

Cheshire South Methodist Circuit
Worship at Home - Sunday 14th July 2024



Call to Worship

Come, give to the Lord your praises of thanksgiving. **We come this day, grateful for God's wondrous gifts to us!** Sing with great enthusiasm of God's mighty power and love. **We celebrate that love that frames our lives.** It is a wonderful thing to praise God! **May God's praise always be in our hearts and in our lives. Amen.**

StF no. 189 *Wild and lone the prophet's voice*

1. Wild and lone the prophet's voice
echoes through the desert still,
calling us to make a choice,
bidding us to do God's will:
"Turn from sin and be baptized;
cleanse your heart and mind and soul.
Quitting all the sins you prized,
yield your life to God's control."

2. Bear the fruit repentance sows:
lives of justice, truth, and love.
Trust no other claim than those;
set your heart on things above.
Soon the Lord will come in power,
burning clean the threshing floor:
then will flames the chaff devour;
wheat alone shall fill God's store."

3. With such preaching stark and bold
John proclaimed salvation near,
and his timeless warnings hold
words of hope to all who hear.
So we dare to journey on,
led by faith through ways untrod,
till we come at last like John
to behold the Lamb of God.

Carl P Daw (b 1944)

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Almighty God, we give thanks for your gentle and enduring love, for sending us your son Jesus to show us the way to live; for life itself,for our lives.... and for this world. Grant us the grace to respect this world – so that we in faith may see it through your eyes, hear it through your ears, touch it through your hands and leave it as a place pleasing to you.

Father, we thank you for the words and deeds of those who have changed life for other people; those who have brought the word of hope to those who are broken; the message of love to those who are down; those who brought encouragement to those without joy.

Father, we thank you that we can trust you in every situation and not simply when life is good and wholesome, but when we are facing problems; we thank you for the assurance that there is no darkness that your love cannot penetrate, and there is no burden that you cannot carry.

Father, we thank you for the whole life and ministry of Jesus that gives us hope and for the promise of the Holy Spirit, who gives us new life. And we thank you that there is nothing that can ever separate us from your love. Amen

Prayer of confession

Merciful God, you see deep into our hearts and know us better than we know ourselves. Forgive us we pray. For the times we turn away from Your word, remind us that You are the Lord our God, our eternal protector and guide. For our impulses of anger and jealousy, scorn or spite, grant us Your

healing peace. For our resistance to forgiveness, generosity and mercy, inspire us with Your compassionate love.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Welcome now the abundant grace of God: in Jesus, your sins are forgiven. And let God's love comfort and heal your soul.

Redeeming God, in You, we are always welcome and accepted, always forgiven and renewed. Draw us closer to You, today and always. Amen.

New Testament Reading: Mark 6: verses 14-29 - The Death of John the Baptist

¹⁴Now King Herod heard about all this, because Jesus' reputation had spread everywhere. Some people were saying, "John the Baptist has come back to life! That is why he has this power to perform miracles." ¹⁵Others, however, said, "He is Elijah." Others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." ¹⁶When Herod heard it, he said, "He is John the Baptist! I had his head cut off, but he has come back to life!" ¹⁷Herod himself had ordered John's arrest, and he had him chained and put in prison. Herod did this because of Herodias, whom he had married, even though she was the wife of his brother Philip. ¹⁸John the Baptist kept telling Herod, "It isn't right for you to be married to your brother's wife!" ¹⁹So Herodias held a grudge against John and wanted to kill him, but she could not because of Herod. ²⁰Herod was afraid of John because he knew that John was a good and holy man, and so he kept him safe. He liked to listen to him, even though he became greatly disturbed every time he heard him. ²¹Finally Herodias got her chance. It was on Herod's birthday, when he gave a feast for all the chief government officials, the military commanders, and the leading citizens of Galilee. ²²The daughter of Herodias came in and danced, and pleased Herod and his guests. So the king said to the girl, "What would you like to have? I will give you anything you want." ²³With many vows he said to her, "I swear that I will give you anything you ask for, even as much as half my kingdom!"

²⁴So the girl went out and asked her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. ²⁵The girl hurried back at once to the king and demanded, "I want you to give me here and now the head of John the Baptist on a dish!" ²⁶This made the king very sad, but he could not refuse her because of the vows he had made in front of all his guests. ²⁷So he sent off a guard at once with orders to bring John's head. The guard left, went to the prison, and cut John's head off; ²⁸then he brought it on a dish and gave it to the girl, who gave it to her mother. ²⁹When John's disciples heard about this, they came and took away his body, and buried it.

Message

I am sure we have all watched a horror movie or read a horror story, and it's not always a pleasant experience. If a horror movie on TV becomes too scary, I will pick up a book and hide behind it, or go and make a cup of tea, because I am unable to watch what happens next, and our Gospel lesson about the death of John the Baptist comes over like a horror story. This story is widely known and is the source of movies, operas and paintings.

John condemned Herod's marriage to Herodias because it went against the Law of Moses. Herodias had been the wife of Herod's brother Philip, and she divorced Philip in order to marry Herod. Herodias was also Herod's niece (She was the daughter of Herod's half-brother). She wanted the intrigue of palace politics and a man, Herod, whom she could not have lawfully. John's condemnation upset Herodias so much that she looked for an opportunity to have John killed, and that opportunity came at Herod's birthday party.

