

Worship at home  
March 14, 2021  
*Fourth Sunday of Lent*



<https://orthodoxgifts.com/christ-blessing-the-children-icon/>

**Call to worship:**

Surely, he has borne our infirmities  
and carried our diseases;  
yet we accounted him stricken,  
struck down by God, and afflicted.  
But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed.<sup>1</sup>

**Prayers of praise and confession:**

“Our LORD our Father,  
whose thoughts towards us are thoughts of good and not of evil,  
who hast spared us and protected us,  
and hast brought us to this hour;  
we come into Thy [presence] in the multitude of Thy mercies,  
and we praise and bless Thy holy name.

O LORD Jesus Christ our Saviour,  
who broughtest hearing to the deaf,  
sight to the blind,  
and life to the dead,  
who, for us and for our salvation,  
didst suffer at humanity’s hands and didst die upon the Cross of Calvary;  
we rejoice in the redemption which Thou hast purchased for us.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 52: 13; 53:4-6, 12b.

O Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of life,  
bring to our minds the things that are Christ's,  
that we may live anew in the light of His love.

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God,  
that we who know our weakness and trust in Thy mercy,  
may ever rejoice in Thy loving-kindness;  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
Blessed Trinity,  
to whom be glory, wisdom, and power,  
world without end.  
Amen.”<sup>2</sup>

“Merciful God,  
Even as we praise you, we are aware of our failures as your disciples.  
We take your love and acceptance of us for granted.  
We are often careless with our relationships,  
more focused on ourselves than on you or those around us.  
We spend our days distracted by the news,  
rather than seeking your light and truth.  
Forgive us.  
Awaken our spirit of commitment and compassion.  
Give us a new vision of your purposes and our place within them,  
so we may serve you more faithfully, day by day. Amen.”<sup>3</sup>

**Assurance:**

Friends in Christ, by grace we have been saved through faith. This is not our doing but God's gift to us. Know that God forgives you, and forgive one another. So may the peace of Christ be with you.

**Hymn #193** “Out of my bondage, sorrow and night”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQrCbW15L1g>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVZT\\_ZyIM5Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVZT_ZyIM5Q)

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<sup>2</sup> Prayers for the Fourth Sunday in Lent, *Prayers for the Christian Year*, Church of Scotland, 1952.

<sup>3</sup> Worship resource for March 14, 2021 available at <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

## God's Word read and interpreted:

### Embracing the Necessary Season: Sacred Dependence

During this season of Lent, we've been making our way through chapters 8, 9, and 10 of the Gospel of Mark. And a thematic pattern has begun to emerge. In weeks 1, 3, and 5 we looked at (and will look at) the costly terms of Jesus' messiahship and the associated costly terms of our discipleship. In the readings for these weeks, we encounter Jesus trying to impress upon his disciples the necessity of his condemnation, passion, crucifixion, and resurrection. We learn of the disciples' misunderstanding. And we encounter Jesus teaching the implications of his own martyrdom for anyone who wants to follow him.

Weeks 2 and 4 deal with some of the ways and means of living as citizens in the kingdom of God come near in Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.

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The ways and means of the kingdom of God are also the ways and means by which the Spirit enables us mortals to bear the cost of discipleship for the sake of Christ and his gospel.

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The first of these ways and means we touched on two weeks ago is: Prayer. Today we'll consider Sacred Dependence.

READ MARK 10:1, 13-32a.

*How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!*

Upon hearing Jesus speak these words, the disciples were 'perplexed' and, 'greatly astounded.' And well they might be! These aren't the words we want to hear Jesus say.

We are tired. We are weak. We are worn. Our minds are filled with 101 thoughts thrown in a heap like a perpetual pile of laundry waiting to be sorted and washed. We want Jesus to say: "Come, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Which, of course, he does say.

And, he also said: "How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God."

The context for this statement is Jesus' discussion with the wealthy man in which he evoked the well-known turn of phrase of the camel and the needle's eye.



<https://www.pravmir.com/good-master/>

This man was wealthy. He was a person of public stature. Yet, he was respectful. He knelt before Jesus. His inquiry was honest. He wasn't trying to trap Jesus as others did. He genuinely wanted to know. He was also a devout man. He kept the letter of the commandments as best as he was able. However, when Jesus challenged him to go the second mile, he was deeply grieved. He was not willing to give up his life for the sake of Christ and the gospel. In fact, in his question: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" there's a sense that, for all of his righteousness, his motivations were selfish. He was willing to listen to Jesus as long as what Jesus said served his own ends. What must I do *so that* I can get eternal life?

Lest we pass over Jesus' response as a commandment only for the mega-rich, let's keep in mind that if you are regularly making your mortgage payments, if you always have enough food in the house, if you have a car, if you have a device and are paying for the internet by which you are watching this video, you are already among the materially wealthy. And, you may have already begun to realize the difficulty of Jesus' words. There are few people who succeed in obeying Jesus' commands literally and selling all they own to give to the poor.

Whether or not Jesus meant for us to take his words literally, the message is clear. It is the message that ties Mark's gospel together from beginning to end. And, it is the message that everyone who chooses to follow Jesus must consider:

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In whose kingdom do you want to live: Caesar's? Self's? God's?

