**Sunday 10th January RBNM Churches Missional Partnership**

Welcome to todays service as we wind down from a very different Christmas and warm up to a new year that as yet has no firm promise for what it may bring, but which is grounded in a hope that the current vaccination programme will bring some form of relief from Covid 19 in all its forms.

Call to Worship

Jesus has called all of us to be disciples, followers. He has given us a job to do. As we gather together today, we pray for new strength, new ideas and a new love for the world.

**Our first hymn is; At the name of Jesus (41 CMP)**

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| 1.. At the name of Jesusevery knee shall bow,every tongue confess HimKing of glory now.'Tis the Father's pleasurewe should call him Lord,who from the beginningwas the mighty Word.  | 2.. Mighty and mysteriousin the highest height,God from everlasting,very Light of light.In the Father's bosom,with the Spirit blest, love, in love eternal,rest, in perfect rest.  |
| 3.. Humbled for a season,to receive a namefrom the lips of sinnersunto whom He came;faithfully He bore itspotless to the last,brought it back victorious,when from death He passed\_ | 4.. Bore it up triumphantwith its human light,through all ranks of creatures,to the central height;to the throne of Godhead,to the Father's breast,filled it with the gloryof that perfect rest.  |
| 5.. In your hearts enthrone Him;there let Him subdueall that is not holy,all that is not true;crown Him as your captainin temptation's hour,let His will enfold you in its light and power.  | 6.. Brothers, this Lord Jesusshall return again,with His Father's glory,with His angel-train;for all wreaths of empiremeet upon His brow,and our hearts confess HimKing of glory now.  |
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**We join in prayer;**

God says, “You are never too young, never too old to be part of my work. Come near to me all who are weak; all who are afraid; all who know their need of me.”

We pray, Lord God, meet us where we are, meet us in our need. We give our lives to you.

We praise you, Lord God, for your love beyond all telling; your kindness without limits; your joy without end.

We praise you, Lord God, for forgiveness beyond measuring; mystery past imagining; plans too big for us to see. May we never think that we have got to the end of all that you are, or believe that we can contain the wonder of your presence.

We come to you, Lord God, admitting that we are not perfect and that we need your forgiveness;

for the times when we have failed to give respect to each other; adults to children and children to adults and each of us to each other;

for the times we have hurt each other by hurtful things we have said and done for the times when we have caused difficulties for others by the things we have not done that we should have done,

and for the times when we have failed to speak up for you when opportunities have been there for us to do so.

We bring all our faults and shortcomings to the foot of the cross, for we know that there forgiveness not only begins but reigns for all time. We are sorry, Lord God, forgive us in Jesus name. Amen.

We pray together in the words that Jesus taught his disciples;

Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name;

Thy kingdom come;

Thy will be done;

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil,

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory

For ever and ever, Aman

**Hymn; I cannot tell (266 CMP)**

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| 1.. I cannot tell why He, whom angels worship,should set His love upon the sons of men, or why, as Shepherd, He should seek the wanderers,to bring them back, they know not how or when.But this I know, that He was born of Mary,when Bethlehem's manger was His only home,and that He lived at Nazareth and laboured,and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.  | 2.. I cannot tell how silently He suffered,as with His peace He graced this place of tears,or how His heart upon the cross was broken,the crown of pain to three and thirty years.But this I know, He heals the broken-hearted,and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,and lifts the burden from the heavy-laden,for yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.  |
| 3.. I cannot tell how He will win the nations,how He will claim His earthly heritage,how satisfy the needs and aspirationsof east and west, of sinner and of sage.But this I know, all flesh shall see His glory,and He shall reap the harvest He has sown,and some glad day His sun shall rise in splendourwhen He the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.  | 4.. I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,when, at His bidding, every storm is stilled,or who can say how great the jubilationwhen all the hearts of men with love are filled.But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,and myriad, myriad human voices sing,and earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer:At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King!\_ |
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**Children’s talk**

Have you ever thought how much like jigsaw pieces we are?

Each piece has its own place in the picture and if that piece is missing then the picture is incomplete.

But have you ever done a jigsaw upside down? The back of each piece is the same colour, a dull grey usually, but it still has its place in the completed picture. However, it contributes nothing more than occupying a space. I have done a jigsaw upside down and you can see that it is very drab but if you look closely you can perhaps still see the shape of each piece.

