

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH**  
**ZOOM Service, Sunday 7<sup>th</sup>. February 2021; Epiphany 5B**

**Introduction and Prayer – Martin**

*Good morning, wherever you are.*

*It's good to speak to you again.*

*"We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship."*

*(National Worship Team)*

**A Prayer:**

O God, we come to you from the joys and struggles of the week just gone.

By your Holy Spirit, help us to focus on you now,

to listen as you speak to our hearts,

so that we may be better prepared to serve you in the week to come. Amen.

**Hymn: 65 Jubilate Everybody**

Jubilate, Everybody,

Serve The Lord In All Your Ways,

And Come Before His Presence Singing,

Enter Now His Courts With Praise.

For The Lord Our God Is Gracious,

And His Mercy's Everlasting.

Jubilate, Jubilate, Jubilate Deo.

**Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer**

Be still, my soul, be still; for a few moments, be still,

and know the warm breeze of God's Spirit, gently embracing.

Be still, and hear the quiet words of God's Spirit, gently uplifting.

Just for a moment, just for a moment, be still, my soul.

In these anxious times, in this confused and fragile world,

may God strengthen our faith, increase our love,

and let his peace flow through us,

so that we may be an ocean of calm in what has become a restless sea.

The love of God surrounds us,

a love gentle, understanding, and yet persistent,

wanting to be known, waiting to be embraced.

Yet sometimes we choose to be alone, to close the door,

to leave him waiting, patiently,

for the right time to knock once more, and be let in.

For such love, we give thanks.

May we cultivate that love within us, and encourage it to flower,

that its seed, scattered by the breath of the Spirit,

may beautify this world.

When we are unsure of which way to turn,

when tiredness descends, and we are hurting inside,

may God teach us his way,

Teach us your way, Lord,  
when we are anxious and struggling to pray, but not finding the words,  
Lord, teach us your way.

Teach us your way, Lord.  
May we travel in faith through uncertain times.  
Dispel the mists ahead, clear our minds and vision  
so that we may more easily discern this path you ask us to follow,  
to the places you want us to be.

In the mist of doubt, be the strength we require, the word we hear,  
the light we follow, the truth we affirm, the life we live by.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying:  
*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, and the power,  
and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

**Readings: First Reading:**  
***Isaiah 40: 21-31*** (NRSVA)

Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?  
It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,  
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;  
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,  
and spreads them like a tent to live in;  
who brings princes to naught,  
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,  
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,  
when he blows upon them, and they wither,  
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

To whom then will you compare me,  
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.  
Lift up your eyes on high and see:  
Who created these?  
He who brings out their host and numbers them,  
calling them all by name;  
because he is great in strength,  
mighty in power,  
not one is missing.

Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,  
'My way is hidden from the Lord,  
and my right is disregarded by my God?'  
Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.  
He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.  
Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;  
but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.

### **Hymn120 God we praise you**

1 God, we praise you! God, we bless you!  
God, we name you sovereign Lord!  
Mighty King whom angels worship,  
Father, by your church adored:  
all creation shows your glory,  
heaven and earth draw near your throne  
singing 'Holy, holy, holy,  
Lord of hosts, and God alone!'

2 True apostles, faithful prophets,  
saints who set their world ablaze,  
martyrs, once unknown, unheeded,  
join one growing song of praise,  
while your church on earth confesses  
one majestic Trinity:  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
God, our hope eternally.

3 Jesus Christ, the King of glory,  
everlasting Son of God,  
humble was your virgin mother,  
hard the lonely path you trod:  
by your cross is sin defeated,  
hell confronted face to face,  
heaven opened to believers,  
sinners justified by grace.

4 Christ, at God's right hand victorious,  
you will judge the world you made;  
Lord, in mercy help your servants  
for whose freedom you have paid:  
raise us up from dust to glory,  
guard us from all sin today;  
King enthroned above all praises,  
save your people, God, we pray

### **Second Reading:**

**Mark 1: 29-39.** (NRSVA)

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.' He answered, 'Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.' And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

*Amen. For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God among us, for the word of God within us, thanks be to God.*

## Message:

Today we pick up Mark's Gospel from where we left it last Sunday, when we thought about a new kind of teaching, and a new way of life.

Today we see four events from the early ministry of Jesus. Firstly, a healing miracle involving Simon Peter's mother-in-law. Then a summary of Jesus's healing ministry. We see Jesus drawing strength from prayer, and then going out to preach and teach and heal in Galilee. Here Jesus reveals himself and his ministry – what he has come to do, and to be, in the world.

The story about Simon's Mother-in-Law tells us a lot about the lady herself, about the crowds, about Jesus, and about ourselves.

The disciples had not known Jesus very long, but already they were taking their troubles to him; developing what would be a life-long habit: seeking his assistance. *"Take it to the Lord in Prayer."* Here they even come searching for him when he is at prayer.

Simon's Mother-in-Law, an ordinary, practical lady, was in bed with a fever. Mark tells us that Jesus "took her by the hand, and lifted her up, and the fever left her." None of the palaver and hocus-pocus laid down in the Talmud for dealing with 'a fever'. No unnecessary ritual or showmanship. One authoritative command from him accomplished the cure.

And the lady? No fuss. Straight from receiving Jesus's ministry to ministering to the needs of a house-full of hungry men.

*"Saved to Serve"*: words later widely adopted as a motto.

