**Act of Worship - Sunday 7th February 2021**

Good morning everyone. My name is Margaret Ogden and I am a member of Bamford Chapel and Norden URC which is part of the Rochdale, Bury and North Manchester Missional Partnership. I am delighted to welcome you to this service which will include the sharing of bread and wine as we join together to remember the death of our Lord I invite you to avail yourself of some bread and wine at home so that we can eat and drink together, So let us worship God.

Come and worship the living God and the Saviour of the world

Come and worship the one who died and was raised again.

Come and worship the Holy Spirit who renews and empowers us to be God’s people and to offer him our thanks, our praise, our worship and our service. Amen

**We sing our first hymn: In Christ alone my hope is found**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gax8GL7EViE

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| 1.. In Christ alone my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song This Cornerstone, this solid Ground Firm through the fiercest drought and storm. What heights of love, what depths of peace When fears are stilled, when strivings cease My Comforter, my All in All Here in the love of Christ I stand. | 2.. In Christ alone! - who took on flesh, Fullness of God in helpless babe. This gift of love and righteousness, Scorned by the ones He came to save Till on that cross as Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied For every sin on Him was laid Here in the death of Christ I live. |
| 3.. There in the ground His body lay, Light of the world by darkness slain: Then bursting forth in glorious day Up from the grave He rose again And as He stands in victory Sin's curse has lost its grip on me, For I am His and He is mine Bought with the precious blood of Christ. | 4.. No guilt in life, no fear in death, This is the power of Christ in me From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny No power of hell, no scheme of man, Can ever pluck me from His hand Till He returns or calls me home Here in the power of Christ I'll stand |
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**Prayers**

Lord of heaven and earth we praise you for this new day; for all the opportunities we will have to love and serve those with whom we live, those who are in our bubbles and those to whom we can minister via social media, zoom or telephone. In these days of enforced isolation may we still be aware of the needs of others and of our ability to make a difference. Forgive us when we get so overwhelmed that we think only of ourselves and the things we are unable to do. Open our eyes to see what we can do to lighten other people’s burden.s

Lord we thank you for the many blessings that you still continue to shower upon us; for the love of friends and family; for the security of our homes; for food to eat and clean water to drink; for the vaccination programme that is being rolled out across the country to protect us from the spread of the Covid virus; for the wonderful skills of scientists, doctors and nurses and especially for the assurance we have that Jesus loves us and forgives us when we do wrong. When we are tempted to grumble, help us to remember all the things we have to be thankful for.

Loving God you have called us to be your servants, to offer our service to Christ, to one another; to your world. Forgive us when we are concerned to serve only ourselves, our own interests, our own needs, our own desires because when we do so, we know that we fail you.

Teach us to serve seeking no reward; to love without expecting love in return, to give without counting the cost and to live each day as your people.

In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

**Children’s talk**

The Children’s talk asks the question, “What would you like to be when you grow up?” and shows pictures of various possibilities…teacher, policemen, astronaut, soldier, pilot, sailor etc etc. I end up with the suggestion that they might think of giving their lives to Jesus and point out that this is a decision that does not have to wait until they are grown up but is one that can be made today remembering always that Jesus loves us.

**Hymn: I have decided to follow Jesus**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VL1VKc4EDQ>

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| 1.. I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus,  I have decided to follow Jesus,  no turning back, no turning back. | 2.. The world behind me, the cross before me, The world behind me, the cross before me,  The world behind me, the cross before me,  no turning back, no turning back. |
| 3.. Though none go with me, I still will follow, Though none go with me, I still will follow, Though none go with me, I still will follow, no turning back, no turning back. | 4.. Will you decide now to follow Jesus, Will you decide now to follow Jesus, Will you decide now to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back. |
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**Bible Reading Mark 1:29-34 - NIV**

**Jesus Heals Many**

**29**As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. **30**Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. **31**So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

**32**That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. **33**The whole town gathered at the door, **34**and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

**Reflection:**

The lectionary reading for today is split into two parts and so I decided to do a short reflection on each part. I started to think about the news which we see or hear each day. Whenever we turn on the news or read the papers, it is the effect of the coronavirus pandemic across the world, that makes the headlines. We are living in difficult times. But, as I wrote, other things were going on in the world which were regularly brought to our attention; the main one being the events in the United States.

I’m sure we were all bemused by the accounts of the behaviour of the former president following his defeat in the elections. But then came the inauguration of the new president, Joe Biden, and now we await the implementation of his new policies to create millions of new jobs, to control the pandemic, to reduce health care costs, to address race issues, to try to heal the great divisions that have arisen during the last four years and so on. We can be sure he will have given these policies much thought and he has lost no time in letting the world know what his plan of action will be. It’s what everyone does when they take on a new role and I’m sure we all pray that he will have a successful term of office.

