

Ardoch and Blackford Parish Church

Sunday 10th January 2021

Missing the Messiah?



spill the beans
worship and learning
resources for all ages

A lectionary-based resource
with a Scottish flavour for
Sunday Schools, Junior Churches
and Worship Leaders

In this place wherever we are.
In this moment whatever time that is,
we gather in God.

Come and whisper your name,
already familiar on the lips of God
and in the echoing silence listen
as heaven celebrates its sound.

In this belonging place may we gather and
make space to know God.

After the 39 books of the Old Testament, there's a gap of several hundred years, then God chooses to speak again through the voice of one man crying in the wilderness; John the Baptist.

After 39 chapters of Isaiah, there's a pause and then God speaks words of comfort to his people.

After the Overture of The Messiah, Handel has a lone voice singing the first words of his inspiring masterpiece. Words that come from Isaiah 40; words that are quoted in one of our Bible readings introducing John the Baptist.

If you are missing The Messiah as a Christmas time treat in the Perth Concert Hall or elsewhere, the first piece of music in our service this morning is that opening few minutes of The Messiah when God speaks words of comfort to his people and to us. Read them afresh today in this paraphrase called "The Message":

"Comfort, oh comfort my people," says your God. "Speak softly and tenderly to Jerusalem, but also make it very clear that she has served her sentence, that her sin is taken care of—forgiven! She's been punished enough and more than enough, and now it's over and done with." (Isaiah 40:1-2)

Accompagnato: Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplish'd, that her Iniquity is pardoned. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness; prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (Isaiah 40:1-3)

Air: Ev'ry valley shall be exalted, and ev'ry mountain and hill made low; the crooked straight, and the rough places plain. (Is 40:4)

Chorus: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. (Is 40:5)

Let's pray together

Holy and Almighty God, we come into this place, wherever that place is, to set time aside to appreciate your presence, to appreciate your Word, to appreciate you.



Lord, you are glorious beyond description and look forward to a day when trumpets shall sound, and we shall rise to be face to face in your presence, to stand and sing "hallelujah" and to fall on our faces before the Holy God who loved us since before we were born.

Yet you are approachable and reachable now as you stoop down into this world to speak words of Comfort to us. Sins can be forgiven, wounds can be healed, you can walk with us, and speak into our lives. Comfort us in the frustration and futility of life; give us purpose as your people to seek you, serve you, share you, follow you, love you, worship you not just in this time together but in our daily lives, our working lives, our family lives, our church lives.

Open our minds and our lives to what you would want to say to us today as we read, sing pray and reflect together as your people in our communities— wherever they may be. We pray together now using the words you taught us:

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

As you may well be aware, we, like many other churches around the world follow a three-yearly pattern of Bible reading known as the Revised Common Lectionary. Part of that cycle is to focus on either Matthew, Mark or Luke for a year and we dip into John's Gospel each year. We read from John last week and probably will next week as well but our focus for this year is Mark's Gospel. So it's worth introducing Mark's Gospel as we begin.

There's a copy of a summary picture of Mark's Gospel in this issue of the Link Church Newsletter. If you have internet access watch the five minute film from The Bible Project on YouTube to have the picture drawn out with a running commentary.

For a shorter summary, here's what we read in the guide at the back of the NIV Bibles now used in Blackford

Matthew, Mark and Luke follow a similar pattern and are often known as the "Synoptic Gospels" because they "see together" the life of Jesus. Yet each has its own particular emphasis.

Mark's Gospel concentrates mainly on what Jesus did, although the writer does include some of Jesus' teaching. Within the first few chapters several miracles are recorded. He does not speak about Jesus' birth but begins with John the Baptist's work and Jesus' baptism and temptations. Chapters 1-9 are about Jesus' work in galilee, chapters 10-15 his journey to Jerusalem ending in his death and chapter 16 about his resurrection. 16:9-20 was added later probably by the early church. (pp 1258-1259).

