

**Sunday 19th September 2021 - Ipswich Road URC
Worship by Revd Carole Pearl**

Welcome and notices

Candle lighting

Worship songs:

[Here I am to worship](#)

[There is a redeemer](#)

Call to worship

Let us worship God,
We come to meet here with our loving God
God's arms are open wide in welcome
Our hearts are open wide to receive him
God's spirit draws us closer now to him
and to one another

Let us, then, together, worship in Spirit and in truth.

Prayer of approach

Big hug to the God of upside-downness!
Greatest to least - and leastest is great!

Big God, you showed us a small child
To upset our set-ups
To make us less big,
To show us the childishness of a grown up world - *selfish and bickering, boring and life less.*

Big hug to the God of upside-downness!
Greatest to least and leastest is great!

Big God, you come, small as a child
To stand in our midst, to make us less small
To show us the childlikeness of your kingdom
Open-handed and loving, playful and dazzling

Big hug to the God of upside-downness!
Greatest to least and leastest is great!

Big God, your hugs show us that we are all your children!

The Lord's prayer

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

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil
for Thine is the kingdom,
the Power and the Glory forever and ever. Amen

Family time/introduction to gospel theme

Who knows the Mr. Men books? I used to read them to my children and now I sometimes read them to my smallest grandchildren.

One of them tells the story of Mr. Topsy Turvy. He does everything in a kind of back to front and upside down way. Mr. Topsy Turvy would probably run backwards to catch the bus - not a very good idea, really

Sometimes we think of the kingdom of God as being a bit topsy turvy. Worldly values are turned on their head. God says the first shall be last and the last shall be first...

One day, Jesus and his disciples were walking along the road when Jesus heard them arguing amongst themselves.

When they arrived at the house to which they were going, Jesus asked them, "what were you arguing about on the way here?" the disciples didn't answer - because they were embarrassed.

They had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. And, who would get the best seat in the kingdom, the one nearest to Jesus...

But, they didn't have to say anything, because Jesus already knew what they had been arguing about. And he gave them the answer by showing them a little child and saying that the least among them would be the first in God's kingdom.

Can you help me tell that story by using some actions, maybe we can even get the grown ups to join in...

Activity

The disciples were arguing (shake fists)

They were arguing about who was the most important (lift hand up marking different levels)

Jesus took a little child (place hand just above ground) and he gently put the little one down among them (open out arms)

Then he said, "if you welcome one of these little ones (beckon), you welcome the one who sent me (point to self)

Hymn: [O Lord, all the world belongs to you](#)

Children leave for their own groups

Gospel reading Mark 9:30-37

³⁰ They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." ³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

³⁶ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

Meditation of Simon the Zealot, by Nick Fawcett

"Then they came to Capernaum and when he was in the house, he asked them, "what were you arguing about on the way?" but they were silent, for on the way, they had argued with one another - about who was the greatest..."

Did he need to ask what we were talking about? Somehow, I don't think so, for he always seemed to know what we were thinking - even before we knew it ourselves.

The question was not for his benefit, but for ours.
Helping us to see ourselves as we really were:
In all our weakness, with all our faults.

He waited, mind you, until we were behind closed doors, not wanting to embarrass us, but we were ashamed, nevertheless, standing there tongue-tied before him. Like those caught hiding some guilty secret.

We were arguing, you see, over who was the greatest, each of us claiming to be the best, and the higher we tried to position ourselves, the lower we stooped.
A downward spiral to the very bottom

Why do we do it?
Why do we build ourselves up, by putting others down.
As if our worth must be measured at their expense?

It's the way of the world, I suppose. But, it's not his way, as we were soon to learn, for he put others first and self last.

He who is truly the greatest making himself the least

He saw the worst of us, but also the best,
the bad, but, also, the good.
Sacrificing his all for people just like us,
and when we think now of everything he did,
everything he gave, then
We, who thought ourselves so special
Suddenly felt so very small.

Prayer

Gracious God, we marvel at your love
for, we are unworthy of it.

Weak, disobedient, foolish, we think more highly of ourselves than we should.

We judge others,
Condemning their faults
Whilst failing to see our own

Forgive our pride, our arrogance
Our presumption,
And help us to recognise that we all fall short,
all of us are dependent on your grace for acceptance
Rather than any merit of our own.

Teach us, Lord, to put you first
And others before ourselves
Walking humbly in the footsteps of Jesus,
who, for our sake, offered his all.
Amen

Second reading - James 3:13 - 4:3 and 7 – 8

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

4 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you.

Meditation from Bridge of Love, 2003 prayer handbook

Come near to God. And he will come near to you dismantle the barriers that stop you from seeing him if you have quarrelled, seek true reconciliation if there is self-centred anger in you, open yourself to God redeeming love.

