



FOLLOWING JESUS TOGETHER 3

Sunday 26th July 2020

Reading: Matthew ch12 v15-21

'Jesus: The Lone Messiah'

While there is not much similarity, between Jesus and the character of the Lone Ranger, there is something in that title that matches. Jesus was in affect a *'lone ranger'* or maybe we could call him ***'the Lone Messiah'***, Jesus stood alone for many different reasons; he was and is unique, his mission exclusive and he was misunderstood by those around him, even those closest to him.

The events of Matthew Ch12 point us to Jesus warning those whom he encountered to not spread the news of who he was far and wide, this being explained for us by underlining how Jesus was and is the ***Messiah***, meaning 'anointed one' or Christ, chosen by the Father to bring salvation and restoration to his people. Yet Jesus did not fulfil that office in the way those around him had come to expect. We see this throughout the gospels. One particular occasion that sticks out for me being John ch7 while Jesus was ministering in Galilee with his disciples. Let's consider it for a while before coming back to Matthew 12. The Jews were, not unlike in Matthew 12 waiting to take Jesus' life, actively wanting to kill him and get this trouble maker out of the way once and for all. Even though this is the case, still his brothers are trying to get Jesus to go up to Jerusalem, so that the miraculous works that he had been doing would be more visible. His brothers are excited that Jesus can do such amazing things. They want him to get on with it, to promote himself; this kind of thing should be frontline news, going to the Feast of Tabernacles would be a chance for limelight, to reach as many people in one go as humanly possible, everyone would be there. They say to Jesus- get out there, show yourself to the world!

You see there was a sense in Jewish thinking that the ***Messiah*** would come and prove himself, therefore he had to be in the centre, keeping up his profile. Jesus' brothers must have been thinking, 'there was a time where the people wanted to make him king, if he would only go and play it right he could get that popularity back.' There were plenty of whispers, Jesus was much the hot topic of conversation and they wanted him to tap into that. The sad thing is that in one sense Jesus' brothers have a lot of confidence in him: they really believe he can do miracles. They have seen him. But yet John says that the reason they urged Jesus on to display himself and his power so publicly was because they did not believe ***in*** him. It's important to stop and realise that you can believe Jesus is a great miracle worker and yet still lack the faith that Jesus seeks. Believing his miracle working power alone is an inadequate basis for a living, saving faith. This kind of thinking is 'believing-unbelief' and it can be seen in several other places in the gospels. For example, in John 2, in spite of the crowd's so-called believing, Jesus would not entrust himself to them because he could see their hearts. He could see that this outward enthusiasm in his miracle working power left the inside of those people untouched. Everyone loves a good show and would delight in someone who could heal and perform wonders in their midst, they would have thought - he could even be our king! He could conquer the Romans! He could be our superhero!

Yet is that really the faith that Jesus is wanting to well up within them and is it the faith he seeks us to live by? Is there not something essential to faith missing in that so called 'belief'? There must be because Jesus would have nothing to do with it. It was and is not enough to believe Jesus was some sort or a miracle worker with great power, or solely a great teacher or good example. Genuine saving

faith is more than that. Jesus refuses to do as his brothers asked and instead goes to the feast in secret, this is a powerful symbol and is Jesus' way of saying, "Beware, brothers, of your love for glory and power and acclaim. That is not my way." We are pointed to remember that the kingdom of God seems at first small and obscure, like a mustard seed or quiet and subtle as leaven working in a lump of dough. The only people who will ever see it are those whose hearts are humbled by its power underneath, those who allow themselves to be weaned away from the love of worldly praise. Jesus is saying by his behaviour "No, brothers, if all you see is miracles and all you want is to have your worldly longings for attention and praise gratified, then you do not yet believe in me, for that is not my way."

Jesus is not saying that his miraculous works were unimportant. He says that they can point us to the truth, they can help us believe, help us to understand. Yet they are not to be all that we see, they are not to be the limit of our belief, they are to point us to a deeper belief, to a deeper faith. To a full understanding of Jesus, one that is not confined to his power or his wisdom but is all about his person.

Jesus' brothers like most people focused only on the outward show of power and had no eyes to see that there was a special character about the miracles of this man. The sign that pointed to Jesus' truth was not the raw miracle, the mere demonstration of power, but the way of his working, the motive and heart with which they were done. **His miracles, you could say, had a soul** that gave the outward form of power its life and true meaning. Hundreds saw the outward form of the miracles and believed them but didn't perceive **the soul of Jesus' miracles** which is the real basis for genuine saving faith. They just didn't get it, instead of being an encouragement to Jesus they became a temptation, a distraction from the mission at hand.

