

# Cut Through

Sunday 19 September 2021

## Call to Worship

*Psalm 5*

Give ear to my words, O LORD; give heed to my sighing.

**Listen to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you I pray.**

O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;

**In the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.**

For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil will not sojourn with you.

**But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house, I will bow down toward your holy temple in awe of you.**

Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies

**Make your way straight before me.**

## Joy to the world

Joy to the world, the Lord has come

Let earth receive her King

Let every heart prepare Him room

And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing

And heaven, and heaven and nature sing

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns

Let men their songs employ

While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains

Repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy

Repeat, repeat the sounding joy

He rules the world with truth and grace

And makes the nations prove

The glories of His righteousness

And wonders of His love, and wonders of His love

And wonders, wonders of His love

## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

*Bethne Dodd*

Lord of all being and beauty, of worship and wonder,

Earth itself declares Your glory.

From water's edge and white-capped waves,

to sunset's grandeur and star-strewn skies, Your voice goes out.  
We breathe it in.  
We stand in awe.  
Amazed at life's sheer splendour,  
Humbled by our insignificance in light of eternity...  
You, who overwhelms us with Your generosity, draw us close in love.

Lord of the open hands, of birth and death,  
and all that lies between and beyond.  
Thank You for the blessing of balance,  
of daffodils and dirt, of wisdom amid contradiction.  
Help us welcome, in equal measure, faith and frustration.  
Freedom and restriction.  
Healing and hardship.  
Understanding and uncertainty...  
You, who overwhelms us with Your sacrifice, draw us close in love.

Lord of our down-to-earth days, routine yet unpredictable,  
we confess our failures, disappointments and regrets  
over what we have said and done, or left undone...  
Grant us forgiveness, Lord, then strengthen us by Your Spirit.  
Clothe us with Your grace.  
Enfold us in Your peace.  
Instil us with Your hope.  
Inoculate us with Your joy...  
You, who overwhelms us with Your mercy, draw us close in love.

May we continue to grow in relationship with You and one another.  
In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we pray.  
And all the people said, Amen.

## Reflection

Psalm 8

## The Peace

Reading Mark 8:22-30

*Jesus Cures a Blind Man at Bethsaida*

<sup>22</sup> They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. <sup>23</sup> He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on

him, he asked him, “Can you see anything?”<sup>24</sup> And the man looked up and said, “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.”<sup>25</sup> Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.<sup>26</sup> Then he sent him away to his home, saying, “Do not even go into the village.”

#### *Peter’s Declaration about Jesus*

<sup>27</sup> Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”<sup>28</sup> And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”<sup>29</sup> He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”<sup>30</sup> And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

#### Message            Cut Through

As we come to ponder your Word today, God, we ask that you grant us soft hearts and wise minds so we can hear your Spirit calling to our spirit and respond with joy. Amen.

Last week I talked about some of the things that can keep us from discovering the best that God has for us and how we often end up with second best. I guess that in some ways you could look at it as an extension of the parable of the sower. The seed is cast but various things keep the seed from growing and producing something to harvest.

There was the transformative experience that never goes on from there. There were the influences of friends and family that hold us back. There was the failure to see things through to their conclusion. There was getting stuck on the wonderful things of the past and not realising the best is always ahead. And finally there was what we might call the greener grass syndrome, where we are tempted to think that if God is doing something special then it must be somewhere else – the church down the road, the nearest city, overseas. If we are still here then God can’t possibly be working.

All of that contributes to us often missing out on God’s best for our lives.

Today I want to focus in on what might be one of the biggest reasons we miss out on God’s best. I am going to call it the ‘Other People Crisis or OPC.’ Simply put, it is the question, ‘What will other people think?’ when applied to the choices we make and the decisions we take. Once we have beaten that to death we will ask how to cut through all of that to get to God’s best for our lives.

Now, right at the beginning I want to say that I have often heard that the older you get, the less concerned you are about what other people think. To which I wish to politely respond, 'Balderdash.' Show me a 90-year-old who isn't concerned with what other people think and I will show you the casket they are lying in. Often their reasons for caring have changed from what they once were, but they still care. A simple example for the ladies – who, listening in today, doesn't spend time on their appearance before they go to church? There is no casual throwing on of the gardening clothes. Effort is spent to dress well. And who is that for. Does God listen more carefully depending on what you are wearing? Of course not. It is done for everyone else we will see there.

Before the men think they are getting off the hook, I have discovered that most men feel a deep sense of shame when they can no longer work as hard as they used to do, no longer build as high and dig as deep and walk as far. Men in their eighties and nineties climbing ladders to get onto the roof and proud of the fact they haven't damaged themselves in the process. No, we care what other people think as we age, we have simply become more adept at hiding how their opinion affects us.