If worries are distracting you, lay them in trust at the feet of Jesus. If, in the hurly-burly of life, you have forgotten God - then sit quietly and make time to find him
Come near to God: and he will come near to you.

Put the ways and woes of the world to one side for a moment and come near to God. Recognise God's presence in your life - in the joy you knew when seeing a newborn baby, an autumn sunset, flowers blooming in the last of their summer glory; in the beaming smile you saw on the face of a child with something exciting to tell you.
Come near to God, and he will come near to you

Recognise God's presence in your life - in the time you give to someone who needed your time,
In the words you spoke to someone who needed your words;
in the hand you stretched out to someone who needed your hand.
You are not far from God. Come nearer still...

Come near to God and he will come near to you
Come nearer to God, for as you come closer, you will know his presence,
Not far away not even close by, but
In you, in your very being,
You will know His peace, His love, His strength.

And they will be yours.
Come near to God
He is near to you!

Hymn : [The kingdom of God is justice and joy](#)

Prayers of confession/assurance of pardon

Lord Jesus,
You came to be the servant,
Why should we expect to be different?
You told us that we need to be the least
But we still expect to get the best places
You know us so well, you walked our path yet,
We still admire the powerful
We still crave to be seen as being somebody
And still we see greatness in the most successful.
Help us, lord, to hear again what you told us to be humble of heart,
And generous of spirit,

Taking the place you give us.
Amen

Words of forgiveness

Hear now the good news - Christ Jesus came into the world to save us sinners and to all who turn to Him and are truly sorry He says. "Your sins are forgiven. Come now and follow me". And so we do, Lord, and we praise and thank you.
Amen

Father, we would ask now that the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts and minds and the words of my mouth, might, by the power of your holy spirit, be found acceptable in your sight.
Amen

Sermon

Those of us who might be described as being of a certain age will undoubtedly recall the American superstar boxer formerly known as Cassius Clay. His oft repeated proud boast, "I am the greatest" remains in my memory. In contrast, his fellow American, Elvis Presley, was often referred to by others as being the king. "I am **not** a king, the only king is King Jesus" was his response. Fellow Beatles fans might also remember John Lennon's declaration that the Beatles were "greater than Jesus." a statement which he later attempted to retract.

The truth about Jesus' identity isn't always easily recognised by those who have attained every worldly success, blinkered as they are by their own exalted status and unaware of their emptiness of any spiritual substance.

Jesus' disciples were having trouble trying to understand what Jesus had told them about his coming death and resurrection. They simply couldn't take in the message that He *had* to suffer and die before He was raised again in order that God's rescue plan to save humanity could be fulfilled.

Their understanding of his Messiahship was restricted by their human needs and understanding, reducing their view to the one-dimensional. They could cope with thoughts of his divinity, and the knowledge that God would glorify his Son, but the notion that Jesus had come in the role of suffering servant was just too much for them to grapple with.

They began to ask themselves, *"I'm part of the in crowd, part of the Jesus team . . . Just how important am I? Who is the greatest and most important amongst us? Who would Jesus say is really his right hand man?"*

Jesus, perhaps resigned to their lack of understanding, perhaps faintly amused or perhaps saddened by their bickering over imaginary power and status, teaches them an object lesson in just what is meant by the kingdom's standards of greatness and how it might be awarded.

"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me, but the one who sent me."

As he said this, Jesus lifted up a small child and placed them in the middle of those 12 adult men. A little child, the very symbol of vulnerability and powerlessness, one of the weakest and most exploited in society, often the very last to be considered.

"Put such as these before anyone else. Turn your understanding of society upside down. Whoever receives the most vulnerable and marginalised in society and serves them, receives and serves God."

The God of the Kingdom of upside down values comes to us to teach us that, in His Kingdom, the world's greatest will be least, and the least will become the greatest.

Jesus knew that the disciples had been arguing about their rank, importance and social standing as his followers. They were behaving in what we might dismissively label childish ways in their adult attitudes. Are we not familiar with similar concerns and needs for admiration and thanks, the pursuit of which leads on to selfishness and bickering? We don't need to look too far into our own society to see power struggles in all kinds of unlikely places.

Jesus took a little child and placed them in the middle of the group of aspiring grown men. We don't know whether the child knew Jesus, but, what we do know is that the child recognised Jesus as one who could be trusted, one who loved children and one who was sought out by them.

In later years, the excitement of that special day must have been re-lived and re-told to children's children and beyond. Children have such a wonderful way of relating news and events, full of enthusiasm and detail - often seeing far more clearly than we adults do.

Jesus took a little child. . . Children in our western society today are sometimes thought of as being over-indulged, too precocious, too much fussed over and too prominent, no longer banished to be seen and not heard...

