**Service of Worship 30th August 2020**

**Service led by Revd Richard Bradley**

**Family address and Sermon by Revd Daniel Harris**

**Opening Words of welcome and introduction**

Welcome to Church today!

As I put the hymn lyrics into the order of service Daniel sent me for today, I saw the opening song and wondered if there was a story to it, and there is.

Matt Redman was (and may still be) part of a Church called “Soul Survivor” in London. The church was going through a dry spell with regards its worship and the Pastor suggested that the band didn’t play and no music was used and people simply sang with just their voices – a sound which I think is always powerful. A someone who appreciates musical instruments that is not easy to say.

The Pastor asked this of the congregation: “When you come through the doors on a Sunday, what are you bringing as your offering to God?”

From that question and the response of the Church family the Church discerned the direction God was calling them. From that experience Matt Redman wrote the song that we will sing as our opening song today. But first I want to pray….

**Opening prayer**

Lord Jesus, in the Bible we read your words: **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”** *(Matthew 11:28 – NIV)*may we, wherever we are gathered today, come just as we are into your loving and gracious presence. Knowing that when we give our lives fully to you, you change and transform us. Help us to acknowledge that it is indeed all about you.

Amen.

Friends let us sing our opening song…

**Song: When the Music Fades**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.. When the music fades,  all is stripped away  and I simply come;  longing just to bring  something that's of worth  that will bless Your heart.  I'll bring You more than a song,  for a song in itself  is not what You have required.  You search much deeper within through the way things appear,  You're looking into my heart. *(Chorus…)* | 2.. King of endless worth,  no-one could express  how much You deserve.  Though I'm weak and poor,  all I have is Yours,  every single breath.  I'll bring You more than a song,  for a song in itself  is not what You have required.  You search much deeper within through the way things appear,  You're looking into my heart. |
| Chorus*:  I'm coming back to the heart of worship,*  *and it's all about You,  all about You, Jesus.*  *I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it,*  *when it's all about You,*  *all about You, Jesus.* | Matt Redman  ©1997 Thankyou Music/Capitol CMG/Integritymusic.com  ccli 169737  Streaming Licence 595811 |

**Prayers of Approach and Confession**

Loving God, we come into your presence this day to offer you our praise and worship. Help us today in what we sing, hear, reflect upon and pray for to focus ourselves and all that we are on you.

We come with our prayers of praise for You today. We praise you for your goodness, love and your creative power. We praise you for the seasons of the year and the beauty of them.

We praise you for those things that we so often take for granted which are luxuries to others – for warmth, our homes, food, drink and family.

We praise you for the Church even though it looks and feel so different at present. We thank you that when we come through all of this you and the church will have remained and will be constant and for that we praise you.

But we also come knowing that we are weak and frail. When we have not placed you at the centre of all that we are. The song reminds us that it is “all about you”. We seek your forgiveness for the times when we make it about anything and everything else and fail to make it about you.

When we focus on self and say and do things that injure others, ourselves and you we ask for your forgiveness. When we think things that are not of you…we say sorry.

We offer all these prayers in and through the name of Jesus.

Amen.

We come to sing again – this song reminds us that we are changed and renewed when we come to faith in Jesus. We sing:

**Song: I Am Not My Own**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Lord, I am not my own, no longer my own, living now for You, and everything I think all I say and do is for You, my Lord. | Now, taking up the cross, walking on Your paths, holding out Your truth running in this race, bowing every day, all for You, my Lord. |
| And what I have vowed I will make good. Every promise made will be fulfilled 'till the day I die, every day I live is for You, is for You, is for You, is for You, is for You, is for You, | Earth has nothing I desire that lives outside of You, I'm consumed with You. Treasures have no hold, nothing else will do, only You, my Lord. |
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**Ask the Family**

Welcome back to our popular revival of that classic 1970s quiz show, *Ask the Family*.

And in today’s round we are going to play Spot the Odd Bod.