Mark 8:27 reads, 'Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"'

There's a saying that trial lawyers have to the effect that you should never ask a question to which you don't know the answer. I am quite sure that in this case Jesus knew the answer before he asked the question. The point of this exchange seems to be to have the disciples think about what is being said and what it might mean.

There is an interesting point here. What people say matters. Everyone is probably familiar with the saying, 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.' Everyone is probably also aware that as snappy as it sounds, it is simply not true. The things people say to us and about us matter and they can do more damage than physical hurts. A physical scrape will heal over and maybe leave a scar of some kind to remind us of the event. Emotional pain can be carried with us for a lifetime. It is this emotional pain that is the underlying source of OPC. We know that what people think and say matters. Reputation is hard won and easy lost. Just think of the judge in Auckland cursing her son and his partner who escaped the lockdown to go to Wanaka.

It's not even something she did, and yet people's opinion of her will be forever coloured by their escapade. 'Oh, aren't you the mother of...'

All this means that there is a very human aspect to the question Jesus puts to his disciples. He knows that they know. He knows that they will be affected by people's opinions (OPC). He knows that some of what is said will continue to have an effect for years to come. He also knows that self-awareness is important and getting these things out in the open so they can be discussed, matters.

We can see that the issue was weighing on the disciples because they didn't hesitate in their answer. There was no fumbling around trying to come up with something, none of Peter's excuses and missing the point. Right out with it they answer, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." They were listening to what people were saying and it cannot help affecting their thinking. This person they were travelling with, ministering with, healing with, preaching with, was important. In fact he was more than important. There hadn't been a prophet in the land for 400 years. That people were comparing Jesus with the prophets, even as far as to say he *was* one of the prophets would have been both remarkable and mystifying. Their rabbi was clearly seen by others to be something well outside the average. But was that a good thing? Or was it a problem?

Well, in the first instance, sticking with our theme, those options were all very much second best. Good as they may have seemed on the surface they fell well short of who Jesus really was. Sure, on the scale of good, better, best they floated around better. They certainly weren't the worst comparison one could make, but they completely failed to capture the person of Jesus as Son of Man, Son of God.

Of more importance is the fickleness of the crowd. These same people comparing Jesus to John the Baptist or one of the Prophets would soon be shouting for him to be crucified. They could change so easily because they didn't have any skin in the game. It came at no cost to them to suggest Jesus might be Elijah and so it came at no cost to call for his death. In a way it was all about the entertainment and going along with whatever was exciting in the moment. We need look no further than the people baying for blood over the Wanaka escapees. Nobody on social media has any skin in the game and it matters not one jot whether anything actually comes of the situation. It's just fun to join the madding crowd. I don't know how many of you have ever

attended a music concert or a big rugby match and experienced that amazing sense of being caught up in the moment. Cheering for a runaway try or singing along with a well-known favourite. The energy is infectious and it carries an excitement that is greater than the sum of its parts. Like being at that rugby match and somehow your team scores a try. You have no idea what happened in the depths of the ruck, but wow! that was good and story to tell your friends.

And that is why Jesus brings it all back to a personal level. 'But who do *YOU* think I am?' Not, 'Who do you think you should think I am?' No checking to see if anyone is cheering your answer here. I want you to tell me what you think. When the crowd has walked away and you are on your own, 'What do you think?'

I find myself imagining a hush falling over the disciples. Looking at each other, not sure what to say. 'Uh, oh. This has just become real. What if we get it wrong?'

Wait for it... 'What will everyone else think?'

Did you see that coming? That nearly unconscious checking around to see what everyone else is thinking before you say your thing. I don't want to be the only one to put up my hand.

Then Peter blurting it out, 'You are the Messiah.'

I can see it now, hand half in the air, confident and apologetic in the same instant. He knows the right answer, but not at all sure he has it right. Hoping the rest of the class doesn't make fun of him afterward he cuts through all the froth and bubble and gets right to the point.

In our reading Jesus immediately tells them that no-one else is to know. Matthew adds that Peter knows this because God has revealed it to him.

Here is where I want to draw everything together. God has designed us to be creatures of community. With very rare exceptions we need each other to define who and how we are as people. It is that same community that in shaping us can also hold us back from God's very best for our lives. Of course the crowd knows best! Democracy is the worst form of government apart from all the others. The church and tradition and family can tell you what you should do. And all of it is fickle. All of it looks to its own interest first and then, if there is any entertainment in it, to yours. And if your interest doesn't obviously further the interest of the immediate crowd then you will likely be told you are

wrong. Even if your interest has been led by God. So, you are condemned to second best by the interests of the crowd. You learn to keep your head down, because if you step up with words like, 'You are the Messiah,' the crowd will murmur and perhaps shout to put you out.

