



## Week 2 - Mark 4:1- 8:21 "Responding in Faith"

Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2021

led by John Dyster and Cathy Stubbs

### In Psalm 145 we read:

I will sing your praises, God my King,  
I bless your name for ever and ever,  
blessing you day after day,  
and praising your name for ever and ever.  
Can anyone measure the magnificence  
of Yahweh the Great, and his inexpressible  
grandeur?

So today we too join together in our praise of  
God our King, through the words of the hymn:  
The splendour of the King

### HYMN: STF 15 The splendour of the King

The splendour of the King,  
clothed in majesty;  
let all the earth rejoice,  
let all the earth rejoice.  
He wraps himself in light  
and darkness tries to hide,  
and trembles at his voice,  
and trembles at his voice.

*How great is our God, sing with me,  
how great is our God, and all will see  
how great, how great is our God.*

And age to age he stands,  
and time is in his hands;  
beginning and the end,  
beginning and the end.  
The Godhead, Three in One,  
Father, Spirit, Son,  
the Lion and the Lamb,  
the Lion and the Lamb.

*(Chorus)*

Name above all names,  
worthy of all praise;  
my heart will sing:  
how great is our God.  
Name above all names,  
worthy of all praise;  
my heart will sing:  
how great is our God.

*How great is our God, sing with me,  
how great is our God, and all will see  
how great, how great is our God.*

Chris Tomlin (b. 1972), Ed Cash and Jesse Reeves

### Prayers

God, we praise you for creating this world in  
all its beauty, and we thank you especially for  
the colours of summer and the warmth of  
summer sunshine. Lord, help us to treat each  
new day as a gift from you. With adoring love,  
we proclaim your glory: all praise and glory be  
yours.

We thank you for our friends and families  
and for all you are doing in our lives.

Let us spend a moment silently thinking of all  
these people and offering thanks to God.

But, gentle and gracious God, we also  
confess before you the evil of our hearts. We  
acknowledge that sometimes we are too  
inclined toward anger, jealousy, revenge and  
pride, which often give rise to unpleasant  
feelings between others and us.

Forgive us, Lord God, through Jesus Christ,  
and help us to put this right in our lives.

When you came to us as one of us, Lord, you  
met with outcasts, healing their infirmities,  
forgiving their sinfulness, inviting them to join  
you in your kingdom.

Loving God, we confess that all too often in  
many subtle ways we exclude those who  
aren't like us, those we aren't comfortable  
around, we disapprove of those we think  
responsible for their own misfortune, we  
denounce those whose sins are different  
from our own.

Lord, forgive us also for these sins.

Loving God, we praise and thank you for the  
unfathomable depth of your love for us, and  
we thank you for your forgiveness.

In our worship today, through our praising, praying, preaching, may we, yet again, realise your greatness; may we, yet again, express our heartfelt gratitude for your incredible compassion.

Loving God, we praise and thank you that each of us is equally precious in your sight.

Amen.

**First reading: Mark 4:1-9 NIV**

**4** Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. **2** He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: **3** "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. **4** As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. **5** Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. **6** But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. **7** Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. **8** Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."

**9** Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

**The Parable of the Sower must be one of the most well-known parables in the Bible.**

Those of us who have been involved in Sunday School and Church must have come across it dozens of times over the years.

It is of course a parable about how we respond to the message of Jesus, and how that bears fruit in our lives. Nowadays, farmers do not scatter seed manually in the way that is depicted in the parable, or at least not in this country, and I started to think about seed being planted in other ways.

In the original parable, some seed was gobbled up by the birds and never even got started. Sometimes we hear things but they 'go in one ear and out the other' and have no effect upon us at all. I think this is sometimes a danger for ourselves when we have heard

things over and over again - like this parable - so allow me this morning to put another spin on seed sowing and offer you some images from my garden.

**Have a look at image number 1:**

A row of forget-me-nots.

Perfectly acceptable forget-me-nots, but in each pot

was planted a lupin seed. Not one of them appeared. That seed did not take root at all - something else did, and not what was intended!

Like those in the parable, some people may not listen to the word of God at all, but they may still live very good and acceptable lives - only not really the life that 'God the Gardener' intended.

