

Call to Worship

Video, Steelehouse Media, Worship Inspiration

Hymn of Confession: Most Merciful God

Most merciful God,
our Father of grace,
we confess we have sinned,
we have walked our own way.

Our love has been fickle,
our hearts they have strayed.
So, Lord, in your mercy,
forgive us we pray.

*Restore us,
change us.
Lord, lead us on.*

That we may do justly,
Forever love mercy,
together walk humbly
with you.

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Receiving Forgiveness

[place your hands in front of you, as if receiving a gift]

God we receive your forgiveness,
the restoration of our tired souls,
the renewal our fickle hearts,
the washing of our dirty hands.

That we may do justly,
love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen.

SONGS FOR SUNDAYS

This resource is provided to work alongside the song "Most Merciful God"
from RESOUNDworship, as part of the Songs For Sundays project.
Prayer written by Sam Hargreaves for engageworship.

[Mark 1:14-20](#)

Many of you know that I'm an amateur photographer. When I want to make a photo of an object that is a long distance away and I can't physically get close to it, I use a zoom telephoto lens. I have two such lenses.

This first lens will go from making things about one and a half times larger than we naturally see them to about four times. This second lens is my monster and will make objects look between about four and ten times larger than our normal field of vision.

Our reading today is like the experience of zooming in closer on Jesus' ministry. Here, he begins his public ministry, and we get to see him laying out the fundamentals of that ministry. In a week where we've seen the inauguration of a new American President, and where like many new Presidents, Joe Biden has set out his plans for his first hundred days in office to show what he hopes to be the important threads of his presidency, so here we see Jesus setting out the essential elements of his ministry.

Firstly, we see the *context*. This is the wide view.

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee

Something is lost in the NIV's translation here. It's OK to translate the opening words as 'After John was *put in prison*', and we know from later in Mark that he was imprisoned. But a strict translation would say, 'After John was *handed over*'. He has been handed over (or betrayed, possibly) to the henchmen of Herod Antipas.

One or two things flow from this. John has done his work of preparation. Now the stage is set for Jesus. Just as he has been handed over, so he hands over the public ministry to Jesus.

But also, the language of handing over will reappear in Mark and the other Gospels. For in Gethsemane, Jesus too will be handed over.

And so too may some of the first readers of this Gospel. It's likely that Mark wrote his Gospel for Christians suffering under the persecution of Nero in Rome in the mid-sixties.

So the wide context of John handing over to Jesus is that the shadow of suffering for one's faith is cast across the landscape. It's present here near the beginning of the Gospel, and it doesn't go away. With our comfortable life in the West we often don't see this shadow, but millions of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world will recognise this, and we have a duty to stand up for them.

Secondly, we see the *theme* of Jesus' ministry.

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, *proclaiming the good news of God.* [Italics mine.]

'Good news' here is a technical term. The Greek used here is the same as where the Septuagint, the famous Greek translation of what we call the Old Testament, speaks about reports of victory coming from a battlefield¹. Similarly, when a Roman herald came to a town or village in the empire and said he was proclaiming good news, it was usually the news that Rome's armies had won a great victory somewhere.

So when Jesus comes to herald 'the good news of God', it is a public announcement that God himself has won a great victory. The ordinary people will have received such an announcement with great joy.

But of course they will be disappointed. They will discover that Jesus does not herald a God who wins great battles by the force of his armies. No legions of angels appear to dispatch the hated Romans.

Instead, this Gospel which begins with the shadow of suffering introduces us to a God who wins his victories in completely different ways. He wins them not with violence but with compassion, as seen in the healing miracles of Jesus.

And he wins the greatest victory of all through suffering, as Jesus goes to the Cross, which becomes not a place of defeat but of triumph.

What an amazing message this is for those living under the shadow of unjust suffering as those Christians in Rome did. It is the same for those who suffer for the name of Christ today.

And what a confounding message for those in our day who cannot accept God unless he deals with pain and suffering in their prescribed ways. Loud and clear comes the message from the throne of the universe, 'I do not do things your way. Learn what I am like and how I achieve the ultimate conquest.'

Thirdly, we get closer still to the action as we hear the **content** of Jesus' ministry.

¹⁵ 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near. You bet it has. When Jesus says the kingdom of God has come near he means it has come close in a spatial sense. It's close in physical distance rather than being close in time.

