

Call to Worship – We Come to Worship

[Worship Resources/Call To Worship/We come to worship revised.ppt]

From different lives:

We come to worship.

From good weeks and bad weeks:

We come to worship.

Bringing great times and painful memories:

We come to worship.

Needing healing, needing peace:

We come to worship.

With hope in our hearts:

We come to worship.

To the Almighty God:

We come to worship.

To the King of Kings:

We come to worship.

Together:

We come to worship.

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Prayer of Preparation

[Worship Resources/Praise/Prayer of Preparation.pptx]

Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit
that we may perfectly love you
and worthily magnify your holy Name;
through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

Mark 1:29-39

Although the Beatles had their wildly successful career while I was a child, I can't say I listened to their music until I was a teenager and their songs came on the radio as oldies. At the time, I could warm to their melodic songs like Yesterday and Penny Lane, but I found some of their more experimental songs strange and even disturbing.

One example of the disturbing category for me was 'A Day In The Life'. Not only was it filled with druggy lyrics and accompanying psychedelic arrangements, it ended with a strange section where the instruments of the orchestra kept accelerating in tempo until there was one final, aggressive piano chord, which eventually died away.

Some critics say that song was their crowning achievement. It just left me feeling troubled.

'A day in the life.' In our reading today, Mark edits together some typical accounts of Jesus' early ministry to provide us with a sense of what a day in the life of Jesus during those first weeks and months of his mission in Galilee were like.

But it's not just any old 'day in the life of Jesus'. It's very focussed. All the themes reflected here give pointers towards the coming kingdom of God which Jesus was heralding in his ministry. He said the kingdom had come near, and so in this typical day's ministry we see glimpses of what is coming.

Firstly, *healing*:

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.

Let's leave aside any jokes about the greatest miracle here being that Simon Peter wanted his mother-in-law healed, let's see this for what it is: a sign of the coming kingdom. As Jesus heals people, he shows that the coming kingdom is one where sickness will not ravage people, but that our resurrected bodily lives will be characterised by well-being in every sense.

How do we read this as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, and in a week when the number of deaths in the UK has gone past 110,000?

We remember that God's kingdom is both 'now' and 'not yet'. So we see signs of the kingdom when people are healed, but not all are healed. Death, the last enemy, has not been completely vanquished yet. But it will be when Christ appears again.

In the meantime, we pray for the sick to be healed, and we support them when they do not receive that healing in this life. We keep praying, we keep doing those things which make for health, but we leave the outcomes to God as his kingdom pierces this broken world.

Secondly, *banishing evil*:

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all who were ill 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.

Casting out demons is only something that very few Christians will probably undertake, and we should not underestimate it by mistakenly attributing all such incidents to mental illness or epilepsy.

But we are all involved in the battle against evil. We set ourselves against evil in society as we stand for justice. We seek to be a positive witness for goodness and truth in our daily relationships.

And of course we battle the evil that we find deep within ourselves, those things that we wouldn't want other people to know about.

And yet sometimes the greatest help in our own inner battles is precisely when we do find a trustworthy friend with whom to share our struggles, and who can hold us to account.

We face all types of evil from social injustice to nasty neighbours to our own shame with the help of the *Holy Spirit*. For the Spirit is with us, among us, and within us to help us in the ministry of Christ. 'More Holy Spirit!' is a good prayer when we face evil.

Thirdly, *intimacy with God*:

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!'

Many preachers rightly say that Jesus' priority of prayer is vital in his being equipped to show the signs of the coming kingdom, and they would of course be right. How does anyone – even Jesus – do the will of God without fuelling it in prayer?

But it is also a sign of the coming kingdom to pray, because when the kingdom of God comes in all its fulness there will be a closeness to God, who will no longer be distanced from us by sin or anything else. It's worth therefore investing now in the practice of drawing near to him.

And no, not all prayer times are ecstatic, but that's OK. Not all meals are memorable, but they all feed us. So in anticipation of the coming kingdom, prayer is a sign of the intimacy with God that is promised.

Fourthly and finally, there's a theme that runs through all the three we've discussed so far. And that theme is *service*.

When Simon Peter's mother-in-law is healed, her response is to serve (verse 31). When Jesus casts out demons, he commands them to be silent 'because they knew who he was' (verse 34) and had they blabbed who he was, people would not have understood that Jesus saw himself as the Messiah in terms of Isaiah's Servant of the Lord, rather than a military leader. And true prayer is an act of service, because prayer reminds us that we are ranked below God, and owe him service.

Serving is a sign of the kingdom because it characterises the relationships of God's kingdom. The kingdom of God is not a place where we seek to grab all we can for ourselves, it is somewhere that we say, 'What can I give to others?'

Perhaps you know the old story wherein it was imagined that in both Heaven and Hell the occupants were given very long chopsticks with which to eat a meal. In Hell, people starved, because they only thought to try and feed themselves and the length of the chopsticks precluded that. In Heaven, however, everybody flourished, because people sat opposite each other and fed one another with their long chopsticks.

When we follow the pattern of Jesus by serving him and serving people, we are imbibing the culture of God's kingdom. It's an important way that we prepare for the life of the age to come – alongside our ministry to the sick, our opposition to evil in the power of the Spirit, and our fellowship with God.

May we more truly point to the coming kingdom through our lives.

Song – Recover Me

[Worship Resources/Healing/Recover Me_1.mp4]

We're all in recovery,
we are all on a journey of change.
We're not where we want to be,
but just look at the distance we've made.

We're offered acceptance,
we are known, we are loved come what may.
There's always another chance,
taking steps, making choices each day.

*Recover me, God of welcome, God of peace.
Jesus set me free to be how you see me.*

We're all seen as beautiful,
and we each have a gift we can share.
Our stories are meaningful,
there's a friend who will listen and care.

Come with your peace, come and rebuild.
We're coming empty, we come to be filled.

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Inspired by the women of Azalea, Luton. See www.azalea.org.uk

Prayer of Petition – Overcome Evil with Good

[Worship Resources/Intercession/Overcome_Evil_With_Good.pdf]

When we are tempted to put others down:

Help us to overcome evil with good.

When we long to pass on the latest piece of gossip:

Help us to overcome evil with good.

When we want to push others away:

Help us to overcome evil with good.

When we are invited to nurture negative attitudes:

Help us to overcome evil with good.

When cynicism is the easy option:

Help us to overcome evil with good.

And when we hear your gentle voice calling us towards love:

Help us to take note and respond.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

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Blessing – Aaron’s Blessing

[Worship Resources/Blessings/Aarons_Blessing.pptx]

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.

Amen.

Words: Numbers 6:24-26

Slide designed by Sam Hargreaves/engageworship