

# Order of Service for Sunday 6th June

## 10th Sunday in Ordinary time

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Rev Andrew Biggs

### Call to Worship

Lord, we reach out to you in worship this morning,  
Hear our voices raised in praise,  
For in you is our hope and our redemption  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord  
Amen

### Hymn: STF 18 Be Still and Know that I Am God

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God.  
Be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.  
I am the Lord who saves and heals.  
I am the Lord who saves and heals.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.  
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.  
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

Anonymous  
Based on Psalm 46: 10-11

### Let us pray together.

Lord, I gaze in wonder and thanks on the World you have made, the World that offers life, the joy of living, and the knowledge of you.  
I remember when I have failed to do your will, and have acted, spoken or thought selfishly and not as you wished.  
Yet I know that, through the suffering and death of your Son, my sins are forgiven and my life renewed. Amen.

### Reading: Psalm 130 (STF 832)

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice!

**Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications!**

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?

**But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.**

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;

### Hymn: 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.

**my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for the  
morning,  
more than those who watch for the  
morning.**

O Israel, hope in the Lord!  
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.

**It is he who will redeem Israel  
from all its iniquities.**

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)

## Today's Gospel Reading: Mark 3: 20 – 35

### Reflection

## Jesus' Authority Challenged

The Harry Potter series is one of my favourites - both the books and films. It is a great classic story of good winning over evil and there are many allusions to the Christian message in it. There is the evil dark wizard - Voldemort who represents all that is bad in the world, who brings increasing chaos to the world as his power rises. Standing against him is Harry Potter - 11 years old at the start of the series - almost David and Goliath like. In the end it is Harry who has to fight Voldemort and win. We love these great stories of good over evil with their special language that conveys the sense of evil and dread in contrast to light and joy of the Good. So perhaps when we read stories in the Bible which have references to Beelzebul and Satan, we can feel that we are back in the fictional world of the likes of Harry Potter. But of course we are not and today's story has a serious real life application.

Talk of Beelzebul and Satan doesn't sit so easily with us today when applied to the real world and its easy to dismiss such references as old fashioned nonsense. But we are all aware that the world we live in is far from being a perfectly good and loving place. It is a place where our attempts to create order often fail, where evil is only too often prevalent and where love is often lacking. Perhaps then it might help to see references to Satan and Beelzebul as being metaphors that give us a language to talk about those times when God's holy order seems distant and where chaos seems to reign supreme. They represent that which is the opposite of God's love and will, the opposite of the order that God brings from chaos (Genesis 1:1).

In Mark 3, Jesus' authority is being seriously challenged by the Pharisees. Earlier they had challenged Jesus over breaking the sabbath rules and they cannot understand how someone who does not follow the law in the obsessive way they do, can possibly come from God. And yet Jesus has both stated and demonstrated that he is the Son of God who gains his power directly from God. At his Baptism John had declared Jesus to be one who came with power, whose sandals he was not fit to tie and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove had descended upon him with a voice from heaven stating "You are my Son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased".

Jesus has overcome direct temptation from the devil in the wilderness, earning his right to minister in the name of God. He has shown that he has power to heal - he has already healed a leper and a paralytic and a man with a withered hand. He also has a special air of authority in the way that he preaches that has been commented on as he has traveled around Galilee. He has done nothing but good and shown nothing but love for the people he has come into contact with.

As a result a huge following of people has gathered around him - 'a great multitude' now following Jesus, from his beginning in Galilee and from all over the wider region. All of them wanted to get close to Jesus, to touch him, because they believed that they would be healed by doing so. The crowd had become so intense that he had to go out in a boat on the waters of Galilee in order to avoid being crushed to death. Jesus decided he had to do something about this situation so he had appointed the 12 disciples, (now called apostles, which means 'one who is sent out') to be *sent out* in his name to proclaim his message and to heal with his authority. Now they too could go out and continue this work in more places and amongst more people, sharing the load.

But then we have this challenge by the Pharisees to Jesus' authority. Perhaps its not surprising that they began to feel that their own authority was being threatened by this man who seemed to have so little regard for the rules and regulations that they considered to be as much a part of the law as the actual law given to Moses. In fact they accused him of being out of his mind because surely - only a madman would dare to challenge the prevailing culture and authorities? Even Jesus' own family were embarrassed by his words and actions and tried to persuade him to come home and stop making trouble!

Some Scribes had been sent down from Jerusalem to see what was going on. In those days scribes were well respected. They not only made official copies of the Torah but they also acted as lawyers, judges, government officials and financiers so they were important people to keep on the right side of. However, despite the evidence of Jesus words and actions - they apparently believe, or try to persuade, that his power does not come from God but from Beelzebul. In today's parlance we might they tried to write him off as fake news!

Now Beelzebul is mentioned in the Old Testament in 2 Kings 1:2. He was a Philistine God apparently worshipped in Ekron. He was himself a composite of Baal, who was a Caananite fertility God and Zebub, which was Hebrew for flies. So Baalzebul literally means 'Lord of the flies!' The name may have been a play on words probably referencing the state of chaos that ensued in Egypt when God sent the various plagues to persuade the pharaoh to let them go. I remember reading William Golding's book "The Lord of the Flies" at school. It is about a group of boys who get stranded on an uninhabited island and their disastrous attempts to govern themselves, which soon descend into anarchy, chaos and idleness. The Scribes and Pharisees are subtly accusing Jesus of being an architect of chaos.

