

Sunday Update
30th August 2020

Matthew 16:21-28

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. 22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." 24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. 28 "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

"A strange way to save the world." That is the title of a sing and a video that we showed at one of our services last Christmas; here's the link if you want to watch it for yourself now: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKYfzax-sNk> It is about Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus to ordinary people like Joseph and Mary, in an ordinary place like the stable and gives voice to Joseph reflecting that the birth of Jesus in these circumstances is a strange way for God to save the world. If Bethlehem seems strange in God's promise to save the world, then today's reading adds a whole new level to that sense of strangeness because Jesus speaks about His suffering and death (and resurrection) as the reason for His coming. The cross has always seemed a strange place for salvation to be worked out, so let's give this some thought.

At the end of last week's conversation between Jesus and the disciples at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus told them not to say anything about Him as Messiah. They were to keep that insight to themselves. Why would Jesus do that? Surely, He would want to broadcast the news so that more people will follow Him! Well, today we have a clue as to why: He will be a different kind of Messiah; He will rewrite the book on Messiahship. The Jews expected Messiah to come as a great King, someone who will bring in the kingdom of God in power and with great glory; popular opinion thought that Messiah would come to restore Israel to her glory days of king David and king Solomon, would defeat the Roman army and set Israel free. If they had a picture in their mind's eye of Messiah, he would be riding a war horse at the head of the Lord's army and winning great battles. When Peter confesses Jesus as "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*" we have to think that he imagines the same picture.

In the days after that conversation at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus sets out to change their expectations of Him. "*From that time on, Jesus began to explain...*" (verse 21) that He was going to be a very different Messiah; perhaps that's why they were told not to say a word about Him! This is the first of three episodes in the gospels when Jesus talks about what is going to happen to Him, each one slightly different, but each one confirming in the disciples' minds what will happen. Jesus says that there are 4 things that we are to expect: first of all, He will go to Jerusalem: nothing unusual about that, perhaps, except when we see what will happen when He gets there! Second, He will suffer and third, He will be killed – this is not what we expect of Messiah, if we are first-century Jews; this is not on the agenda at all! Fourthly, He will be raised to life; that's better, but it is still clouded by all the events that come before it!

Peter is not happy. He has a stand-up argument with Jesus about this. *“Never, Lord. This shall never happen to you!”* (verse 22) This is not at all what Peter expected when he confessed Jesus as Messiah. This is a strange way for Messiah to behave! He is not happy about this and he lets Jesus know that he is not happy! The man who was inspired before to utter the most sublime confession of faith, is now described in the most terrifying way – *“Get behind me, Satan!”* – and as getting in the way of Jesus completing His God-given mission. The whole notion of suffering and death is a strange way to be Messiah, as far as Peter is concerned, a strange way to save the world. Yet, Jesus is clear: He has to go this way; He “must” go this way; “it is necessary that” He goes this way. The shadow of the cross that has been hanging over Jesus for His whole life, is now hanging over His friends as well; they have to come to terms with this, even though it is a struggle for them.

Crucifixion was a barbaric form of capital punishment. There is nothing attractive about the cross. It was a place of profound suffering and agonising death; Jesus went that way in order to save the world. When he writes about the cross in 1 Corinthians 1, Paul describes *“Christ as the power of God and the wisdom of God”* – in other words, the cross was the right thing at the right time to save the world. So we are to trust Jesus, a crucified Saviour. The cross was not the waste of a young life; it was not a tragic accident that somehow God turned around to benefit the world; it was the express purpose for Jesus’ coming into the world; it was the reason for Him being here. From the very start, the shadow of the cross hung over His life and His suffering and death were God’s way to save the world. The resurrection confirms that!

We make mistakes, we have faults and failings, and we even rebel against God – justice demands that such rebellion and waywardness faces an accounting; when Jesus died on the cross, He took all of that human rebellion and waywardness on His own shoulders so that we might be free, justified! There are days when guilt is an overbearing burden and the sense of being deserted, even abandoned by God is overwhelming – because of Jesus on the cross, there is forgiveness for us and our Father understands these most profound of dark human emotions. When we pray and tell our Father about our pain and suffering, how does He know what we feel? He knows because Jesus is beside Him with nail marks in His wrists to tell the Father what it feels like to suffer and to be afraid of death.

Forgiveness, freedom, hope, help, compassion, grace – the cross may be a strange way to save the world, but it surely is a most effective way. These blessings, and lots more, are the ways in which the crucified Jesus helps and saves us. Our faith is to be centred on the cross; we are to live lives that are shaped by the cross; we are to share the good news of a crucified Saviour with a lost and at times dark world. Jesus came to save the world; He may have gone about it in a way that seems strange to us, but it works!