**Now let's look at image 2:**

Here are some lovely Nasturtium plants. Seedlings which have grown into small spindly plants.

Behind them you can see a picture of the perfect specimens into which we hope they will grow.

In our own gardens we would never plant seedlings on rocky ground, as in the parable, but they can still end up expiring for other reasons.

**In image number 3**

you can see something has nibbled a hole in the leaf! Slugs and other creatures can pick away at them, and without the gardener's intervention they may disappear altogether.



Our own experience can be like that. Things can gnaw away at us, challenge our Christian faith, which is very fragile at first. We have to work on keeping ourselves strong and allowing God the Gardener to protect us and help us grow

**I am pleased to say that the next photo was not taken in my garden!**



It reminds us of the seed that fell among thorns in the parable and you will be able to see that bindweed in this garden has grown over everything around it - even a small child's bike. It is such an invasive weed and winds round and round things, until eventually you cannot see anything of the original plant and it will take over completely. Jesus' parable warns us that we may have responded to God's message and it has taken root and flourished in our lives, but we can still fall prey to things which take over our lives, so that our real selves are no longer visible.

**And so to our final image.**

This is a hedge of Rosemary, and the amazing thing is it started out ten years ago as two small plants. It is an evergreen, so it is there all year round and has beautiful blue flowers in Summer.



Some seed fell on the good ground, says the parable, and some of that seed produced more than others.

My challenge to those of you who, like me, have been a Christian for some time, and responded to that message years ago, is to see whether you may still need to do some more growing: to be the best plant that you can be; to be the seed that 'yields a harvest of hundredfold'; to be the one that hears and responds and never stops responding, the one that will give God the Gardener so much pleasure.

**HYMN: STF 161 Speak O Lord as we come to you**

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you  
to receive the food of your holy word.  
Take your truth, plant it deep in us ;  
shape and fashion us in your likeness,  
that the light of Christ might be seen today  
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.  
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us  
all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,  
holy reverence, true humility.  
Test our thoughts and our attitudes  
in the radiance of your purity.  
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see  
your majestic love and authority.  
Words of power that can never fail ;  
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds ;  
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.

Truths unchanged from the dawn of time  
that will echo down through eternity.  
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,  
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.  
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built  
and the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty (*b. 1974*) and  
Stuart Townend (*b. 1963*)

**"Responding in faith" part 1**

Last Sunday, Fiona introduced us to Mark's Gospel - and I agree with her - it's great!

She talked about the first three chapters, where Mark tells us that Jesus is the Son of God, that the Kingdom of God is near, and he calls us to 'repent and believe'.

Today, we're looking at the next chunk - four and a half chapters. Mark tells us a lot more



about what Jesus said and did - and the various ways people responded to him.

Behind it all, there's another question - a question which Mark never puts to us directly, but implies the whole time: "How will you respond to Jesus?"

### **That's what the Parable of the Sower is about.**

Parables are stories based on everyday life - things which were familiar to those who were listening to Jesus. But people had to think about what they heard - and about what it meant.

A farmer sowed his seed: some of it grew and some of it didn't; some of it did at first, but it didn't last very long.

And the reasons are fairly self-evident. What it boils down to is this: there's nothing wrong with the seed, the problem is the ground it falls on.

Jesus had done his bit, preaching his message, but many people didn't respond, or, if they did, they soon gave up.

There were those who didn't take Jesus seriously  
-they would soon forget about what he said.

But there were also those who were really interested and persisted in listening and thinking about what he said - they would understand his meaning and be strengthened in their faith.

In other words, "those who had ears to hear, would hear."

**In this Bible Month, we have an opportunity to consider seriously what Mark has to say about Jesus.**

But, in four services, all preachers can do is scatter a bit of seed. To really get to grips with what Mark had to say, we need to read the whole of his message. That's why there's a daily reading plan to help us do that.

**Even the disciples struggled because they'd either not understood, or not believed, who Jesus was.**

At the end of chapter 4, in order to get away from the crowds, Jesus and the disciples

crossed the Sea of Galilee, in a boat belonging to some of the fishermen, and a sudden storm blew up, as often happens on the lake.

