

Welcome to our worship on our **Patronal Festival, the Feast Day of St Mark, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2020** coming from the parish of St Mark's Church in Reigate. Usually each year for the past 160 years, we have gathered together for a celebration in our church building, and we remember the past and look to the future. I have often said that the Church is the people, not the building, and this year we are confronted with this reality head on. We cannot enter the church building, but the church is very much alive in homes throughout the area. Traditionally we have held our Annual Gift Day around the weekend of our Patronal Festival, and we are doing the same this year, but more about that later. We are gathered together in a spiritual community, each of us in our own homes. I'm sat here in the Vicarage rather than in Church and for this worship we are being joined by various people who have recorded parts of the service from their own homes. We can all pray at home and lift up our prayers to our heavenly Father who always hears our prayers.

As you watch or listen to this broadcast perhaps you can join in with the usual responses, the hymns and with the Lord's Prayer.

Jesus said to the disciples, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.'

**Alleluia! Lord, we are your witnesses.**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
**Amen.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

We sing a hymn by Bishop Timothy Dudley Smith that reminds us of the inspiration of our Patron, St Mark, *Praise be to God for servants of the word.*

Praise be to God for servants of the word,  
Saint Mark among them, held in high renown;  
of all he witnessed, knew, received and heard,  
Mark in his gospel set the story down.

He tells of one who suffered for our sake,  
who in the paths of pain and sorrow trod,  
that all-sufficient sacrifice to make,  
our Saviour Christ, the Servant Son of God.

Mark tasted hardship, failure too, and fears,  
yet from his weakness knew himself restored;  
Mark learned of Peter, taught by bitter tears,  
how frail disciples still can serve their Lord.

All Mark bequeaths us from those earliest days  
we, who come after, thankfully receive.  
For this his servant, we the Master praise.  
Mark shows us Jesus: seeing, we believe!

*Copyright © 2008 Timothy Dudley-Smith (b.1926)*

We run the race set before us,  
surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.  
Therefore let us lay aside every weight,  
and the sin which clings so closely,  
calling to mind our sins and weaknesses,  
and asking God for his mercy.

You were sent to preach the good news of light in the darkness of this world:  
Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

You were sent to plant in our hearts the seed of eternal life:  
Christ, have mercy.

**Christ, have mercy.**

You were sent to reconcile us to yourself by the shedding of your blood:  
Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent,  
have mercy upon *you*,  
pardon and deliver *you* from all *your* sins,  
confirm and strengthen *you* in all goodness,  
and keep *you* in life eternal;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

We join together in singing this hymn version of the Gloria.

Glory in the highest to the God of heaven!  
Peace to all your people through the earth be given!  
Mighty God and Father, thanks and praise we bring,  
singing Hallelujah to our heavenly king.

Jesus Christ is risen, God the Father's Son!  
With the Holy Spirit you are Lord alone!  
Lamb once killed for sinners, all our guilt to bear,  
show us now your mercy, now receive our prayer.

Christ the world's true Saviour, high and holy One,  
seated now and reigning from your Father's throne:  
Lord and God, we praise you! Highest heaven adores:  
in the Father's glory, all the praise be yours!

*Christopher Idle (b.1938) after Gloria in Excelsis  
Copyright © Christopher Idle/Jubilate Hymns Ltd*

The Collect for our Patronal Festival, the Feast Day of St Mark.  
Let us pray that our risen Lord  
will lead us to eternal life with all the saints.

Almighty God,  
who enlightened your holy Church  
through the inspired witness of your evangelist Saint Mark:  
grant that we, being firmly grounded in the truth of the gospel,  
may be faithful to its teaching both in word and deed;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

Our first reading is read by Nicci Lloyd.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles chapter 15 verses 35 to 41.

Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, and there, with many others, they taught and proclaimed the word of the Lord. After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Come, let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and set out, the believers commending him to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

Alleluia, alleluia.

I have called you friends, says the Lord,  
for all that I have heard from my Father  
I have made known to you.

**Alleluia.**

A reading from Mark chapter 13 verses 5-13

Hear the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus began to say to the disciples, "Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

### Sermon

St Mark is one of those figures from the Early Church where most of what we know about him is speculation, or has been transmitted down through history in an almost mythical way. However, that is not to say that it is not accurate, we just do not have some of the concrete details or facts that we in the 21st Century like to have!