Prayer: Father, thank You for Jesus the crucified Messiah; humbly we thank you for all that He went through and endured for our sake, in order to be our Saviour; open our hearts to find forgiveness, freedom, hope, compassion from Jesus; help us to live our lives by faith “in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.” (Galatians 2:20)

*Day by day, dear Lord of you
Three things I pray:
To see you more clearly,
To love you more dearly,
To follow you more nearly,
Day by day.*

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- Pray for our schools, the children, settling down into the routines and rhythms of being back at school; the teachers and other staff; wearing masks or no masks?
- Young people considering what their future holds: are some back to school? Others looking for college or university places? Those going to university or college in the next few weeks – what kind of experience will that be for them?
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.
- NHS staff, care home staff, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- The opening up of lockdown, to be done carefully and not recklessly; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable. Headline stories of breaches of the protocols to be seen for the danger that they are rather than people to copy them.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some still furloughed, others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- For the virus to go away completely; pray that science will find a vaccine.
- More places opening: let this not be the occasion for a spike in the virus, but for people to stay safe and well while enjoying new freedoms. Churches agonising over the question of re-opening their buildings, weighing up the value against the risk – Lord, guide us.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- **Orbisa's** story: For many people in the north-east of Ethiopia, the impact of climate change is devastating. They used to expect rain for up to four months a year, but now it only falls in August. People do not have enough water to survive – it is an issue of life or death. No one should have to go to bed thirsty. Help Tearfund to provide life-saving water. Join us in following Jesus where the need is greatest.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen.

You're the word of God the Father	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVpkR4gYTIg
So amazing God	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OIVeudCxqSw
And can it be	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQeIGbKqiw8
There is a redeemer	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61CJdXmxxLU
Love Divine	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BN2-soK46LY

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerjgpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk

- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - New issues of “**Every Day with Jesus**” Booklet for September and October 2020 are now available. Please contact Ian Aitken who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Michael Merriman. **Let the Bible feed you.**

Church News: we are planning to produce an issue of Church News sometime in the next few weeks. Alison is keen to include people’s stories of lockdown: did you learn to play the guitar or to speak Spanish? Contact Alison on jgchurchnews@gmail.com with your lockdown stories or anything else you would like to include in Church News.

Take up your cross

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Lord, the disciples gathered around you,
trying so hard to answer your questions,
and to cope with difficult news.
We come before you now and ask your blessing,
as we seek to understand more of your story –
your tough and challenging,
but so good story!
Amen.



Question...



How many opposites can you think of? Here's some examples:

Light/dark Warm/cold Sweet/sour

Some things don't make sense without their opposite. We wouldn't appreciate light without knowing the dark. We might not understand love without a sense of loss too.

When we're invited to share in Jesus' story, we must be willing to share the bad times as well as the good., embracing the life of opposites we experience in our walk with him.



Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in Matthew 16:21-28. You can read them in a Bible or find them here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16%3A21-28&version=ERV>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage.



Talk together...

Jesus' disciples have declared him to be king. Now Jesus tells them what his kingship will look like: it will contain suffering and death (as well as good stuff!). He also tells his disciples that if they choose to keep following him it will not always be easy, and that whoever puts themselves first will end up coming last.

- What do you think about Jesus telling us to “take up our cross” to follow him? What do you think that means?
- What in life is hard work but worth persevering with?
- Do you think people tend to put others first or themselves first, and how? What about you?
- What things are good about being a follower of Jesus? What things are difficult?
- How do you respond when life is tough? What keeps us going in difficult times?

Praise together...



I have decided to follow Jesus:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8jvfdDtoqY>

Pray together...

Lord God, you knew what was going to happen to you.

You didn't flinch, or back away.

You calmly told the disciples – and us – what to expect.

As we go out now, remind us constantly to look to you in the good and the tough times.

Guide us as we go in your name. **Amen.**

Make strips of coloured paper. Write your name or draw yourself on one of the strips. Loop the strips together to make a chain. As you hang the chain up say: We praise you, Jesus, that we are all part of your story.

Play together...

Play a game of Jenga. Or build a wall using Lego/recycling materials/plastic boxes then try to knock it down using a few beanbags/pillows/soft toys/balled up socks.

Stumbling blocks are normally seen as a negative in our life because they stop us doing what we want to do or slow us down. But some stumbling blocks are good, can you think of any good ones? (Eg. Traffic lights, house rules)

Jesus had many stumbling blocks put in his path and in today's story Peter was a bit of a stumbling block. But bit by bit Jesus gets over the blocks and just like Jenga the stumbling blocks come tumbling down rather than seeming like a massive obstacle.

Read together...

Read *The Smartest Giant in town* by Julia Donaldson or *The Rainbow fish* by Marcus Pfister.

When the giant and the fish decide to start giving away what they have instead of keeping it all to themselves their life changes. What happens?

In the end they feel content and rewarded by those they help. In what ways is this similar to what Jesus asks us to do?

Sometimes when we give of ourselves we gain in return. Can you think of any examples of this?