They also accuse him of driving out demons by the 'prince of demons'. Illness in those days was considered be either punishment for sin or the result of demon possession so the accusation is that the healings Jesus has done are not from a place of goodness but from demonic power within Jesus himself. They are trying to re-label the good that Jesus is doing for people as actually harming them. An act worthy of some modern day politicians!

Jesus responds by presenting a logical argument. If a house is divided against itself it cannot stand. If a kingdom is divided it cannot stand either, and so if Satan has risen up against himself then he cannot stand and his end has come. Jesus turns their argument around and uses it against them.

We should note an important point here that Jesus is making about unity. If a kingdom is divided then that kingdom cannot stand - arguments and infighting will tear it apart, will weaken it and enable its enemies to take advantage. This applies in all sorts of areas of life. A business where the leaders cannot agree on a business plan is likely to fail because it will be pulling in different directions. If a political party - cannot agree on set of policies then it becomes split and unable to take or maintain effective power. A church that is divided will not be effective for the kingdom of God and will fade away.

As a people, as a community in every context, we are always stronger when we work together than when we divide and separate. We are after all part of the one body - the body of Christ, and a body can only work successfully if it is in synchronisation with itself. The body simply ceases to be effective if one part fails to work with the other parts. Imagine trying to walk, if one leg goes one way and the other leg tries to go a different way! In order to work successfully for the kingdom of God we need to work together in unity - one mind with each other and one mind with Christ.

So Jesus refutes the challenge of the scribes by arguing that a house cannot stand divided and neither can Satan - that he has come to bind Satan and plunder his property. In other words to acquire the space that Satan occupies, to eliminate his influence on the world and replace it with the rule of God's love. To *replace* chaos with God's order just as God created the universe out of chaos before time.

But there is one more important point that he makes: He goes on to say that people will be forgiven for their sins except for those who sin against the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to sin against the Holy Spirit? What the scribes are in danger of is ascribing the working of the Holy Spirit to Satan. That is a lie that Jesus calls a 'Blasphemy' against the Holy Spirit. It is offensive to ascribe credit for a good act to one who does not deserve it. So those who see the work of the Holy Spirit in action and deny it are committing sin against the Holy Spirit and this is the sin that is so serious it cannot be forgiven.

This could happen out of prejudice, pride, thirst for power or other evil motives. The work of the Holy Spirit is always out of love, always good and never causes harm. To deliberately and knowingly thwart a good and loving act is to sin against the Holy Spirit. The scribes were coming close to this in seeing the healing that Jesus was doing and ascribing it to Satan.

So then what do we take from this? Beyond the need for unity in human relationships there is also the call to recognise and be alert to the work of Jesus in the world through his Holy Spirit and give

credit where it is due. We see this whenever we see love in action. Where people act to bring about justice, healing, wholeness and new life, to help the weak and the vulnerable and to bring about a better understanding between peoples - then we see love in action. As we go about our daily lives we need to look out for and recognise such moments and such actions and also look for those times when we can contribute to the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about the fulfilment of the kingdom of God on earth and give thanks to God for his work in creation.

Amen.

### **A time of prayer**

I thank you, Lord, for the gift of your Son: for His life, His sufferings and death and for His Resurrection and Ascension, for the witness, salvation and hope He gives.

I thank you for the gift of Your Holy Spirit to those who have come to you, and especially for the gift of that Spirit in your Church.

I pray for the needs of the World, and for those who are in need: for the sick, the hungry, the lonely, those who mourn the loss of loved ones, the homeless, those without hope. I pray for those in need who are known to me (for.....). I give thanks for those who seek to help and comfort those in need.

I pray for those whose lives affect others. May they know Your Love and seek to fulfil your will.

Lord, as we continue to deal with the Coronavirus pandemic I give thanks and pray for those who do your will in dealing with the suffering it causes and helping us to meet the challenges it presents.

I pray that in my own life I can better know your Love, and may be strengthened by your Spirit to follow you. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father .....

### **Hymn: 504 May the Mind of Christ my Saviour**

May the mind of Christ my Saviour  
live in me from day to day,  
by his love and power controlling  
all I do or say.

May the word of God dwell richly  
in my heart from hour to hour,  
so that all may see I triumph  
only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father  
rule my life in everything,  
that I may be calm to comfort  
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me,  
as the waters fill the sea ;  
him exalting, self forgetting —  
this is victory.

May I run the race before me,  
strong and brave to face the foe,  
looking only unto Jesus  
as I onward go.

Katie Barclay Wilkinson (1859–1928)

### **A prayer of blessing**

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me.  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.  
May the blessing of God the Father, Son and  
Holy Spirit be with me and all who share in  
your worship this day and for ever.

(Includes v5 from Hymns and Psalms No 695)

Prayers by Ralph Frankland  
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