But the shortest summary of the book is from Mark himself. As one commentator puts it, "Mark is like the TV news reader who is too excited to warn everyone he's about to give the final result of a big game in the very first verse." So if you don't want know the result please look away now as we read the start of Mark's Gospel.

John the Baptist prepares the way

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way'— ³ 'a voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: 'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

The baptism of Jesus

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

In starting to prepare for this service, one of the questions I wrote down as I read that passage was, "why tell us what John wore?" Despite the rushed pace at which Mark recounts his gospel, he does have a great eye for detail. Look out for a cushion on a boat and the colour of the grass at the feeding of the 5,000 as we read throughout the year. But it's more than that. He's identifying John with Elijah who Jews were expecting as a forerunner of Jesus. Read the narrative in the opening chapter of 2nd Kings and you'll see Adonijah's response when his men tell him who claimed to be speaking on God's behalf. To paraphrase v8: "Oh no! not the guy in the hairy coat and leather belt; that's Elijah so he really is declaring the word of the Lord." Mark wanted his readers (including us) to realise that Elijah had arrived and the Messiah was now here too.

Our second song of worship is called "These are the days of Elijah" and was written in the mid-1990s These are still the days of Elijah as we are called to prepare the way of the Lord—not his first coming to a stable or walking down to the river to be baptised but his return at the trumpet sound. There is no God like Jehovah and he is still in control.

These are the days of Elijah, declaring the Word of the Lord
And these are the days of Your servant, Moses,
righteousness being restored
Though these are the days of great trials,
of famine and darkness and sword
Still we are the voice in the desert crying
prepare ye the way of the Lord!

Behold He comes, riding on the clouds,
shining like the sun at the trumpet call
Lift your voice, it's the year of Jubilee,
out of Zion's hill, salvation comes

And these are the days of Ezekiel, the dry bones becoming flesh
And these are the days of Your servant, David,
rebuilding a temple of praise
And these are the days of the harvest,

the fields are all white in Your world
And we are the laborers in the vineyard,
declaring the Word of the Lord

There is no God like Jehovah! There is no God like Jehovah!
There is no God like Jehovah! There is no God like Jehovah!
Words & Music Robin Mark © 1996 Song Solutions Daybreak

We take time to pray for others and ourselves.

Heavenly Father, we are as ever aware of our dependence on you as individuals and as your family here in your church and in our communities. We bring those who are on our hearts and in our minds. Those who we are feeling separated from; by distance, by illness, by argument, by dispute. Bring hope, healing and hearing into these relationship we pray; into those individuals through your Spirit and into us through them.

We pray for those we are close to. Those who are part of our everyday life; those we live with. Those we phone each day; those we look for each day; those who check in on us each day. We thank you for them. We pray that they would walk close to you; see and identify you for who you are. Build their life on you; live in the expectation of your coming again.

Lord we pray for ourselves; when we are strong use us to live for you. When we are weak remind us of our journey together. When we are uncertain and doubting remind us of your grace, your forgiveness, your calling and your equipping. When we are cautious make us bold for you. When we are reflective, may we see you and identify with you as your followers in a world that challenges and doubts you.

Take our offerings we pray and use them to grow your kingdom in our country, our church and in our lives even during this period of lockdown.

Lord, open our minds now to your Word and open your Word to our minds. Amen.

Today's Sermon

These 11 verses of Mark chapter 1 have so much in them it would be easy to take several weeks to cover different parts of the passage but, knowing that we could be back here in three years' time, some of it will have to wait.

What cannot wait—because Mark was determined to get it out in the open from verse one is the statement of who Jesus is. To rework a phrase used in the Christmas Eve service, it's worth looking at what it meant *there and then* before we look at its significance *here and now*.