I will show you a series of pictures. I will give you one point for spotting the odd one out, and another point for recognising what they rest of the pictures have in common.

**Round 1:**

![A picture containing shirt, drawing

Description automatically generated]()

**Round 2:**

![A group of people posing for the camera

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**Round 3:**

**![A close up of a logo

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**Answers:**

1. Bart Simpson (The others are wearing glasses)
2. Frank Sinatra (the others do not have blue eyes or blue lenses)
3. Police (Sunglasses brand - the others are opticians).

**How did you do?**

As you can see, there is a common theme of sight running through this quiz.

When I arrived in Manchester I needed to get an eyesight check-up at a well-known high street opticians.

However, when I arrived at the store I was told that I had not booked an appointment.

I checked my diary: right time - check; right opticians - check.

Then the member of staff asked if I was at the right store.

As it turned out, this high-street opticians had three stores in Bolton.

I was in the wrong one.

Should have gone to SpecSavers.

Oh, I *was* in SpecSavers!

Sometimes we find ourselves in embarrassing moments, or times when the road ahead isn’t quite clear. Its natural to trust our instincts and try to charge ahead.

However, Jesus encourages us to trust him and follow him on a more adventurous route.

“Enter through the narrow gate … small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

Jesus doesn’t just ask us to trust his instincts. Jesus asks us to trust *Him.*

**Scripture Reading: Matthew 16.21-28**

***Jesus predicts his death***

21From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

22Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’

23Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’

24Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25For whoever wants to save their life[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-23698f)] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 26What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 27For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

28‘Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.’

*Thanks be to God for this reading from His Word.*

**Sermon**

Today I want to explore a popular mantra.

I like putting popular mantras under the microscope.

This mantra comprises of five simple words

“I did it my way.”

And the question that I want to is this:

Is this way of thinking good for our spiritual health?

I wouldn’t be surprised if you recognise this mantra. It comes from one of the most famous musical anthems of the 20th Century - the song “My Way” as immortalised by Frank Sinatra. “My Way” has been covered by numerous other artists over the years, including Elvis Presley and the Sex Pistols, but it will always be regarded as Sinatra’s signature song.

Frank Sinatra seemed to be the living embodiment this song. Sinatra was known for his immaculate sense of style.He spent lavishly on expensive custom-tailored tuxedos and stylish pin-striped suits. These made him feel wealthy and important, that he was giving his very best to the audience.He was also obsessed with cleanliness. He was known to frequently shower and change his outfits.His deep blue eyes earned him the popular nickname "Ol' Blue Eyes”. He had friends in high and dubious places, including Presidents and rumoured links with the Mafia.

However, according to his daughter Tina, Ol’ Blue Eyes came to loath the song that became his namesake. Sinatra resented its themes of self-determination and self-indulgence

Let’s look more closely at this anthem.

The song reflects back on a long life lived on the terms of the individual.

This person has travelled far, has fought many battles, has a few regrets, but takes the credit for every success and walks tall in life. It makes no celebration of family, loved ones, friends or community.

The lyrics come from another century but are still deeply insightful:

“For what is a man, what has he got

If not himself then he has not

To say all the things he truly feels

And not the words of one who kneels

The record shows, I took the blows

But I did it my way”

This song is stating that if the individual, as an entity, is not exalted and worshipped then what are we? Without this, the song suggests, we are nothing. This is why the individual must kneel to no-one or never stoop so low as to worship any other entity.

Is this way of thinking good for us? We have all witnessed individuals who have shipwrecked their lives and families in pursuit of power, fame, money or crazy dreams. But this desire to control our own lives, and the lives of others, runs deep within our culture. It will take nothing but the deepest wash to remove such a mindset from our lives.

I deliberately chose to start with mentioning Sinatra’s song because it acts as a mirror to Jesus’ words.

On one hand, we have Sinatra saying “I did it my way”.