Revenge can become all-consuming and is in the business of hurting others. Revenge is a destructive force in life, and Herodias had these characteristics. Because John was pulling back the curtain on this scandalous, illegal and politically corrupt marriage, Herodias wanted to kill John. But she couldn't, because Herod liked John.

In this passage of Scripture, we see Herod and his misuse of power by making foolish promises to his stepdaughter, which leads to the tragedy of John's beheading. Herod becomes an example of the abuse of power.

Yet the story is fascinating and is known throughout the world. It is indeed full of intrigue on many levels. Herod has immense power, but seems to have no power over it. He becomes helpless through

the manipulation of others. Those who influence Herod include his powerful community members who were his guests. His family members, including his wife and stepdaughter, took advantage of him, and due to his inept use of his power, Herod executes John, in spite of his admiration and fascination with John as a person and his message.

Reading from Mark, verse 20: Herod was afraid of John because he knew that John was a good and holy man, and so he kept him safe. He liked to listen to him, even though he became greatly disturbed every time he heard him.

Herod beheaded John and did not give him a formal trial. This was in violation of the Law of Moses. Herod did this because he wanted to save face and not look like a fool in front of his guests. Many of the sins we commit today are done in order to save face. We are so often concerned about looking good in front of others, when we should be more concerned with pleasing God.

Herod's story was one of impulse, pride and stubbornness, and the story of our lives is similar. Herod gave his word to his stepdaughter Salome in front of his friends, so he had no choice but to agree to her demands. To do otherwise would have led to a loss of power. Herod had greater concern for his pride and reputation than for truth and integrity. Believers and unbelievers alike can easily allow peer pressure and public opinion to turn them away from doing what they know in their hearts is right. Mark wants us to realize that the world is inhabited by many "Herods" who abuse power, and we are called to witness and proclaim the Good News to people who resist the message to repent. They do not want to change. Remember that Jesus continued his own ministry and proclamation in the face of great opposition.

Jesus came to call the world to repent, and Jesus gives us a new perspective for our lives. The call to minister in the face of resistance and opposition is our call today.

So in this passage from Mark it is teaching us about the life of discipleship. To follow Jesus means laying aside our determination to have our own way and turning instead toward the way of obedience to Jesus, God's anointed King. It means not just listening to God's message, but actually putting it into practice - making the hard decisions about our way of life as followers of Jesus, and we are assured, that this is the right path for us to choose, and that if we choose it, by the grace of God we will know God's mercy, forgiveness and everlasting eternal love.

The story of John the Baptist's death is meant to shock us out of our complacency. We are called on to confront the evil we see around us. Those who proclaim the truth of God's word will certainly face opposition, and John was no exception.

John was faithful to his calling. He prepared the way for Jesus, and so should we. John's life was intended to prepare the way for Jesus and point people to Jesus. We as individuals and as the church need to spend our lives pointing toward Jesus and drawing people to Jesus.

Christianity is not just about knowing about God. It is about having a relationship with God. We have a choice - to be like John or to be like Herod. Will we be weak like Herod, easily tempted and easily manipulated, or will we be strong in our moral convictions like John?

But the good news of our story isn't over.

There is a grace and power of God that is at work within us, beyond our failures and our lowest moments. The good news is that mine and your faults and failures don't get have the last word.

In Ephesians Chapter 1 v 13, it says "you also became God's people when you heard the true message, the Good News that brought you salvation. You believed in Christ, and God put his stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he had promised."

Dear friends, what we learn from St Mark's Gospel, is that God's endless desire and power to redeem this world through grace, mercy, forgiveness and self-sacrifice is greater than any power that our failures might wield. So today we can truly say **Thanks be to God. Amen**

Prayers of intercession

Everlasting God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, hear our prayers which we offer in His name and by the power of your Holy Spirit working among us that we might tell and live the Gospel of Salvation as a living example for all mankind.

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Creator God we pray for the leaders of the world carrying responsibilities for the lives of their people. We pray for all victims of recent terrorism and for a new determination to end the spiral of violence which brings with it so much fear, heartache and suffering.

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Gracious God we pray for all people who feel excluded, exploited or ignored. Help us, your people, to work together to build a community which is as open and generous as your love, shown to us in the gift of your Son Jesus Christ.

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Loving God we pray for healing in body, mind and spirit for all who are in need. We pray that in lives darkened by any kind of pain, distress or grief the light of Christ will bring comfort, hope and a sense of your all-encompassing love.

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Lord, your love reaches beyond the grave. At the end of our days on earth be with us and with those we love and with those whom we love and have gone before us. We pray for those who have recently died and those bereaved by their passing.

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Heavenly Father we thank you for the opportunity of coming to you in prayer. As we look forward to the week to come, we pray for an awareness of your love and support in all we do.

We bring all these prayers in the name of Jesus, who taught us when we pray to say **Our Father, who art in heaven**

StF no 455 *All my hope on God is founded*

1 All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

4 Daily doth the Almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

2 Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

5 Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

3 God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom passing thought:
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Robert Bridges (b 1844) based on Joachim Meander (b 1650)

A prayer of blessing

We go into God's world **to resist injustice**. We go into God's world **to speak of peace**. We go into God's world **to walk gently**. We go into God's world **to discover Jesus all around us, in the life we live and share together**. Amen

This act of worship was prepared by Jenny Smith