In Mark’s gospel Jesus too has just taken on a new role. Mark has no narrative concerning the birth of Jesus but instead jumps straight in to record the ministry of Jesus, and by the end of his first chapter we are left in no doubt as to what Jesus sees as his priority. Its as if he too is setting out his manifesto, his plan of action. How he intends to fulfil that which his Father God has predestined for him.

The passage which we have just heard tells us that Jesus’ reputation had already spread through the whole region of Galilee as a result of his radical new teaching and the authority he demonstrated. On the Sabbath day in question, he had been in the synagogue in Capernaum where he had healed a man who was possessed by demons. When he came out he was invited to the home of Simon and Andrew, two of his new disciples. On their arrival at the house he found Simon’s mother- in- law sick with a fever and instantly Jesus took her hand and she was healed. The touch of Jesus had restored her so that she was able to go about the business of ministering to his needs, offering hospitality.

Later on that same day many other sick people crowded round the house door waiting for that same touch. It was as if the whole town were there and many went away healed of their diseases.

One of the hardest things for people to cope with during the Coronavirus pandemic has been the no touching rule; our enforced obsession with isolation, with keeping our distance and washing our hands in order to protect ourselves and others. All the things that come naturally to us to show that we care for others have been denied to us and we have to acknowledge that many people are suffering as a result.

We have to find other ways to show that we care and many people are going out of their way to do just that. When Simon’s mother was healed she immediately began to minister to Jesus’ needs by preparing food and this has been a way that lots of people within the church and society at large have demonstrated their love and support to others during lockdown; taking a meal to a neighbour or a bag of scones to someone living alone perhaps. Foodbanks have been inundated with food generously donated by members of the public. Thankfulness our own health and strength should make us able to express our gratitude by sharing with and ministering to the needs of others. As we too have been touched by Jesus we need to be filled with his love and express it in practical ways. I would suggest that even knocking at someone’s door and standing at a distance for a chat can be an offering of healing, as can a phone call or text message to someone who will not see or speak to anyone else that day.

I believe we must all be endeavouring to love our neighbours as we love ourselves even during lockdown. People need to see that we, as members of the church are going the extra mile to serve others in our community thus fulfilling the command of Jesus to “love our neighbour as we love ourselves”. The indictment is that there are those, even within our own church family, who feel they have been let down by the Church. I suppose it has a lot to do with the fact that attending worship and enjoying fellowship, even at a distance, has been a privilege denied us. We all miss that contact, that fellowship which is a vital part of being part of the church. That being so, we need to be aware of the vulnerable within our congregation so that they too may feel the healing touch of Jesus through each one of us. This might sound very parochial because I know that there are even greater needs in the wider community so while we might concentrate on those we know and love, we still need to think what our responsibilities are within our town and beyond.

A couple of weeks ago I listened to John Bell of the Iona community. He told, on Radio 4’s Thought for the Day, how he had noticed how much less he was spending as a result of the lockdown so that. when he checked his bank statement, he had more money in his account than usual. Then he challenged his listeners by asking what their appropriate response should be in the face of the desperate needs around our country and the world as a whole. So now I challenge myself and I challenge you too because we must all be finding ourselves in the same position…no holidays to pay for, no meals out in restaurants, very little petrol being used and so on. I challenge you, as he challenged me that day, to think what our response could be. Charities across the world are struggling to maintain the work they do among the most vulnerable in society because their fundraising has been curtailed. Are we in a position to be able to help? I leave that thought with you, Maybe this is a way we could help others in our endeavour to serve our brothers and sisters.

**Let’s sing our next hymn Brother, sister let me serve you.**

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

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| 1.. Brother, sister, let me serve you; let me be as Christ to you; pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too. | 2.. We are pilgrims on a journey, and companions on the road; we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load. |
| 3.. I will hold the Christlight for you in the nighttime of your fear; I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear. | 4.. I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh I'll laugh with you; I will share your joy and sorrow, till we've seen this journey through. |
| 5.. When we sing to God in heaven, we shall find such harmony, born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony. | 6.. Brother, sister, let me serve you; let me be as Christ to you; pray thatl may have the grace to let you be my servant too. |
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**Reading Mark 1: 35-39**

**Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place**

**35**Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. **36**Simon and his companions went to look for him, **37**and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”

**38**Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” **39**So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

**Reflection 2**

Let’s look now at the second part of our reading. Mark tells us that Jesus got up very early the next morning, while it was still dark. He left the house and went off to a solitary place and there he prayed. It’s amazing how often Jesus found it necessary to do this throughout his ministry. Remember that in human terms he’d had a very successful day, the day before. He’d healed many, many people. His reputation as a healer and preacher had been advanced, he was building up a following; so why would he choose to go off to be on his own when the likelyhood was that the same opportunities would repeat themselves that day. I’ll try to answer that in a minute.