Jesus was asleep, and the disciples woke him up: "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

To their amazement, Jesus calmed the storm, and then he said to them: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

The same question comes to us when we're buffeted by the storms of life: when things happen which disturb our peace and tranquillity, or worse still, our very foundations are rocked - what we had previously taken for granted no longer seems to apply.

When we get caught in the storm, we need to have faith in the love and power of God, which is made known to us in Christ.

The disciples asked one another, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him"

The significance of what happened was that, in the Old Testament, power over the wind and waves was attributed directly to God. Jesus was doing what God does, so who is Jesus?

**The feeding of the five thousand was another sign that the power of God was at work within him.**

It was significant for those who witnessed it because it reminded them of the Old Testament story about the children of Israel being fed by God in the desert, on their way to the Promised Land. Jesus was doing what God does, so who is Jesus?

**In chapter 5, Mark tells us about people who were healed by Jesus.**

There were two women: one was the daughter of an anxious father; the other, Jesus himself called 'daughter', such was his compassion for her.

The younger one had an illness which threatened to end her short life of 12 years; the older one had a serious complaint which had quite ruined her life - for the same 12 years.



### **The two people who approached Jesus for help were quite different characters.**

Jairus was a well-respected religious leader in the local community - it was his daughter who was dangerously ill. The elderly woman was something of an outcast, because, with her continual flow of blood, she was considered ritually unclean, and no-one would wish to be associated with her.

### **But these two quite different characters had something in common:**

They both had faith that Jesus could help them, and they both had their faith severely tested.

Jairus had to wait while Jesus spoke to the woman, and then he had to cope with discouraging news from home, which seemed to indicate it was too late - the girl had died.

But Jesus said, "Don't be afraid, just believe."

The woman's faith was also tested: she'd approached Jesus secretly, and touched his garment, not wishing to be seen, either by him, or by anybody else. But Jesus called her out of the crowd to acknowledge what she had done, and to declare her faith.

Jesus responded to the faith of each one, and both women were healed.

### **Our faith may also be tested.**

We may not immediately receive what we want from Jesus but have to wait; or what we receive may not be what we asked for, because God has other plans for us, which may, at first, be difficult for us to understand.

But Jesus says, "Don't be afraid, just believe."

### **One of my favourite stories in this part of Mark's Gospel is one we don't hear very often.**

So let's read it now:

#### **Second reading: Mark 7:24-30 NIV**

<sup>24</sup> Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. <sup>25</sup> In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose

little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. <sup>26</sup> The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

<sup>27</sup> "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

<sup>28</sup> "Yes, Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

<sup>29</sup> Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

<sup>30</sup> She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

### **"Responding in faith" part 2**

This story is a bit of a puzzle. We expect Jesus to be gracious and loving to everyone, but here he seems - well, a bit rude really.

He was in Tyre, which is on the coast, well outside the country of Galilee where he spent most of his time. The population of Tyre was somewhat mixed - Jews and Gentiles, all mixed up together.

Jesus focussed his ministry on the Jews, not because he wasn't interested in Gentiles, but because he couldn't do everything in the time he had available.

### **But there were exceptions - like this woman of Tyre.**

She sought Jesus out because she had a daughter who needed help.

But his initial response wasn't very promising: "First let the children eat all they want, for it's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

"The children" meant the children of Israel, and "the dogs" meant the Gentiles.

So what he was saying was that it would be wrong for him to heal a Gentile before he'd fulfilled his mission to the Jews.

### **It was quite common for Jews to talk about Gentiles as "dogs"**

But to us, it seems rude, offensive - racist even. We're surprised to find Jesus using such language, calling this woman "a dog" to her face.

Of course, what we can't see, from the text, is how it was said, how Jesus spoke, the tone in his voice, the twinkle in his eye. He was a remarkable judge of character and may well have foreseen the reaction he got.

For she was equal to the challenge, and immediately came back with a quick-witted response: "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs".

The faith of this woman was remarkable: not only did she believe that Jesus could perform this miracle, but she believed that, for Jesus, it was such a small thing, that it was equivalent to a crumb falling from the table.

