

A month of Sundays – September 2021



Preston Ribble Circuit

Ministry Team

Sunday 5th September 2021

Call to Worship:

Lord, Come, light up our lives in faith, and walk with us. Come pour out your Spirit upon us as we stand together as one family and as brothers and sisters in the Lord. Alleluia!

Hymn: STF Lord, we turn to you for mercy (StF 429)

Prayer and Lord's Prayer:

Lord, you have made me free to choose and love you. Thank you for freeing me from fear! Help me to show compassion and love to each person I meet this week. Amen

Gracious God, send your love and compassion into the world anew. Give me the grace and the faith to be able to answer that question "who do you say I am" and come to know you more as Lord Amen.

Lord of hope, fill us with the joy of the resurrection and the hope that all things are possible through you even in the most difficult and testing of situations. Fill our daily lives with joy and may we bring that to others too. We pray for our families and friends that they too will come to know you even better and encourage them in their journey of faith and those within our church community. Amen

The Lord's Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven

1st Reading: Psalm 116: 1-9

I love the Lord because he has heard my voice

2nd Reading: Mark 8: 27-38

Who do people say I am?

Hymn STF From heaven you came, helpless babe (StF 272)

Reflection: (Simon Skidmore)

We all have to answer crucial questions in life. When we're young, our family members may well ask, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and children might often might say, "A fireman" or "A princess" without following through. But, in time, the "What will you do with your life?" question requires a mature, thoughtful answer. Then there's often the big question or questions that might changes our lives forever.

But there may be no more significant question in all of life than the one Jesus asked his first disciples in Mark 8:29: "But who do you say I am?" This question came in the context of a conversation between Jesus and his disciples near the northern city of Caesarea Philippi. When Jesus asked, "Who do people say I am?" the disciples offered various answers, "Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets" (Mark 8:27). Not satisfied with any of these answers, Jesus turned to his closest followers and asked, "But who do you say I am?" (Mark 8:29). The structure of this question in Greek emphasizes the word "you." It could be translated more literally, "And you, who do you say that I am?"

You and I can spend our lives speculating about theology. We can study the Bible and spin out all sorts of fine ideas about

Jesus. We can even become a master of “the quest for the historical Jesus.” But, in the end, each one of us has to answer for ourselves the central question of life: “Who do you say I am?” We need to decide whether Jesus is just a good teacher (or, as some prominent atheists have recently claimed, not a good teacher at all). We need to wrestle with Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom of God and its implications. We need to confront the peculiar way in which he identified himself with the Lord, even going so far as to forgive sins. And then we need to grapple with the meaning of his death and the implications of his resurrection. Only then are we in a position to answer adequately Jesus’ question, “Who do you say I am?”

The way we answer Jesus has the potential to change our lives. If we acknowledge Jesus to be a divinely inspired teacher, then we will pay close attention to what he says so that we might believe it and live it. If we see Jesus as the Messiah, then we will serve him as God’s royal representative who ushers in the kingdom. If we believe Jesus to be the Savior of the world, then we will put our ultimate faith in him. And if we confess Jesus to be the Word of God Incarnate, the very Son of God, then we will fall before him in worship so that we might live our entire lives as an offering to him.

Intercessions:

Let us bring our prayers for the needs of all people to our heavenly Father:

We pray for our own local community. We thank you that you forgive our failings and we ask you to graciously give us a spirit of love and forgiveness that sees only the good in each other, that bears no grudges and forgives all grievances. May we

learn to forgive even as you have forgiven us that we may live together in unity. Amen.

And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind.' Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over all living creatures of the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, male and female, and blessed them. Lord, we thank you for creating us, and giving us our families and friends. We ask that you help us with our relationships, help us make our strong ones to be stronger, our broken ones to be healed and our new ones to continue growing. Amen.

May the risen Jesus give us hope and courage to proclaim the gospel to others, to bring good news to the poor, to challenge injustice and to work for your kingdom. Banish our fears and may your light shine in our lives. Amen.

Loving God bless each one of us this day and renew our faith and be witnesses and an example to others. In Jesus name, Amen.

Hymn: STF Father, I place into your hands the things I cannot do (StF 519)

Blessing:

May the love of God be with you in the week ahead, in our homes, in our workplaces, in our thinking and in our times of joy and struggles. May we receive the blessings of your peace in our hearts. Amen.

Sunday 12th September 2021

Call to Worship:

To whom do we turn?

We turn to the Lord.

To whom do we listen?

We listen to the Lord!

Come then, let us worship the Lord!

Hymn 287: When I survey the wondrous cross

On which the Prince of glory died;

My richest gain I count but loss

And pour contempt on all my pride.

Prayer:

Most merciful and gracious God,

we offer you our heartfelt love and praise

because you love us so much that you gave your only Son,

Jesus, to die on the cross for us.

We come to worship you,

earnestly seeking your will for us.

Lord God, we praise you that your ways are not our ways.

We praise you for the gift of your wonderful Son

He took risks for us, greater than we can ever comprehend. He

took on the troubles and heartaches of the world, and died on
the cross.