When I turn it over what a difference! The picture comes to life in all its colour and all its story! This one is a Disney picture with Micky and Dumbo and Pluto and all sorts of things that we associate with Disney. A joyful and happy place.

We are so like jigsaws. We each have our own place and if we are missing then the picture is not complete! And, if we are miserable or grumpy then we take the colour out of life.

Jesus wants us to be happy, to enjoy life and to share our best bits with each other.

We can all of us, whatever our ages, practice a bit of this by perhaps smiling at each other, that is sharing some of our inner joy with each other.

In John’s gospel chapter 15, verses 8 to 12 Jesus said, “*This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this; Love each other as I have loved you.”*

Jesus wants us to bear much fruit. Fruit needs sunshine to ripen and make it fit to eat. So try each day to spread a little sunshine with a smile and be filled with Jesus’ joy.

God bless.

**Hymn To God be the glory (708 CMP)**

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| 1.. To God be the glory! great things He hath done!So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,who yielded His life an atonement for sin,and opened the lifegate that all may go in.  | 2.. O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood!To every believer the promise of God;the vilest offender who truly believes,that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.  |
| 3.. Great things He hath taught us,great things He hath done,and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;but purer and higher, and greater will beour wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see. | Chorus: *Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!**Let the earth hear His voice!**Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!**Let the people rejoice! O come to the Father**through Jesus the Son; and give Him the glory,**great things He hath done!*  |
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**We will have our readings**

**Mark chapter 4 verses 35 to 41 - Jesus Calms the Storm**

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

**Acts chapter 9 verses 19b to 22 - Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem**

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who caused havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

I thank Margaret for those readings

**Our next hymn is I come with joy to meet my Lord** [**(447**](https://d.docs.live.net/9447) **R&S)**

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| 1.. I come with joy to meet my Lord,forgiven, loved, and free,in awe and wonder to recallhis life laid down for me. | 2.. I come with Christians far and nearto find, as all are fed,the new community of lovein Christ's communion bread. |
| 3.. As Christ breaks bread and bids us share,each proud division ends.That love that made us makes us one,and strangers now are friends. | 4.. And thus with joy we meet our Lord.His presence, always near,is in such friendship better known:we see and praise him here. |
| 5.. Together met, together bound,we'll go our different ways,and as his people in the world,we'll live and speak his praise. | Brian WrenCcli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811  |

**Address**

Several questions crossed my mind as I was preparing for this service. Questions such as, what would it be like to meet Jesus? How would I recognise him? Would I even be the type of person that Jesus would want to meet?

Many people in the gospels had encounters with Jesus and our readings today tell of one such encounter, and what resulted from another. We read in Mark’s gospel that, when evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” They got into a boat and, leaving the crowds behind, they took him along, just as he was. There were also other boats with him.

Although it was evening the disciples didn’t question this request, indeed they would have no qualms about setting off across to the other side of the Sea of Galilee at this time of night, they were fishermen and often fished all night. They knew all that there was to know about this lake, it held no fears for them. It was where they lived and where, until meeting Jesus, they had earned their livings. Besides, Jesus was with them, he had demonstrated his special powers by his teaching, by healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, changing water into wine. They had witnessed this with their own eyes. Life was exciting with this man. Large crowds followed him wherever he went.

His teaching was like nothing they, or the ones who professed to be teachers of the law, had ever heard. He spoke about things with authority and conviction, though it might be difficult to understand at times. He was, however, often prepared to explain to his disciples his little stories, parables he called them, when they were away from the crowds. He made **them** feel special. Why, they were special! Only the other day, when they had all been at a house that was so crowded that they were not even able to eat, Jesus’ mother and brothers had arrived and had sent word to him that they were outside. When Jesus was told that his mother and brothers were outside looking for him his reply was, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And he had then looked around at those seated around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” How special was that! To be called his brother!

But let’s get back to the story. It had been a long day and as they set off to cross the water Jesus settled down in the stern of the boat on a cushion and went to sleep. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a furious squall sprang up and the wind was causing the waves to mount up higher than the boat, crashing down on them so that the boat was nearly swamped. Hardened fishermen though they were, they had not experienced anything like this in a long time and they were frightened. They woke Jesus up and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” … and the wind died down and the waves became calm and the disciples were astounded. Then Jesus turned to them and said, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” The astonishment of the disciples changed and they were suddenly terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

This event is also recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Luke so it must have had an amazing affect on all who were there and those who were told about it later.