Mark started writing because the Roman authorities were beginning to notice the impact of the Christian church and they were not popular. More leaders are being killed and those who knew the accounts of Jesus as eye-witnesses would soon be gone so getting these statements down on papyrus was important. Even when it challenged the Roman authorities. Various Caesars liked to be known as the sons of the Gods; they had it put on their coins; so to start the Gospel with “Jesus, the Son of God” was to fly in the face of popular culture. We are still called to do that; not to buckle under pressure to allow society to shape and interpret Jesus or the Bible for us but to use Jesus' words in the Bible to interpret society, to shape it and to speak truth to power. To weaken the identify of Jesus for example—to portray him as a good teacher who set ever changing moral standards that he called people to follow to the best of their ability, is to miss who Jesus is— they're missing The Messiah.

“Messiah” is a Hebrew word that means promised one or chosen one. As the New Testament is written in Greek we're more used to the Greek equivalent—Christ. He may not be the promised one who the Jewish leaders were expecting, and he may not preach that the world would have chosen but many will miss the Messiah because they preferred a different path.

So Jesus walks into the scrolls of Mark's Gospel already 30 years of age and almost ready for public ministry. Why is his first act baptism? Does he need to confess sins? Does he need to repent?

No. But just as three years later he would identify with a sinful world and take our sin upon himself as he dies on the cross, so he identified with you and me that day and says, “I need to be washed clean before God and this baptism is a reminder of that and a symbol of that.

Perhaps 20 years later, as Paul and Silas preach the life changing good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, they come up against the town leaders of Philippi and are thrown in the town jail. Singing hymns overnight, an earthquake shakes the prison and the doors fly open; assuming he'd be killed in the morning for letting prisoners escape, the jailer was all set to kill himself, until Paul

shouted—we're all here! Robyn Peacock took up the story from Acts 16 in our service:

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'

³¹ They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.' ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptised. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole household.

So baptism became a family event, identifying people with the community of faith—as circumcision had done for Jewish men before. It would be very unusual for a baptism in the Church of Scotland not to be part of public worship because the parents are asking the church family to accept and be part of the their children's journey of faith until—and beyond—the point where they express their personal faith and “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.” That offer is open to all in the household and must be accepted by each individually. And notice the repentance—the change of direction that the jailer exhibited immediately. Tell me you're a follower of Jesus then show me.

So have we missed the Messiah or found him? Have we identified him as Jesus, the Son of God and now identify with him as a believer and follower of Jesus the Christ? Do we head into the new year as those, like Paul and Silas who recognise Christ beyond our immediate circumstances. There is no God like Jehovah so I can trust him to be in control; Can I sing his praise in the darkest of nights? Can I share that confidence in Christ with those around me? Can I share Jesus with those who are still missing the Messiah?

Our final hymn is number 645 in the CH4 hymnbooks; It needs the chorus to go to the particular tune we have on video in the online service. It's a great hymn of personal testimony expressing confidence as we place ourselves into the hands of Christ as Saviour and as Lord. It's the hymn that was sung on the evening I was baptised, like the Philippian jailer on my own profession of faith rather than my parents' decision.

I'm not ashamed to own my Lord, or to defend his cause,
maintain the honour of his Word, the glory of his cross.

Chorus:

At the cross at the cross where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away.
It was there by faith I received my sight
and now I am happy all the day.

Jesus, my God! I know his name, his name is all my trust;
nor will he put my soul to shame, nor let my hope be lost.

Firm as his throne his promise stands, and he can well secure
what I've committed to his hands 'til the decisive hour.

Then will he own my worthless name before his Father's face,
and in the new Jerusalem appoint my soul a place

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**Now go to seek, find, serve and follow Jesus, the Messiah,
the Son of God. And may the blessing of almighty God be yours,
this day and each day. Amen**

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Some notices!

Mairi has been on holiday and comes back to work on Monday.

The Link has been put together during the course of this week and will be coming out in printed or electronic form.

Please continue to collect used stamps and to consider how to manage regular offerings. Details on both are in The Link.

There's a Blackford Kirk Session meeting on Monday 18th and an Ardoch Kirk Session meeting on Wednesday 27th. Details and Zoom links to follow

Blackford's building will not now be open for prayer as planned,

The Bible Study starts again this Tuesday looking at Ezekiel for the next 6 weeks through to the start of Lent. Details on the Blackford church website as we meet using Zoom.