He rose again and gave us new life in him. Life in all its
fullness.

Life forever.

Lord, we are often ashamed to confess our faith.

We remain silent, even in this free country.

Yet across the world, people suffer for their faith:

they profess, confess, and bear the consequences.

We confess our cowardice and shame
and ask forgiveness.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are Messiah.

We take up our cross, and follow.

Amen.

Reading : Mark 8: 27 – 38

Reflection by Rev Janet

When I was training to be a preacher, I was in a group session with other trainees from around the area. We were thinking about the cross and what it means to us. One person there said “Do you know, it doesn’t matter where you are. If you look for one, you can always find a cross” Look around the room where you are right now. Can you see a cross?

Maybe a cross on the wall, on a shelf or a table, a cross that you keep in sight to remind you of your faith. But what about a cross that you never realised was there until you looked? In the window frame, the woodwork on a door? In the pattern in a piece of furniture, on a curtain or cushion cover?

That preacher was right – there is always a cross nearby if you look for one.

When you think of the cross, what comes to mind? You may have in your mind’s eye a particular image. You might be wearing a cross as an item of jewellery, be reminded of a film we have seen about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, or of some music you have heard or sung about the cross.

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus is beginning to take control of his own life and destiny. We have the advantage in that we already know how the story ends. With the gift of hindsight, we know that Jesus chose to go to Jerusalem, where he was arrested, tortured and put to death. We know what the cross

means. We know too that on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead, offering us the gift of eternal life. But when Jesus speaks to the disciples about his death, it comes as a terrible shock. Surely death on a cross cannot be the fate of someone who is clearly the Messiah, God's chosen one, God's only Son? That was certainly Peter's first reaction.

Jesus responds by talking about his followers taking up their cross – not his cross but theirs, and ours. We are called to be willing to suffer and to make sacrifices, for the sake of the Gospel. For many of us, most of us probably, this cost of discipleship will not be anywhere near as great as it was for Jesus and his disciples. But we are fortunate and we need to remember how privileged we are: there are Christians all over the world who do suffer for their faith.

Aware of the relative safety in which we live – even after a coronavirus pandemic – let us give thanks for our blessings and pray for all who suffer.

Let us pray:

Father, your son Jesus Christ asks his friends to follow him in carrying the cross.

In your church,
we pray for those who try to follow Jesus in places where Christians are oppressed, abused or killed for their beliefs.
Give them strength to carry their cross **and follow in his way.**

In your world,
we pray for those who struggle to live without proper food or clean water, and for those who have lost homes and family in war.
Give them strength to carry their cross **and follow in his way.**

In our community,
we pray for those who are uncared for and unwanted,
for those who have been hurt and cannot forget,
for those who are depressed and see no purpose in living,

and for those who are ill.

Give them strength to carry their cross **and follow in his way.**

In our own lives,

we pray for courage to choose the way of Christ, whatever it may cost, and to see him in the faces of all who suffer in your world.

Give us strength to carry our cross **and follow in his way.**

Hymn 481:

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

Blessing:

Loving God, as we end this time of worship,
we remember you are with us in our pain.
We remember you are with us in our
struggle to bring goodness.

We remember that nothing in all of creation can separate us from your love. And we thank you.
Amen.

Sunday 19th September 2021

Call to worship:

We come as we are. We come holding our hands and hearts open ready and willing to receive. We are aware of how our week has been; all that has happened, all the plans we have had, the people we have spoken to, all the concerns we have had and all the places we have been. In all these times of connection you have been present Lord. You have been there in the voices of friends, in the natural beauty around us and in the challenges of life. Help us to be more conscious of you Lord in the coming minutes as we read through this service.

Hymn – sing to yourself (or with a friend) STF 18 Be Still

Opening Prayer:

Consider these words from Psalm 145

'I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever.

Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever'

(A moment of silence)

Creator God, we glimpse your beauty
in setting sun, mountain top, eagle's wing.

We sense your power in thunder crash,
lightning flash and ocean's roar.
Creator God we praise you

Precious Jesus, we see your love
stretched out upon a cruel cross.
We stand in awe at your sacrifice,
pure love poured out for humankind.
Precious Jesus we praise you

Holy Spirit, we see your power
in lives transformed, hearts on fire.
We listen for your still, small voice,
comforting, guiding, calling.
Holy Spirit we praise you.

Amen.

Please say The Lord's Prayer.

Readings : Hebrews 10 v 19-25

Reflection by Denise Johnson

I don't know about you but I really love this time of year. I like the light nights, the colours in the garden, enjoying the fresh herbs and vegetables and the warm weather. Late Summer is a time I enjoy.

I grew up in farming community in Lincolnshire. At this time of year everyone seemed busy and as a child I remember being out playing in the fields until late (even on school nights) and returning home tired, hungry and happy. There seemed to be a zest for life, a real purpose in everyone as the community pulled together to begin to tend and gather in the harvest. It

was as if, in the winter we slept and rested and prepared but in the summer we really lived life to the full.