The second reading tells of the result of the encounter that Saul had with Jesus. I am sure that we know the story up to that point, that Saul was blinded as he travelled on the road to Damascus where he was going, with the authority of the High Priest, to arrest and bring back to Jerusalem for trial those who were disciples and followers of Jesus. He was told to go to the house of Judas, who lived on Straight Street. Ananias was instructed by God to go to Judas’ house and to lay his hands on Saul. He did so and Saul could see again. Our reading then tells us that immediately after receiving his sight Saul spent several days with the believers in Damascus and then began to preach. Saul went to the synagogue to tell the Jews about Jesus Christ. Saul made this the beginning of a worldwide journey to proclaim Jesus as Lord. Some Christians counsel new believers to wait until they are thoroughly grounded in their faith before attempting to share the gospel. Although this is sound advice it should not stop us from telling others what may have happened to us.

Earlier I said that I had asked myself if I might be the type of person that Jesus would want to meet and so I looked at some of the people who had had encounters with Jesus. What a varied bunch they were! Jesus came in contact with people from all walks of life, some of them reached out and touched **him** but he reached out and touched **each** and **all** of them.

Matthew records Jesus reaching out to; a despised tax collector (Matthew himself!); an expert in the law; fishermen; a prophet; and a high priest.

Mark records Jesus reaching out to; an insane hermit; a Roman governor; a young boy, a synagogue ruler; a group of children; a sick woman; a rich man; a blind beggar; Jewish political leaders; a young girl; a helpless and paralysed man; and a woman from a foreign land.

Luke records Jesus reaching out to; a housewife; a criminal; a king; a poor widow; a Roman centurion; the Jewish council; a group of women; and an outcast with leprosy.

John records Jesus reaching out to; a prominent religious leader; an adulterous woman; a royal official; a traitor; an angry mob of soldiers and police; and a Samaritan woman.

And in Acts Jesus reached out and touched a man who was a self-declared enemy who hated him, (Saul).

Jesus was not concerned whether they were great or unknown, young or old, rich or poor, saint or sinner. He did not bother what anyone else thought. He was not interested in the fact that some had been declared untouchables by the authorities nor was he influenced even by general opinion. He touched lepers and tax collectors, women and foreigners, the able and the crippled, even the hated occupying Romans. He did not condemn the one who betrayed him and he also made Saul, the one who hated him, into one of the greatest of the apostles, the one who brought Christianity to the gentiles. Giving him the name Paul in the process.

So, Jesus is happy to encounter anyone, including and maybe especially me, and you. But all this is of no consequence if we, each of us, do not get close enough to Jesus to touch him or to be touched by him. We cannot give the excuse that we are not good enough nor, indeed, that we are too good. What is required of us is that we must put ourselves in a position where we can touch and be touched by Jesus.

The two readings give examples of what can happen to individuals or groups when they come face to face with the awesome power of Jesus. The disciples in the boat were initially frightened of what the elements, the wind and waves, might do to them and then they were terrified of the power and majesty of Jesus as he demonstrated his authority, even over nature. We know, if we read on in the gospels, that the disciples, in spite of their terror and great awe, continued to follow and support Jesus even though most of the time they were unsure of what the outcome might be. Paul on the other hand, from being a ruthless persecutor of those who believed in Jesus became a great preacher and proclaimer that, ‘Jesus is Lord’. We as individuals should follow the examples of the disciples and Paul and take every opportunity to tell the story of what God has done for us in and through Jesus. I read the other day that everything that Jesus was and everything that Jesus did pointed to God. He truly was and still is Immanuel, God with us.

Sometimes, like the disciples in the boat, we can step out trusting in our own abilities only to be terrified at what can happen when Jesus takes control. I remember a Methodist church who agreed that they would start a Boys’ Brigade Company. The company started small but then flourished. One Sunday morning , as they were putting extra chairs out for the service, one of the members was heard to say, “If I had known that we’d have had to put this number of chairs out on a Sunday morning I would never have voted for the Boys’ Brigade to start!”

