souls; and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, be with you and abide with you always. Amen

(Words by William Temple, 1881 – 1944)

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