On the other, we have Jesus who said that one must “deny themselves, carry their cross, and follow me.”

These are two opposite extremes which initially seem to have nothing in common.

However, both have common ground.

Firstly, both require sacrifice.

Sinatra’s way would call for the sacrifice of relationships in pursuit of the individual’s dream.

On the other, one must sacrifice one’s own will to follow Christ’s goal.

Normally, we would try to navigate a path between both positions.

We all have the capacity for being charitable; we all have the capacity for promoting our self-interests.

Secondly, income way, both need God to make sense.

On initial inspection Sinatra’s song lacks spiritual or religious meaning.

But it reveals an exposed underbelly which longs for a healthy spiritual life.

If we are not able to find satisfaction in life through such self-orientated living, the song suggests, we are nothing because there is no God.

Whereas Christ says we can abandon the futile search for meaning in a self-directed life, and invest in living for a higher cause, directly because God does exist and gives our lives meaning.

One way of life is about exerting control to find a satisfying life. The other way of life is about giving up control to find a satisfying life.

But which one of these is good for the soul?

This desire to seek control of our lives is not just a modern phenomenon.

As we see from today’s scripture reading, this mindset goes way back into antiquity.

And I want to suggest that the character traits which Sinatra’s song gives voice, to exert control on other people, are present in the apostle Peter, as we will see.

Jesus lived in revolutionary times. Jesus’ mission was to install the Kingdom of God, a mission which his disciples often misinterpreted in military terms. We find Jesus about to enter Jerusalem and approaching the climax of his mission. His road crew are thinking that this going to end in a coup. The disciples imagine that they will boot out the Romans and put Jesus on the throne. Peter, in particular, seems to be picking for a fight. His approach is to hit first and ask questions later. It’s all very macho and gun-ho.

It is worth bearing in mind that Jesus had declared his intentions to build his church through Peter. He had just christened Peter with the new name of “Rock”. This is the highest praise possible. The new name also seems to play into Peter’s masculine character. (I can’t help thinking of Sylvester Stallone’s character Rocky, but there you go.)

Jesus then reveals his hidden hand: that he must experience arrest, torture, execution - then resurrection after three days. This strategy is the complete opposite to the plan that Peter has in mind.

You can see the shock in Peter’s eyes: “Never, Lord! This will never happen to you!” He says. Peter knows that many a messianic pretender have gone before Jesus - fools whose revolutionary ideas have ended with their lives. Jesus is the real deal - this fate surely cannot befall him too! Peter is trying to exert control over Jesus’ actions. But Peter misses the nuance - Jesus isn’t talking about defeat, but victory.

Jesus replies with the strongest rebuke possible: “get behind me, satan.” What a fall from grace in such a short time! Jesus’ plans for Peter’s life are still safely in place, but there is a warning here for all of us - particularly those in church leadership. If we place our own will above that of the Kingdom of God, we are setting ourselves up from the highest rebuke from Jesus. Are our churches going His way or our way?

Is it healthy to be on the receiving end of one of Jesus’ rebukes?

But Jesus goes further. He says that the pursuit of power, the acquisition of wealth, and the exultation of the individual comes with a hefty price-tag. “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul.” We pursue one at the cost of another. We must not kid ourselves, for we cannot have it both ways.

What is the health regime that our souls require? Jesus prescribes us an alternative course of medicine. To see things back-to-front.

Or is it to see things the right way round? We need to remind ourselves of God’s perspective, if such a thing is possible. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Is 55.9). God seems to be seeing things back-to-front - or maybe He sees things the right way around.

Maybe it is us whose perspective is spiritually impaired.

Maybe it is us who need corrective lenses.

So Jesus invites us to think and see things from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, even though we will be seeing a distorted image in this lifetime. But he encourages us to trust him anyway.