This speculation, or these indications, from history include the following points: First, he was not part of the original Twelve Apostles, rather it seems that he was a native of Jerusalem and it is thought that it was his house that was used as the meeting place for the Last Supper; he was most likely a teenager at the time.

Second, during the Passion Narrative in Mark's Gospel only, there is one curious figure who appears: "Now a young man followed him wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body. They seized him, but he left the cloth behind and ran off naked." (Mark 14.51-52) This young man could well be the future evangelist, and lends credence that the Last Supper was held at his house. He quietly slipped out to join Jesus and the disciples during their night of prayer.

Finally, there is a figure who appears periodically in the Acts of the Apostles, and we've just heard about him in our first reading: John Mark. From earliest times writers have linked this man with the Evangelist St Mark. John Mark is a some-time companion with Paul and Barnabas, especially during their first missionary journey to Asia Minor. However, it seems that the persecution that they were facing was too much for him at the time and he had to leave Paul's side and returned, apparently, to Jerusalem where he joined up with Peter. This final detail is important because as Paul and Barnabas were preparing to go on their second journey, Barnabas wanted to bring John Mark with them; but Paul refused because he had deserted them once and was fearful that he would desert them again.

Now, these points of history are certainly interesting from the historical point of view and give us some of the intriguing story lines from the early church, but they also have some impact for us today, celebrating our Patronal Festival from the security of our own homes. For those of us joining together by Zoom, at least we feel connected as we participate in our worship at the same time via our computers and telephones.

The first point relates to Mark's home being the location of the Last Supper. The young evangelist is home when the preparations begin for an unexpected visitor. (Is he perhaps the "certain man" Jesus' Apostles were sent to find?) This unexpected encounter leads to a thirst to get to know Our Lord better, apparently even leading him to creep out of the house to join with the disciples. He aspires to join with them and with Jesus, and his life is changed forever from this one encounter.

For today, we have to help everyone, especially our young people to have that same desire to "be with Jesus." He is the one who that changes our path of life forever. Our Church is inter-generational. We are a family that includes babies and those in their

90s and every age in-between. Yet how often do our young people of today have the witness of the older generation, of their parents, of their grandparents, of having a radical discipleship with Jesus? Hence the need to model that ourselves as a Church. For example, Messy Church is not for our young people. Yes, it includes them but should also include our older members as well to model discipleship. When we are back meeting together, as one day we certainly will, consider coming along to Messy Church or the Family Service and discover that the attendance is often the same as or more than our 10am service. As the whole church family, a house of prayer, are we ready to welcome Our Lord should he be passing by?

Second, for some, this encounter with Jesus is a unique call to leave it all behind to follow him. Here, in the case of St Mark, he apparently gets up in the middle of the night and goes out wearing only a cloth. He follows Jesus out into the Garden; he leaves behind his family and the life he has known. On this night, he experiences the first challenge in response to discipleship: the possibility of arrest. This was a counter-cultural movement, one that placed him at odds with the established government and culture at the time. It does not take much examination of the wider culture to recognize we are in a similar situation today. To be identified as a Christian is to be counter-cultural.

Finally, the demands placed upon us are many, varied, and difficult. We may be placed in situations that are not of our own choosing, just as John Mark was elected and joined with St Paul in the initial stages of his journeys throughout the then known world. Sometimes it can be overwhelming for us, and we may need to step away, as John Mark did. This can be catastrophic for the individual who desires to give more, yet is feeling some reluctance, a reluctance that they may not even be able to articulate and clarify. Why did St Mark leave Paul and Barnabas? We will never know. What we do know is that it did cause further division and strife. This can be exceedingly difficult to overcome, and has a lasting impact, as it did between Mark and Paul.

Yet, in the midst of this and "the rest of the story" is that Mark did not give up, but saw this as a new path, a new direction in his journey. After he left Paul, there is a vein of history that says that he joined up with St Peter, and that the Gospel according to Mark is also the Gospel according to Peter: Mark becomes Peter's transcriber, as it were, giving us this image of Jesus on fire with preaching, moving from event to event eager to spread the message that the Father had given him. An interesting image. What would have happened had Mark given up after his dismissal from Paul? We might not have this depiction of Jesus as the roaring lion of Judah, as presented in this shortest of canonical Gospels.