And that's because the kingdom comes in and with him. So his arrival makes the kingdom near. And thus the time really has come. When God's kingdom comes this close, it's time to do something. This is the hinge of history.

In Jesus God is acting in kingly power. And while it's good news, that God is doing this, it's also why the necessary response is 'Repent and believe the good news'.

Why? Plenty of people say they believe in Jesus. They believe he existed and they have a warm regard for him. But if we truly want to believe in him then we have to accept what he says here, which is that no belief in him exists without first being preceded by repentance.

And that's because believing in Jesus requires conforming to the ways of God's kingdom. Yes, God coming and acting in kingly power is good news for his people, but it isn't as simple as booting out the enemies of God's people. It also means God's people need to polish up their act.

I wonder whether the Holy Spirit is prompting any of us in this way? 'You say you believe in Jesus, well great – but are you conforming your life more and more to his ways and his pattern?'

Fourthly and finally, we zoom right in on the ministry of Jesus in the **calling** of the first disciples.

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Simon, Andrew, James, and John have missed out on the opportunity to be disciples of a rabbi. Those chances went to the bright lads. So they've gone off into their family businesses.

But here comes a second chance, and it's a surprising one. Normally, a young Jewish man would ask a rabbi if he could apprentice himself to him. It wasn't the done thing for a rabbi to come and call people to be his followers. But Jesus did that.

And the call was different in another way². The usual pattern was for a disciple to say that they were following Torah (the Jewish Law). They didn't say they were following a person, not even an eminent rabbi. But Jesus is different. He's on a different plane from the normal rabbis. To follow him is to follow the law of God, for he is the instigator of it.

Further, this was not to be some academic call to learn Torah and its meaning. It was a call to service: 'I will send you out to fish for people.' Thus, it's possible for Jesus to issue this kind of call to anyone. No qualifications are needed.

And even more than this, it was a call to fellowship, for Jesus creates the beginnings of a community here. This is not an isolated individual call. This is about the making of a new community. Jesus calls all his people to that, too, for he is making us into a sign to the world of how human community is meant to be as he makes all things new. That's why we have to dispense with all the ways in the church that we carry on as if we are just a club or a social organisation. Our destiny is far greater than such trivia.

So this is where we get to when we zoom in on the ministry of Jesus. In the shadow of suffering, God wins a great victory. Jesus calls us to a belief in him that requires aligning ourselves with his purposes. It involves loyalty to him, a commitment to service, and the building of a new community.

Is that what we are about in our churches? It needs to be, if we care about the kingdom of God.

Let Your Kingdom Come: Intercessions

For global events,
natural disasters
and areas of need:

**Let your kingdom come,
Let your will be done.**

For our streets,
neighbours and communities:

**Let your kingdom come,
Let your will be done.**

For our schools,
nurseries and youth workers:

**Let your kingdom come,
Let your will be done.**

For our government,
financial systems and businesses:

**Let your kingdom come,
Let your will be done.**

For the lonely,
the hurting and the desperate:

**Let your kingdom come,
Let your will be done.**

SONGS FOR SUNDAYS

Sam Hargreaves/engageworship

For more resources in this series visit www.resoundworship.org and www.engageworship.org

Hymn: God Our Father

God our Father, King of heaven,
let your Kingdom come.
On the earth as in your heaven,
let your will be done.

Everything we need you've given;
bread for every day.

In your mercy we're forgiven,
may we show your grace.

*Let your Kingdom come,
let your will be done.*

Lead us not into temptation,
help us walk your ways.
Lord, deliver us from evil,
hear us as we pray:

For the kingdom, and the power
and the glory are yours,
now and forever,
forevermore.

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Blessing Song: May The Lord Bless You

[Those watching on video will see the lyrics in both words and sign language]

May the Lord bless you,
may the Lord keep you,
may the Lord's face shine down on you
and show you grace.

May the Lord bless you,
may the Lord keep you,
may the Lord turn his face to you
and give you peace.

And give you peace,
and show your grace,
and give you hope,
and show you love,
and give you peace.

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¹ James R Edwards, *The Gospel According To Mark*, p24, discussing the meaning of 'gospel' in 1:1.

² What follows is based on Edwards, pp49-51.