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That which consumes our energy is that which we worship. A house is a good thing. However, if we have to work so hard to pay for the house we *want* that we have no energy or resources left for our neighbours, our family, our God, we have made an idol out of what God intended for our benefit.

Houses, cars, land, toys, food. They can all be good things. But the degree to which we have made them idols is disclosed when we take seriously Jesus' words. And then, we come face to face with the reality:

*How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!*

In their astonishment, and perhaps disappointment, the disciples ask: "Then who can be saved?"

Left to our own devices, the answer is: no one.

However; for God all things are possible.



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Doesn't that sound like the mindset of a child?

Something broke? Mom or dad can fix it!

I'm hungry? Mom or dad can fix it!

I'm hurt? Mom or dad can fix it!

All needs, wants, concerns can be tended to by our loving care giver.

All things are possible for our Father in heaven.

Mark was careful to tell the gospel of Jesus in such a way that the wealthy man's predicament contrasted considerably with the interaction of Jesus and the children.

Unlike the circumstances of those who have wealth, and by extension a voice in the public sphere and the ability to make things happen (i.e. power),

*...it is to such as these [children] that the kingdom of God belongs.*

In Matthew 5, Jesus said the same thing another way:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.*

In other words, just as children are dependent on care givers and learn to trust their care givers when given reason, blessed are those who recognize their need and dependence on the heavenly Father. Blessed are those who recognize the care the heavenly Father has for us. Blessed are those who bear the cost of discipleship in the strength of the Lord and his mercy.

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*Blessed are those with a living knowledge of Sacred Dependence.  
it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.*

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Lent is traditionally a time for fasting during which we are given the opportunity to cultivate *Sacred Dependence* having divested ourselves of our material crutches.

There is a sense in which the past 12 months have been an extended and ongoing exercise in cultivating *Sacred Dependence*. A year ago this weekend we were furiously emailing and phoning everyone in response to the press releases about this thing called the Coronavirus. It has been one year since we gathered in our sanctuaries. Since then, people have divested themselves of birthdays, and weddings, and funerals. People have been born and died without the comforting presence of family and the associated rituals. People have lost the security of jobs and steady incomes. And, the experience continues.

And yet, just as the Israelites in Egypt and in the exile learned; and just as the early Christians in the diaspora learned, for those with the eyes to see and the ears to hear, the kingdom of God is near nevertheless.

There is a very important line in the midst of the exchange between Jesus and the wealthy man:

*Jesus, looking at him, loved him.<sup>4</sup>*

The Father's love manifest in Jesus of Nazareth is a love that chooses the life he wants for us. Jesus chooses for us a life that is not bound by sin; that is free to embrace righteousness; that is holy; that is joy in spite of circumstances. And, Jesus chose to do whatever is necessary for us, in our place, and on our behalf so that we can live this life. Even if that means his own death. Even death on a cross.

Whether the wealthy man followed through Jesus' instructions or not, we don't know. Mark implies that he did not. Nevertheless, Jesus loved him.

Because Jesus looks upon us, and loves us;

because it is impossible for mortals to enter the kingdom of God;

Jesus took upon himself what is necessary.

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.<sup>5</sup>*

For those with the heart of a child; who depend not on their own merit and strength, not on their ability to win friends and influence people, but solely on the grace and mercy of their Caregiver – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

**Hymn #675** "Precious Lord, take my hand"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=as1rsZenwNc>  
(Mahalia Jackson)

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 10:21.

<sup>5</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:24

## **Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession**

Generous and gracious God,  
with your great mercy, you have made us alive together with Christ.  
By your grace we are saved from sin and despair,  
and promised hope for everlasting life with you.  
You have shown us immeasurable riches through your grace and mercy,  
and we offer you our deepest gratitude, now and always.  
We pray that each person will know the fullness of your gifts  
in ways that touch their deepest needs.

We pray for those dear to us  
and all those we've come to lean on in the months of the pandemic...  
We pray for those who are struggling in isolation or frustration...  
for all those who experience illness or pain in body, mind or spirit...  
for all who have lost someone or something central to their lives  
and have to cope with grief and loss...  
May all these, your children, know your grace and mercy.

We pray for peace and safety in the world...  
for countries struggling to care for their citizens and to rebuild their economies...  
for all who do not receive the respect and consideration they deserve...  
for all those persecuted for their faith or their views...  
for all who are disenfranchised and long to live in freedom...  
May all these, your children, know your grace and mercy.

We pray for your church around the world and for the congregations we know...  
for the work of presbyteries across Canada and the faithful ministries they lead in this  
time of working at a distance...  
for the learning we have gained in outreach during the pandemic and all who have  
connected to your church in new ways...  
and for ministers and other leaders who are finding this time of planning and decision  
making very stressful...  
May your church in all its many expressions know your grace and mercy.

We pray for the concerns on our hearts this day,  
for the fears and frustrations we struggle with...  
for any troubled relationships...  
for the doubts and the hopes which compete within us...  
for any need of healing and support...  
May we, your children, know your grace and mercy.

We offer the prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray, saying:

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



**Hymn #624** “Blest are they, the poor in spirit”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnVjF-3PVKA>

(Rochester Institute of Technology; Jacob Daniels, Ron Dufort)

**Blessing:**

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling,  
and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing,  
to the only God our Saviour,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
be glory, majesty, power, and authority,  
before all time and now and forever.  
Amen.