And Jesus responded by healing the girl.

### **It doesn't matter who we are.**

Those who really think about what Jesus said, those who respond to him, those who put their faith in Jesus, as this woman did, find:

- that he is the Son of God, who is able to do the unexpected,
- that he does stand by us, through the storms of life,
- that he does enable us to understand his teaching about the Kingdom of God,
- that he will enable us to become his disciples, and work for the coming of that Kingdom.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

### **HYMN: STF 466 Have faith in God, my heart**

Have faith in God, my heart,  
trust and be unafraid ;  
God will fulfil in every part  
each promise he has made.

Have faith in God, my mind,  
for when your light burns low ;  
God's mercy holds a wiser plan  
than you can fully know.

Have faith in God, my soul ;  
his cross for ever stands ;  
and neither life nor death can pluck  
his children from his hands.

Lord Jesus, make me whole ;  
grant me no resting place,  
until I rest, heart, mind, and soul,  
the captive of your grace.

Bryn Rees (1911–1983)

### **Prayers of thanksgiving, dedication and intercession**



Father, we thank you  
for Jesus, for his  
coming into our world to make known to us  
your power and your love - for us and for all  
people.

We thank you that, through the writing of  
Mark and many others, we are able to hear  
his words and to know of his miracles.

Help us to respond, not to be afraid, but to  
have to faith - in what he says and can do. As  
he called the first disciples and they followed  
him, so may we respond to his call, learn your  
ways and carry out the work you have  
entrusted to us.

Thank you that when we misunderstand, get  
it wrong or let you down, you do not give up  
on us, but you forgive us and do not write us  
off.

Father we thank you that, when we are  
buffeted by storms, and do not know how we  
will cope, you are with us and have power  
over the waves.

We pray for those known to us who are  
suffering at present, through illness or  
infirmity, and for those who care for them:  
may they know the inner strength which  
comes from you.

We remember those whose work is difficult  
or uncertain and the way ahead is unclear:  
may they receive your guidance and  
reassurance.

We pray for those who are without friends or  
family to support them, and for refugees and  
asylum seekers, whom nobody seems to  
want: may they find you - in someone who  
cares.

Father we pray for our church and its witness  
in our community: may we know your  
guidance as we consider big questions  
regarding our premises and the shape of our  
worship and activities after lockdown.

Guide us in our mission, so that your  
kingdom may come amongst us and those  
around us: may we know Christ better and  
make him better known.

Father, we thank you that you hear our prayers. Amen.

**We sum up all our prayers, in the prayer which Jesus taught us:**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are  
yours,  
now and for ever. Amen.

**HYMN: STF 347 Crown him with many crowns**

Crown him with many crowns,  
the Lamb upon his throne.  
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns  
all music but its own.  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
of him who died for thee,  
and hail him as thy matchless King  
through all eternity.

Crown him the Son of God,  
before the worlds began ;  
and ye who tread where he has trod,  
crown him the Son of Man,  
who every grief has known  
that wrings the human breast,  
and takes and bears them for his own,  
that all in him may rest.

Crown him the Lord of life,  
who triumphed o'er the grave,  
and rose victorious in the strife  
for those he came to save.  
His glories now we sing,  
who died, and rose on high ;  
who died, eternal life to bring,  
and lives, that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of peace,  
whose power a sceptre sways  
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,  
absorbed in prayer and praise.  
His reign shall know no end,  
and round his pierced feet  
fair flowers of paradise extend  
their fragrance ever sweet.

Crown him the Lord of love ;  
behold his hands and side —  
rich wounds, yet visible above,  
in beauty glorified.  
All hail, Redeemer, hail !  
for thou hast died for me ;  
thy praise and glory shall not fail  
throughout eternity.

Matthew Bridges (1800–1894) and Godfrey Thring  
(1823–1903)

**Blessing**

Now may the God of peace,  
who brought back from the dead our Lord  
Jesus,  
that great Shepherd of the sheep,  
equip us with everything good for doing his  
will,  
and may he work in us what is pleasing to  
him,  
through Jesus Christ,  
to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

*(based on Hebrews 13:20-21)*



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