Jesus spoke about this kind of full living. He spoke about living life in all its fullness, having your thirst quenched by living water (never to thirst again), he spoke of peace which passes understanding and shared stories of seeds which grew into huge plants loaded with fruits. Maybe this is why I like this time of year – it connects with some of my favourite Bible themes. These biblical accounts speak of a faith which creates energy and momentum, a faith which encourages positivity and possibility, a faith which is infectious and raw.

In the coming months we will be moving forward into times which have no precedence. Cautiously stepping out into a changed world and seeing what is happening. What might your hopes and dreams be for these times – for yourself, your church and your Circuit? Is there anything that makes you anxious? I would love to listen to your thoughts on these questions. Please feel free to contact me if you would like a chat or have ideas and dreams that you would like to share. Your ideas matter and are precious and valuable.

The Bible themes of abundance are about daring to dream of bigger possibilities, hoping for greater good and really living. Step out into the world in confidence that the God you worship is with you, at your side and may be whispering a challenge or idea into your ear. Listen well and pursue your hopes and dreams.

Peace be with you

Denise

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Prayers

Lord I come to you to seek rest and also to rekindle my hopes and dreams. I come to seek peace and to pray for those who have no peace. I pray for those who are ill in body or mind, those who are bereaved and those in positions of care. (Call to mind those known to you who are struggling at this time)

Lord may we truly know that the everlasting arms of love are around us and those we know and love always.

Amen.

Sunday 26th September 2021

Call to worship

Inclusive God, we gather together wherever we are.

Welcoming God, we come to you.

Valuing God, we see our worth in you.

Challenging God, open our ears to your words,
open our minds to explore our ways,
open our hearts to receive all that you offer.

Loving God, we come to you.

Amen.

Prayer

God of eternity, you are at the very heart of our lives:
we adore you.

God of miracles, you add flavour to our world;
you are the salt that seasons us,
you preserve all that is good and make us whole;
we worship you.

God of humanity, you look on us with love
and we cannot help but love you back;
we bless you, Lord.

Amen.

For the times I don't live my best life,
or even recognize what that might be:
I'm sorry, Lord, please forgive me.

For the times I sulk because I think my nose is out of
joint, and I'm too blinkered to see you in others:
I'm sorry, Lord, please forgive me.

Sometimes I just don't understand your word;
when I haven't the patience to work out what it really means:
I'm sorry, Lord, please forgive me.

For the times when I try and water down your Gospel
because I don't like what it is saying to me:
I'm sorry, Lord, please forgive me.

Sometimes I judge others harshly, and try to stop them
because I don't agree with what they are doing
– even though it may be for good:
I'm sorry, Lord, please forgive me.
Amen.

Loving Lord God,
you care so much for each one of us.
You are there for us whenever we turn to you.
When we are truly sorry,
and intend to move forward, to live our best life,
you graciously forgive us all our sins.
We gratefully and humbly accept
your forgiveness and peace.
Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Reading

Mark 9:38-50

Reflection Carolyn Hothersall

There are those who can delegate, and trust that those who have been given a task will get on with it and don't need to be constantly checked up on. And there are those who believe that expression, 'If you want a job doing properly, do it yourself.' I wonder which of those you most closely relate to? I know just where I am, and I'm consciously working on it, but still find it a challenge.

The disciples seem to struggle with the idea that anyone else might possibly be able to act in the name of Jesus, driving out demons, or any other kind of miracle without being one of the chosen twelve. They even seemed rather taken aback by Jesus' response that those who are not against us are really for us.

I wonder how challenging we find being welcoming of others, even if their way may not be our way, their style something we've not experienced before, their words quite different from the words we might choose. I was talking with a friend recently about the challenge of letting go and allowing others to do things their way, and she spoke of her difficulty not interfering when the church hall was being laid out for an event, and the tables weren't set out the way she would have done them.

How do we respond to different styles of worship or prayer, how do we react to different forms of charitable fundraising? Do we give our support and encouragement to those operating in ways we might not have thought of, or are we critical of their efforts?

'Whoever is not against us is with us.'

Let us encourage and welcome everyone and anyone who is living and promoting God's kingdom values – or, if you prefer, way of living. Let us encourage each to be the best people we can be – and never to be a stumbling block to one of God's beloved children.

Prayer

We recognize we are often caught up in so much busyness that we don't always make time to meet you in simplicity and stillness. We make space for our prayers for your world. Thinking about the news which has filled our headlines, we pray for those people we have seen on our screens or read about this week, and we hold them in your love.

We know so many who are struggling with health, big decisions, crises or major changes in life. We know you care for them more deeply than we do, but we show our concern as we name them before you in quiet trust.

There are many things which we have on our minds, things we may not have shared with anyone else. But you understand us and want only the best for us. We pray to you in the honesty of our hearts.

We ask that you will take each of our prayers and answer them in your own time and in your own way, giving us expectant and trustful hearts.

Amen

Blessing

Lord God,
bless us and keep us.
And may we be a blessing to others
in all we think and say and do.

Amen.