Learning to think and see in this new way is like learning to swim. We start our swimming lessons in the shallow end, but we are slowly coaxed by the instructor into the deep end of the pool. The floor of the pool is sloping downhill. When we look through the water, our view of the floor is distorted; it can be hard to discern our depth. At some point we will have to take our feet off the floor and trust in the buoyancy of the water to keep us afloat.

We have seen two extremes - our way or Christ’s way, with the caveat that many try to live both ways.

But I want to suggest that, when we are left to our own devices, “my way” is our default way.

But Christ’s way is something completely different. It is not a code of conduct. It is a relationship. When we pursue that relationship with Christ we receive freely God’s unconditional love. The promise of a healthy and satisfying spiritual life is immediately offered to us. He also offers us the way to live which will sustain a healthy and happy spiritual life.

Relinquishing control of our own lives, and letting God be God, is challenging. Jesus encourages us to do this thoughtfully, weighing our the pros and cons, and coming to a reasoned conclusion. I don’t think he’s trying to scare us across the finishing line. But we maybe surprised to find that the only two real options open for consideration are either to go His way, or to go our own way.

Sink or swim.

These are the only two options regarding the matter of our spiritual health.

**Response following Sermon:**

God gives us clear choices.

He gives us an opportunity to make a life changing decision.

The choice is to either carry on doing things our own way

Or to pick up that cross, deny ourselves, and to follow him.

This may be for the first time, it may be with a renewed deeper commitment.

Come to the Lord now with a questioning heart

Asking him to show us the way to life.

**Song: Have you counted the cost? (sung verse, chorus, verse, chorus….)**

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| --- | --- |
| 1.. There's a line that is drawn by rejecting our Lord,  Where the call of His Spirit is lost,  And you hurry along with the pleasure-mad throng -  Have you counted, have you counted the cost? | 2.. You may barter your hope of eternity's morn,  For a moment of joy at the most,  For the glitter of sin and the things it will win -  Have you counted, have you counted the cost? |
| 3.. While the door of His mercy is open to you,  Ere the depth of His love you exhaust,  Won't you come and be healed, won't you whisper, I yield -  I have counted, I have counted the cost. | Chorus:  *Have you counted the cost, if your soul should be lost*  *Tho' you gain the whole world for your own?*  *Even now it may be that the line you have crossed,*  *Have you counted, have you counted the cost?* |
| Arthur J. Hodge  ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 | |

**Prayers of Intercession**

Loving God, we come before you in prayer for those in need at this time. We pray for those who have lost their lives in recent weeks through age, illness, accidents, crime and through neglect. Comfort those who mourn we pray. We pray for those who are suffering at this time because of a loss of a job, the Covid-9 virus, separation from family and friends, through ill health, through being used and abused. We lift them to you and ask that you would be present with them in their pain and lay your healing hand upon them.

We pray for churches that have opened and those in the process of opening. May the church be a symbol of hope and light to their communities. We pray for those who don’t feel it is right to open yet, may they not feel pressured or guilt over their decision.

We pray for one another…in a moment of silence we think about and pray for people we are concerned for at this time…..*(moment of silence)*

We offer all our prayers in and through the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Having prayed through Jesus we now sing our final hymn about the price he paid on the cross. As we sing…

**Final Song: When I survey the wondrous cross**

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| --- | --- |
| 1.. When I survey the wondrous cross  on which the Prince of glory died,  my richest gain I count but loss,  and pour contempt on all my pride. | 2.. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  save in the death of Christ, my God:  all the vain things that charm me most,  I sacrifice them to His blood. |
| 3.. See, from His head, His hands, His feet,  sorrow and love flow mingled down:  did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  or thorns compose so rich a crown? | 4.. Were the whole realm of nature mine,  that were an offering far too small;  love so amazing, so divine,  demands my soul, my life, my all. |
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**Benediction**

And in closing some words to send us out into the world from Paul’s letter to the Church in Ephesus:

**“20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”** (Ephesians 3:20-21 – NIV)

Friends stay safe this coming week and may you know God’s presence in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.