That crowd can be people who genuinely believe they are looking after your best interests. Let me put it this way. Have you ever seen or read of God calling a crowd? I've tried really hard and yet all I can come up with is examples of God calling people out of a crowd. It may be to do amazing things like David Livingstone or Billy Graham, or it may be to do unheralded things like teach Sunday School or mow the lawns around the church buildings or deliver food to the poor.

Discovering our best in God begins with drawing apart from the crowd and answering the question, 'Who do you think I am?' With no-one to look to for the shared answer we are left, like Peter, to give the only answer we have. It is in that moment, realising that Jesus is the Messiah, that we cut through the interests of the crowd and come face to face with God. And having cut through we can begin to draw into God's very best for our lives.

I want to finish with something that may not seem obvious at first blush. Cutting through the interests of the crowd is not a, 'done once, done forever,' exercise. It is something we must repeat, sometimes daily, and it is never finished. Pressing back into our God given calling, living God's best, will always mean pushing against the flow, even for 90-year-olds getting ready for church or contemplating the leaves in the spouting.

What does that mean for you, today?

### [We Pray](#)

We are creatures of habit and community. You have made us that way, God. We see and hear what others think and we are so easily persuaded to move away from your call on our lives. Help us to learn how to discover our best in you and to cut through the interests of the crowd around us so we can live your best in all we do. Amen.

### [10000 Reasons](#)

Bless the Lord O my soul, O my soul  
Worship His Holy name  
Sing like never before, O my soul  
I'll worship Your Holy name

The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning  
It's time to sing Your song again  
Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me  
Let me be singing when the evening comes

You're rich in love and You're slow to anger  
Your name is great and Your heart is kind  
For all Your goodness I will keep on singing  
Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find

And on that day when my strength is failing  
The end draws near and my time has come  
Still my soul will sing Your praise unending  
Ten thousand years and then forevermore

### Offering

Gracious God, grant us the grace to be extravagant in the gifts we give to you. Help us be wise and just in how we live with the resources we keep. Guide us in the way to lives that bear the fruit that is pleasing to you: lives full of mercy and compassion. Free us from envy and selfish ambition that leads us away from you, that we might draw near to you. We pray in the love and hope that is Jesus, our Saviour. Amen.

### Prayer for Ourselves and Others

*Bruce Prewer*

Concern for needy neighbours, and strangers, can be channelled into both prayers and deeds. At this point we begin the first part.

We pray.

To you, God of Christ Jesus and ourselves, we bring our concern for our sisters and brothers in all the world.

To you who seek justice and mercy, we pray for all who are wronged and neglected, and for those who work and suffer to right wrongs, champion the oppressed, and rescue the lost.

Merciful God, work through our prayers,  
**Just God, work through our deeds...**



To you who foster health of body and mind, we pray for the diseased, badly injured, deranged or spiritually dying, and also for all your human agents of healing and comfort.

Merciful God, work through our prayers,  
**Just God, work through our deeds...**

To you who want the church to be at one in prayer and mission, we pray for the church in its divided and scattered condition, and also for those who work tirelessly for reconciliation.

Merciful God, work through our prayers,  
**Just God, work through our deeds...**

To you who seek the salvation of the world from evil and alienation, we pray for those without faith and hope, and for your servants who humbly and lovingly spread the Gospel of Jesus.

Merciful God, work through our prayers,  
**Just God, work through our deeds...**

To you who want each of us here to live with freedom and confidence, we pray for any among us who are feeling crushed by circumstances over which they seem to have no control, and we also pray for those of us who unobtrusively minister to each other like angels of mercy.

Merciful God, work through our prayers,  
**Just God, work through our deeds...**

Most loving God, we pray with faith and with thanksgiving, knowing that you are already doing things far beyond our capacity to understand or imagine. Through Christ Jesus our persistent Saviour.

Amen!

### [The Lord's Prayer](#)

Our Father in Heaven, holy 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 forever.

Amen

## It is well

*Horatio Gates Spafford, Philip Paul Bliss*

When peace like a river attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to say,  
“It is well, it is well with my soul!”

It is well with my soul!  
It is well, it is well with my soul!

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought—  
My sin, not in part, but the whole,  
Is nailed to His Cross, and I bear it no more;  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend  
Even so, it is well with my soul

## Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we go as a people with the courage to cut through those things that would hold us back from discovering our very best in Christ and may our very best bring hope and encouragement to everyone we come in contact with.

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Love of God,  
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.