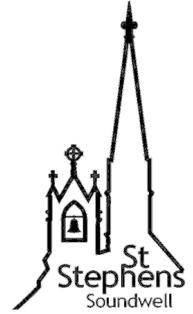


Sunday 10th January 2021

Worship & Bible study on Mark 1.1-11

This can be used as an act of Worship at home or a private Bible Study. It can be used by an individual or a small family/ household group.



Begin with an opening prayer - why not light a candle

Lord God, giver of light and life,
by your word you bring everything into being –
the far-flung galaxies and the tiniest atomic particle.
You have given us a world to enjoy and to care for.
Give us compassion in the use of its resources,
wisdom in our stewardship of your gifts,
and reverence for all that you have made –
for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

Read the passage

Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.

Explore and respond to the text

Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.

Bible notes

Mark announces his Gospel as 'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (v.1). He sets the scene for transformation by telling the story of John the Baptist, who fulfils Isaiah's prophecy and makes the preparations. These are impressive in themselves. Mark describes crowds of people thronging from all directions to find John in the desert and seek his baptism. But this is only the prologue. John's ministry reaches its climax with the announcement of the one who will baptize with water and the Holy Spirit – and then Jesus appears.

The whole passage centres on new beginnings. The first sentence of the Gospel spells out the way in which the world is entirely changed, now that Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, is present. Mark goes on to describe the ways in which this new life is made real. People are offered the opportunity for a fresh start. The Greek word usually translated 'repentance' (v.4) carries the sense of 'a change of mind' or 'a change of heart'. It relates far more to the promise of a new future than to mulling over the sins of the past. But this is only stage one of the new life into which God invites us.

The baptism of Jesus is also a moment of new beginning. Though there is nothing for Jesus to repent of (see Matthew 3.14), this is a new stage in his life too, as he moves away from the hidden years in Nazareth and begins his active ministry. At his baptism, God does something amazing. People of Jesus' time tended to imagine a rigid, unbreakable barrier dividing earth and heaven, one that made it impossible for humanity to reach God. Now this barrier is torn apart (v.10) and God's Spirit comes powering through, like a descending dove. The world is indeed changed and those who experience Jesus' baptism in the Spirit will begin to discover what that means.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

The Greek word 'metanoia' is exciting in that it invites people to look towards a new future where old mistakes are left behind and new possibilities open up. The traditional translation 'repentance' is less attractive because it is often understood as encouraging people to focus on what has gone wrong in the past, rather than what could go better in the future. How can we help people envision repentance as a door to new life?

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about, or discuss with those in your household, issues arising from this week's Bible passage.



- What would you draw/write here?
- How does the idea of a 'blank canvas' make you feel?
- When have you experienced a fresh start?

A simple worship activity

Remembering baptism as a sign of new beginnings.

Every act of repentance is a reminder that, through baptism, we have died to sin and are alive to Christ, to new possibilities, empowered by the Holy Spirit. The key is looking forward to what might and can be, and not to dwell on what we have turned from and left behind (see Luke 9.62).

Fill a large bowl with water. Stand by the bowl and ask everyone to turn and face you, or simply and quietly do this yourself. Say, 'Jesus was changed and empowered at his baptism. It marked the beginning of a new ministry, a new direction to his life.' Either invite people to come and dip their hands in the water, or fling some of it far and wide! (as Lisa loves to do with Holy Water in Church) Say, 'Remember your baptism. You too are changed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and given new direction in your life. Think about what must be left behind.'

After a time of silence, say, 'Here, today, we all make a new beginning. Think of what we have explored and discussed today. Think of what God may be calling you to do in the days that lie ahead. Pray for God's guidance and blessing.' Say together, slowly, the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer

You might choose to use the Prayers of Intercession, which can be found in Open Space, or, this one...

God, through your might and power the world was created,
and through it now the world is changed, and ever changing.
We read in the Scriptures of how you changed people's lives.
We hear it in the stories of saints old and new.
We know it through the experience and lives of our own communities.
We thank and praise you for all that you have done through the changes
you have made – and are still making – in our lives.
We thank and praise you for the gift of your Holy Spirit who gives us
– your people – strength, and the blessing of peace.
Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Lord, help us to be open to your prompting
as we seek to discover what you would have us be and do.
Remind us again and again that you have promised to be our
guide and companion on our journey.
Help us to look forward with renewed commitment,
and bless our thinking and speaking and doing.
Amen.

The Lord be with you.... (and also with you.)

We Follow Jesus!!

And don't forget... for what will be a very different perspective, why not listen to...

Dial-a-Sermon

To listen to this week's sermon
from Rev Lisa Wigmore,
Rev Sandy Cooper or
Peter Robbins (LLM),
just call this number (cost is
the same as a local call)

**0117
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St Stephen's Church, Soundwell