Meanwhile he had been missed and the disciples came looking for him. They couldn’t understand what he was doing in that place and told him “Everybody is looking for you!” Well, they would have been, wouldn’t they? After the healing miracles of yesterday, their appetites had been whetted. They wanted a repeat performance; more of the same.

But in response, Jesus dropped his bombshell so to speak. He didn’t want to go back into, Capernaum, he wanted to move on to other towns and villages…not to heal more people but to preach his gospel. This is the manifesto I referred to at the start of my first reflection. This was his mission; not to heal those who were sick but primarily to tell others of God’s love and forgiveness; to tell of God’s grace; to teach people how to live their lives and ultimately to pay the great price for their sin. Good deeds had their place but pointing others to God’s kingdom was a much greater responsibility. That was why he had come to a solitary place away from the distractions of fame. He needed to offer what he had done the day before to his Father God and ask for his presence in the daunting task that lay ahead. He knew that he could do none of these things in his own strength.

Even at a time when his popularity was on the rise in a staggering way; and even when people were coming to him from the whole city; and even at a time when he could have remained and set up a wonderful ministry of healing perhaps thousands of people; he didn’t do so. That was not the Father’s will for him. Instead, he needed to go on and preach the message of the kingdom that the Father had given him to preach. Even at what was the very beginning of his ministry he knew that the long road to Jerusalem lay ahead . He knew that he would have to yield himself to the hands of wicked men to be crucified for our sins. He needed to be about the work the Father had given him. He needed to fulfil the Father’s purpose for him.

And the lesson he teaches us in it all is this: When we know the Father’s good purpose for us, we must not allow ourselves to be distracted from it—even by other ‘good’ things. We can consider this from the standpoint of our church. We live in a time when people everywhere have their own ideas of what the church ought to do and the good things that it ought to be doing for people. And as I said earlier we ***should*** be doing these good deeds. Jesus taught us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves and to do that we have to demonstrate our love in action. But we must never be doing the things that people think we ought to be doing—even good things—at the expense of the thing that God has called us to do. We are called to proclaim the same message that Jesus gave to this world—“Repent, and believe the gospel.” We are commissioned to make disciples. And if we as a church are doing all kinds of other ‘good’ things, (and I hope we are!) but not fulfilling the very purpose for which the Father has left us on this earth, then we are not doing His will.

Both as individual and as a church, we are all called to be about the work of proclaiming the message of Jesus to this world, a world that seems to be losing hope. We are not all preachers or teachers but we have all been given some skills to use in his service. If I fill my time doing other things—even good things, but do not do what God has called me to do, then I am not doing his will.

Perhaps a good way to help us to apply this morning’s message is by taking some time to get away from any of our day to day demands to be alone with the Father, and spend some time with him. Let’s ask him—as a church, and as individual believers—whether or not we have been doing the things that he has wanted done. Let’s ask him to make his purpose clear to us—and to recommit ourselves to not be distracted from it. If Jesus, the son of the Father, found it essential to take time out, to seek his direction and encouragement then, it stands to reason, that we should do the same.

So today we have two totally different sermons from the same passage of scripture. They might even appear to be contradictory, but I don’t believe they are. OK on that particular day Jesus was telling his disciples what his first priority was but that didn’t stop him from, subsequently, doing his good deeds, from feeding the hungry, healing the sick, befriending the friendless and so on. I think James puts it in a nutshell when he says what good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? **15**Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. **16**If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? **17**In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Our faith in our loving God demands that we act in love but we must never forget that primarily Jesus has commissioned us to go into all the world to make people his disciples. Feeding the hungry and healing the sick was part of Jesus’ strategy to bring in the kingdom of God. May it be ours too. Amen

**We will join together again to sing: Take my life and let it be**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sss-g50Dw1Q

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| 1.. Take my life and let it be  consecrated to Thee Take my moments and my days,  let them flow in ceaseless praise. | 2.. Take my hands and let them move  at the impulse of Thy love Take my feet and let them be  swift and beautiful for Thee. |
| 3.. Take my voice and let me sing  always, only for my King Take my lips and let them be  filled with messages from Thee. | 4.. Take my silver and my gold,  not a might would I withhold Take my intellect and use  every power as You choose. |
| 5.. Take my will and make it Thine,  It shall be no longer mine:  take my heart, it is thine own;  it shall be thy royal throne. | 6.. Take my love, my Lord I pour at Your feet, it's treasure store Take myself and I will be ever, only, all for Thee |
| Frances Ridley Havergal ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 | |

**We come now to share in our act of remembrance as we eat bread and drink wine together.**

Let’s pray

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 and forgive us our sins as we forgive those that sin against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours for ever and ever . Amen

WE are here to look back, here to look forward.