But, that, of course, is only a small part of the true story of childhood today. Children are in poverty in our country. Children in the Southern hemisphere face many dangers, starvation, lack of education and welfare, slave labour. Looking at reports of their suffering horrifies those of us who live in the so called civilised world. And yet we, in turn, often appear to tolerate our own society's failure to ensure children's wellbeing. Children are still abused physically and mentally, some even locked away like prisoners simply because their parents are seeking asylum. Children in our country face all kinds of dangerous temptations including the nightmare of drug addiction and the threat of having their self-worth deflated by the prospect of unemployment. Growing up is not an easy process, just as in the world into which Jesus came, the infant born to refugee parents on the run from persecution.

*"Whoever wants to be first must be last and servant of all" says the Servant King.
"Become like this little child..."*

The invitation to become like a child may not be quite as easy or as persuasive as it may have first seemed. Plato taught that those who were really suitable for leadership and positions of authority were those who would never want to do it.

We have only to look at our daily news reports to see the truth that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Even those closest to Jesus, those who had followed him from the beginning of his ministry, were not exempt from arguing about status and power struggles amongst their own number and which of us can really say that we never worry about what others might think of us and the way in which our own actions might be seen to represent the God we love and serve?

Jesus turns the world's status symbols, values and expectations upside down. Enjoy serving others in my name. Don't expect reward or recognition other than in doing just that. Serve others, love each other serve with humility and love, just as I have shown you. **Follow me.**

Jesus warns against the dangers of giving in to self-centred ambition, stressing the need to avoid the real life preoccupations parodied by fictional characters such as Hyacinth Bouquet - constantly struggling to be important and ahead of the Joneses. None of the trappings of greatness and possession sought after in this world can influence or impress God. None of their false lure will help us to find that abundant life which Jesus promises - *love, peace, joy and hope* - the values of the Kingdom.

The former politician, Clare Short, said, "Christians should acknowledge the emptiness of materialism and rediscover a sense of purpose through the struggle of justice and fairness in the world." Not many of us would argue with her statement, but how can we ever hope to conform to this ideal on our own?

"You can't", says the letter from James. "but, there is one way. The way of Jesus. By submitting to God, putting him first in our lives and drawing on his strength."

Jesus said, "whoever welcomes me welcomes not me, but the one who sent me."

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God

In your love, you humbled yourself

Suffering betrayal and murder and

Rising again for us

You found and gave true greatness and life,

not to human power and prestige,

But in humility and sacrifice.

You revealed God to us.

For You were too great to need to flex your power,

too generous to draw attention to the gift.

Dear Lord, help us to receive, respect and honour all those who are humble or un-regarded

For, in doing so, we receive and honour you - and the loving God who sent you

Amen

Hymn: [Give to me, lord, a thankful heart](#)

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

Praise be to the child in you, Lord Jesus
To the babe of Bethlehem who lives in you still

We praise You for Your childlike wonder at your creation
Your love of sparrows and lilies of the field

We praise you for your joy in company,
in laughter and in love

We give thanks for Your love of your Father
For your total trust and obedience that we should all have.

Lord Jesus, bring out the child in each one of us, and set that child in the midst of our
adult complexity.
Amen

Loving Lord of all love, comfort and peace. This morning we bring before you the
needs and hurts of all who are suffering in body, mind or spirit, recalling now the
names of those we carry in our hearts and minds.
Thinking particularly of.....

We thank You that You hear and answer all our prayers and that those who are dear to
us are known and loved by You. We ask that you bring healing, comfort, peace and the
knowledge of your presence with each of them this morning.

Today is Peace Sunday, the Sunday before the United Nations International Day of
Peace, celebrated each year on 21st September. Today, Christians are called to pray
and reflect on what the Christian calling to be peacemakers means to us.

We pray for peace, Lord,
As we look at the reality of war, and the ravages of evil regimes our minds turn to the
suffering of the people in Afghanistan, those who have escaped the murderous
Taliban, those who are still trying to leave, those in refugee camps and all whose task
it is to rescue and safeguard them.
We pray for peace.

We pray for peace in Your troubled world, for ease of tensions, softening of hearts and
a lessening of violence, hatred and injustice. We pray for acceptance, understanding,
respect and help for refugees arriving in our midst.

We pray for healing of the damage to our environment and our wildlife.

We pray for peace and healing of divisions in our own country, peace in families
divided by difference of opinion, aspiration and belief.

And, lastly, Lord we pray for peace in our own communities, relationships and
churches. Make of us peacemakers, and lead us, Prince of Peace, as we journey on
with You.

These and all our prayers we offer in the name and for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen

Dismissal and blessing

Jesus said: Peace I leave with you; my Peace I give you.
I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

We go in Peace, to love and serve our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen

The blessing of almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest now upon each one of you and all whom you love, this day and for evermore.
Amen.