And to the final application for today: we are living through unprecedented times in our lives, and indeed in the 160-year history of St Mark's Church and community here in Reigate. Yet I believe we will come through it all stronger and more committed. We have many challenges to face, not least financial as we have seen our income drop dramatically overnight in a way we could never imagine, and in a single moment drain away all our reserves. How are we to respond to these challenges? By prayer, by study of the scriptures, by worshipping together and seeking God's vision for our future. Today we were going to present our new Mission Action Plan, our vision for the next 5 years. Because of this pandemic, our Annual Meeting will be held later in the year, probably in the autumn. And in the light of our current situation we might revise our plan.

But we are followers of Jesus Christ, disciples, not perfect, but striving to follow our Lord in worship and acts of service and to bring others to know his saving love. I encourage you all to look to St Mark as an inspiration. Someone who didn't always get it right, who was flawed and frightened, yet inspires and encourages us to follow Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Our next hymn celebrates all the saints, us included: *Rejoice in God's saints*

Rejoice in God's saints, today and all days!  
A world without saints forgets how to praise.  
Their faith in acquiring the habit of prayer,  
their depth of adoring, Lord, help us to share.

Some march with events to turn them God's way;  
some need to withdraw, the better to pray;  
some carry the gospel through fire and through flood:  
our world is their parish: their purpose is God.

Rejoice in those saints, unpraised and unknown,  
who bear someone's cross, or shoulder their own:  
they shame our complaining, our comforts, our cares:  
what patience in caring, what courage, is theirs!

Rejoice in God's saints, today and all days!  
A world without saints forgets how to praise.  
In loving, in living, they prove it is true:  
the way of self-giving, Lord, leads us to you.

*Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)*  
*Copyright © 1973, 1980, Stainer & Bell Ltd*

Our faith is in the living God, and so we declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family  
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us  
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Encouraged by our fellowship with all the saints,  
let us make our prayers to the Father  
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mel Crighton leads us in prayer.

Merciful Father,  
**accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

We join together in the Hymn: Lord of the dance

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,  
and I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,  
and I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth;  
at Bethlehem I had my birth.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be;  
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,  
and I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,  
and I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

I danced for the scribe and the pharisee,  
but they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me.  
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John –  
they came with me and the Dance went on.

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame;  
the holy people said it was a shame.  
They whipped and they stripped  
and they hung me on high,  
and they left me there on a cross to die.

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black –  
it's hard to dance with the devil on your back.  
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone;  
but I am the Dance, and I still go on.

They cut me down and I leapt up high;  
I am the life that'll never, never die;  
I'll live in you if you'll live in me –  
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.

*Sydney Carter (1915-2004) Copyright © 1963 Stainer & Bell Ltd*

I want to thank you all the people that make St Mark's Church. You are the living stones of our community. I mentioned earlier that this weekend we are holding our annual Gift Day. As our treasurer Brian Rowbotham has reminded us in a letter sent out this week and available on our website, about half of our expected income has already dried up or potentially could in the very near future. In figures that is £85,000, not a small sum. The whole Charity sector has been hit very hard financially by the pandemic as many businesses have been. We are facing the biggest financial challenge that St Mark's has faced in its 160-year history, and if you have read my book, there have been many financial challenges. Now I realise that some of you are struggling financially as well, and I am not asking anything from you if you are in this category. But to those on fixed incomes, perhaps with less outgoings at present because of lack of social opportunities, eating out and holidays, may be able to be even more generous this year. We have cut all the costs where we can but we are still looking at a large unexpected deficit this year. If you are able to give a donation, small or large, you can pay directly into our HSBC bank account if you have the details, via our Golden Giving Donate facility on our website, or by sending a cheque to me or to our treasurer Brian Rowbotham. Thank you to each and every one of you.

Let us pray.  
Almighty God,  
grant that your Church  
may faithfully hold and make known  
the faith that has come to us  
through the apostles and evangelists,  
that with them and all your saints  
we may inherit the glories of eternal life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

Rejoicing in God's new Creation,  
let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:

**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 trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

God, who has prepared for you a city with eternal foundations,  
bring you with St Mark and all the saints  
to the eternal and triumphant joy of that city;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you and all those  
whom you love, this day and always. **Amen.**

Go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia!

**Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia!**