We are here to remember one who died, here to greet one who lives.

We are here to share bread and wine in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who invites us, as he invited his first disciples to take supper with him

Jesus was often a guest, sharing many meals with his friends and he ate and drank with all kinds of people, showing everyone the love of God. Wherever people met together, Jesus was glad to be welcomed and to be fed. Today we are the guests of Jesus. He welcomes us, whoever we are and wherever we are. Old or young, rich or poor, sad or happy, Jesus invites us to share bread and wine with him, to remember the story of his life and death and to celebrate his presence with us today.

On the night before he died, Jesus shared a meal with 12 of his disciples in an upstairs room in Jerusalem. The gospel writer, Mark, tells us what happened that night and Samantha will read it for us.

(Mark 14; 22-25)

**2**While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.”

**23**Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

**24**“This is my blood of the[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2014:22-25&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24779a)] covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. **25**“Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

We are the friends and family of Jesus today. He invites us to break bread together, to remember him and to pray that his kingdom will come., but first let’s say thank you to God.

Let’s pray...

Lord we thank you for the beautiful world which you created and for all your gifts to us. We thank you for sending Jesus to live among us; for his death on the cross showing just how much he loves us. We thank you that you invite us to share in this simple act to help us to remember.

Send your Holy Spirit on the bread and wine and upon us your family separated as we are by Covid restrictions, so that we may know that you are with us as we share them together. We ask our prayer in His holy name. Amen

After Jesus had given thanks he shared the bread and wine with his friends.

First he took the bread saying “This is my body broken for you” –

Let’s eat the bread, it is the bread of life.

and then he took the cup saying “This is my blood shed for you”

Let’s drink the wine, it is the cup of blessing.

Lord you have reminded us through bread and wine and through the words of scripture of all that you have done for us. Help us in return to give our all to you in the name of Christ through whom we now offer our prayers for others

**Prayers of Intercession**

We pray for our world.

Lord you gave us the earth as our home and you have filled it with beauty and many good things. Forgive us that by our own self- interest we are destroying your precious gift for future generations.

We pray for those whose minds are filled with hatred and whose hearts have no room for compassion; for those whose anger is fuelled by the injustices they believe they are suffering.

We pray for those whose lives have been torn apart by any natural disasters. We think of those whose homes have been destroyed by recent floods.

We pray for those who care for others, who daily offer healing, hope and kindness. We pray for those working for the NHS under such tremendous pressure as a result of the Covid pandemic. Give them strength to be able to cope in these difficult days.

We think and pray for those who have lost their jobs and must queue to receive benefits from the state and for those who have to ask for food from our Foodbanks

We pray for those who, in this world of plenty, are starved of the food and the medicines they need; for those turned into homeless refugees by civil war or their government’s corruption. We pray for agencies like Christian Aid who seek to bring relief from their suffering.

We pray for those who have lost loved ones asking that you will bring comfort and hope to those who are grieving.

Finally we pray for ourselves and all our church family. Help us to play our part in providing the special love and care needed during these difficult times and may your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven Amen

We bring our worship to a close as we sing

**Thine be the glory )**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaoV5w2Qfag>

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| 1.. Thine be the glory,  risen, conquering Son, endless is the victory  Thou o'er death hast won;  angels in bright raiment  rolled the stone away,  kept the folded grave-clothes  where Thy body lay. | 2.. Lo! Jesus meets us,  risen from the tomb;  lovingly He greets us,  scatters fear and gloom;  let the Church with gladness  hymns of triumph sing,  for her Lord now liveth;  death has lost its sting. |
| 3.. No more we doubt Thee,  glorious Prince of life;  life is nought without Thee:  aid us in our strife;  make us more than conquerors,  through Thy deathless love:  bring us safe through Jordan  to Thy home above. | Chorus: *Thine be the glory,*  *risen, conquering Son,*  *endless is the victory*  *Thou o'er death hast won.* |
| Edmond Budry 1854-1932 tr. R Birch Hoyle (1875-1939) ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 | |

**The blessing**

Lord when we are afraid be there for us.

When we are sad, be there for us;

When we try to serve others, be there for us

And may we declare your gospel to all we meet. Amen