As individuals we are recipients of the free gift of grace, a gift that is free to us but costly to God. A few definitions of grace may help; the first is the acrostic;

God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense;

another is Love in Action;

and put simply; Unmerited Favour.

Grace is love favouring us when we are not favourable, loving us when we are not lovable, accepting us when we are not acceptable and redeeming us when, in human terms, we are not redeemable.

This gift of grace was bought for us by Jesus and so should not be thought of lightly. Grace is a gift from God that enables us to strive towards the things that God wants for us. Paul began virtually all of his letters by wishing his readers, ‘Grace and peace’. He was aware of what being full of grace could do for people. Listen to what he wrote to Titus in chapter 2 verses 11 to 15.

*‘For the grace of God that brings men salvation has appeared to all men, and women. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearance of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.’*

God wants what is best for us. So much so that he gave his only Son for us and to continue that theme he gave us his grace to sustain us when we fall short of his expectations of us. Jesus suffered, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. If we think about that it seems too good to be true, but in reality it is too good not to be true.

Each of the people recorded in the bible as having an encounter with Jesus was changed. Paul told Titus that we would become his, Jesus’, very own people, eager to do good. What better vision can we have as individuals than to wish for a personal encounter with Jesus. It may be awesome, it may be frightening, but the promise, from Jesus himself, is that it can lead to eternal life.

When we come to Jesus, we must listen and take note of what he tells us and move forward in faith. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except by me.” He also tells us, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” To believe in Jesus requires more than just agreeing that he is God. It is to put our trust and confidence in him that he alone can save us. It is to put Christ in charge of our present plans and our eternal destiny. Believing is both trusting his words as reliable and relying on him for the power to change. Trusting and believing means that the promise of everlasting life can be yours and mine.

We have that promise from Jesus, now, as individuals and churches, as we begin our journey through another year, what can our promise be to him? We have hope in the vaccine programme that has been launched to protect us from the Covid virus and Jesus’ own words to protect us spiritually so we can meet this 2021 with confidence.

May 2021 be a good year for each of you, in Jesus name.

Amen.

**Prayers of Intercession**

Lord, we pray for those people and those situations that are on our minds at this time. Each of us comes with our own thoughts and prayers but we offer them to you, individually and collectively.

We pray for; our family, our friends, and our neighbours.

We pray for those we like and those we dislike; help us to love them all as you love each of us,

We pray for those who are ill, and we lift up to you the names that we remember and those who have slipped our minds though we know that you do not forget.

We pray for those who are troubled in any way; whether they are mourning a loved one or are lonely or sad.

We pray for all the parts of the world which are suffering from Covid 19 and pray that as the vaccines are rolled out around the world that some ease may be obtained from its devastating effects.

Lord, we pray for our church and for ourselves. We are sometimes anxious and distressed, and when we are, help us to remember to trust your love and to know that you carry our sorrows. Give us the wisdom to recognise that all things are in your hands.

Lord, grant us the grace to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things that we can change and the wisdom to know the difference.

Father God, we offer all our prayers to you in Jesus name. Amen.

**Our final hymn is O for a thousand tongues to sing (496 CMP)**

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| 1.. O for a thousand tongues to singmy great Redeemer's praise,the glories of my God and King,the triumphs of His grace! \_ | 2.. Jesus! the name that charms our fears,that bids our sorrows cease,'tis music in the sinner's ears,'tis life, and health, and peace. |
| 3.. He breaks the power of cancelled sin;He sets the prisoner free.His blood can make the foulest clean;His blood availed for me.  | 4.. He speaks, and, listening to His voice,new life the dead receive,the mournful, broken hearts rejoice,the humble poor believe.  |
| 5.. Hear Him, ye deaf, His praise, ye dumb,Your loosened tongues employ.Ye blind, behold your Saviour come,And leap, ye lame, for joy.  | 6.. My gracious Master, and my God,assist me to proclaim,to spread through all the earth abroad,the honors of Thy name.  |
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**Benediction**

I wish for us all that 2021 may bring us all closer to God as we pray;

May we focus on the future and find God waiting there;

May we watch the horizon and know that the sun will rise;

May we see clouds gathering and know there will be laughter after the rain;

And may we trust in God’s promised future as we live in today’s present world. AMEN

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and evermore, Amen

David Watson