Yet I wonder about this lady. She'd been seriously ill. Could nobody have given her a bit of time off? Or was she one of those who felt she had to do everything herself? In every group or society – in every congregation – there are the stalwarts, always the first to come forward, who can always be relied upon to do the job. Generous, valuable people. But there are dangers: others may sit back and let them get on with it. Or they may feel discouraged. I've heard would-be helpers say, "I would be glad to help, but so-and-so always does it so much better..."

The danger, too, of coming to think that there's only one way to do it, or for the *"doers"* to get fed up because – for whatever reason, nobody comes forward to help.

We learn a bit about the crowds – and about Jesus.

The crowds *'brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.... and he cured many who were sick .... and cast out many demons'*.

Jesus has just healed the demon-possessed man in the synagogue. Then he heals in a private home, then in the street. He selected neither the place nor the person. His power, and his love, was, and is, available to all.

We need to remember to pray for those we know who need his healing touch, and, in the face of the Pandemic, to continue to pray for his healing power in our world, but also to remember to do our bit by following the guidance of our medical experts.

Notice the warning here. The people didn't come because they loved Jesus, or because he reflected the love of God. They came because they wanted something from him. Someone has said that, for every prayer to God in days of prosperity, there are ten thousand in hard times.

*Do we cry to God in the storms of life - or in the Pandemic - and forget to pray when the sun is shining?*

Some people treat religion like the fire-brigade or the ambulance: never use it, hope they'll never need it, but call upon it in a crisis, when things go wrong.

Mark tells us something very important about Jesus.

'In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.' (v.35)

*For me, this is the take-home lesson.*

Here is the source of Jesus's strength. He went out to pray, alone, in the morning, while it was still dark, to a deserted place, where he hoped he would not be disturbed.

We've seen how busy Jesus was: how much of himself he gave to those who needed him. He knew that he could not live without God, and he could not live without prayer. He needed to be constantly recharging his spiritual batteries.

So do we. If prayer was necessary for Jesus, how much more must it be necessary for us?

Yet even at that vital time, "*Simon and his companions hunted for him.*" Maybe Jesus could have told them to wait. No. His immediate response: "Let us go." He turned from his prayers to meet the practicalities of the work he had come to do. However tired he might be, Jesus was ready to respond to human need. He still is.

*Prayer strengthened him for the work, but prayer would not do the work for him.*

It's the same for us. God will not do for us something we are perfectly capable of doing ourselves. Prayer will never do our work for us, but it will give us the strength, the courage, the determination, the wisdom, to cope with the work we have to do.

When our television screens show us the desperate needs of the world around us, maybe we despair of being able to do anything to help. It's then that we need God to remind us that we are not asked to make the world perfect, but to help one family, or to make one person's life better. We are the tools in God's hands. We need to be willing to do whatever we can.

**In Isaiah 40 we read:**

*He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.*

*Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;*

*but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (v.29-31).*

We too are called to serve. We too are *saved* to serve.

From the example of Jesus we know where to find the strength for that service.  
Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

## **Hymn 721 We lay our broken world**

We lay our broken world  
In sorrow at your feet,  
Haunted by hunger, war and fear,  
Oppressed by power and hate.

Where human life seems less  
That profit, might and pride,  
Though to unite us all in you  
You lived and loved and died.

We bring our broken towns,  
Our neighbours hurt and bruised;  
You show us how old pain and wounds  
For new life can be used.;

We bring our broken loves,  
Friends parted, families torn;  
Then in your life and death we see  
That love must be reborn.

We bring our broken selves,  
Confused and closed and tired;  
Then through your gift of healing grace  
New purpose is inspired.

O Spirit, on us breathe,  
With life and strength anew;  
Find in us love, and hope and trust,  
And lift us up to you.

## **Prayer for Others & Blessing**

In our separate places, as we bring our prayers for other people,  
we remember our kinship, as brothers and sisters in Christ,  
with men and women in this, our own community, and beyond,

In these difficult and unsettled times  
we pray that God will help people everywhere to break down  
the prejudice, the selfishness and fear that separate us from one another;  
that the nations of the world may find a way to live together in peace with honour and  
dignity.

May we be united also in the face of the Covid Pandemic.  
We pray that effective vaccines will be readily available, and fairly and efficiently  
distributed, and that people everywhere may abide by the measures intended  
to halt the spread of the infection.

We pray for all those who are suffering from Covid-19, and for medical teams, and all who  
care for the sick, especially for those who find the burden of work and stress  
becoming too much for them.

We pray for people who watch, and wait, and worry over those seriously ill,  
and for those who grieve for loved ones who have succumbed to the disease.  
We pray for the many people who have lost employment and source of income,  
whose businesses have collapsed;  
and for young people whose education has been disrupted.

We pray for the Church here, and throughout the world;  
for those developing new ways of uniting in worship and prayer,  
that people may find strength in sharing.

In quietness we think of those for whom we have special concerns today.  
*Pause*

Enter, Loving God, enter  
into the silence of the lonely,  
into the fears of the elderly,

into the worries of the family,  
into the anger of the victim,  
into the misery of the homeless,  
into the pain of the sufferer,  
and bring to all comfort, healing, peace.

In Jesus' name we ask. Amen.

In this new week may you find grace in the moments when you need it most.  
May renewal refresh you, and lead you on.  
May you hear the Word speak your name into every silence.  
May God fill you with the possibilities you bring to the world.  
Now may you stay safe in the way of Christ;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you, and remain with you, now and evermore. Amen.