That brings us finally back to Matthew 12 where we are greeted with this **Messiah** on a mission, Christ's quoting from the prophet Isaiah being central to our understanding of that mission, in the previous chapter Jesus describes himself as "**gentle and lowly in heart**" yet his gentleness is by no means weakness. The Lord is unafraid to confront authorities who lead his people astray. Neither does he let opposition from the religious leaders keep him from cleansing the temple when necessary. Jesus also allows the people to pay homage to him as the Christ on Palm Sunday. These controversies coming to a head when Jesus, once and for all, openly self-identifies as the **Messiah** in Jerusalem a few days before his death, explains his reticence to draw attention to himself in Galilee. Our passage tells us of Christ's withdrawal after proclaiming his **messianic authority** on the Sabbath and as we commented upon earlier he also continues to forbid those whom he has healed from spreading the word about him. Jesus knows such acclaim will earn him enemies and notoriety beyond what is prudent if he is to complete his mission before going to Calvary. When the time comes in Jerusalem to die, Jesus will thrust himself into places where hatred will certainly meet him. Until then, He walks away from trouble and asks others to refrain from saying too much. To do otherwise would fan the flames of misguided **messianic expectation** and in all things Jesus acted in obedience to this Father by waiting for his proper timings.

If the people had really known and understood what the **Messiah** would have to do, Jesus could have proclaimed himself as the Christ from the very start. But the Jews wanted a conquering king, not a **Suffering Servant** who goes to the cross before receiving his true crown. Matthew says that Jesus' hiding of himself fulfils Isaiah ch42, as the prophet predicted, the servant of God does not cry aloud; that is, He does not make his identity known at first. Christ will wait and accomplish his mission as the Father directs, teaching, healing, revealing the kingdom, bit by bit, before going to the cross to suffer and die for his people, then by the power and wonder of the Holy Spirit he will task and equip the church to broadcast the truth about himself far and wide, to the very ends of the earth, until that day when the kingdom comes in all its fullness and the **messiahship of Jesus** is displayed in all its

beautiful, holy and awesome glory. Mission Complete: the **Messiah** who came quietly at first to teach, serve and then to die so that by rising again he may bring a people unto himself who would share his inheritance as brothers and sisters of the risen king. Today we are called to respond to Jesus in faith, not in intellectual belief but in faith, believing not just his power or his cleverness but **in** his identity as that **Lone Messiah**, seeing the **soul of his miracles**, casting our eyes upon he who stood alone to bring those who would believe **in** him, rather than just about him, together as his friends to be his Father's treasured possession.

This brings us to one more thought to send us on our way, Jesus shows himself as the **Suffering Servant unwilling to break, the bruised reed or smother the smouldering wick**, in other words not to discard what may otherwise appear useless. That's comforting because just as his identity is not based on earthly achievements, fame, acclaim, pride, the things and stuff of this world we can find that by trusting in him that **our** identity is not wrapped up in all that either. Christ's people are not a collection of super achievers who have in all sorted out, but a gathering up of the broken and faltering who see the folly of thinking that they have the means to fix things by themselves, and so they call out to him whose arms are open to receive, he who in a world of confusion and loss would point the way, teach the truth and give the life. The fact that Jesus **will not snuff out a smouldering wick or break a bruised reed** is of great encouragement. When others would give up on us because of our failures, Jesus still sees fit to use us. If your faith is weak today, know that Christ does not love you any less, ask him, believe **in** him, the **Lone Messiah** and he will not put you out nor break you, but will, by his word and Spirit, lift you up tall and fan your faith into a glowing flame, a fire in your belly that cannot be denied.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHURCH SERVICES- PLEASE REGISTER FOR 2ND AUGUST

At Cregagh we want to create an environment that is both welcoming and safe. While I would actively encourage you to come back to worship, believing it safe to do so with the measures we have taken, I also want to say that no one should come to services if they have any symptoms or if they are shielding.

On 2nd August there will be two services one at 10am, the other at 12noon, accommodating around 60 people on each occasion. The church doors will be opened at 9:30am and 11:30am so that folk can be guided and seated by an usher. Due to 'contact tracing' we have been instructed to keep a record of those attending services for the time being. Therefore we would ask you to register if you wish to attend by contacting Michael Graham email: michaelgraham112@gmail.com or phone: 07548635075, indicating how many are 'in your bubble' and attending with you. If you have registered and for whatever reason you or someone in your group cannot attend please contact Michael so that the register will be as accurate as possible.

Children are very welcome and encouraged to attend. Upon registering with children you may initially, for the time being, be asked to sit in the gallery, please check with an usher when you arrive at church. KidZone is back so if you do register with children please also let Karen McCurry know email: j.k.mccurry@tinyonline.co.uk or phone: 07552606550, indicating which service and which children are attending, so that information can be sent out to you. Unfortunately Crèche will not be available for the time being but more information about this will follow soon. The service will also be recorded, being placed on our website and social media. On Monday 27th July all these procedures will be reviewed, following which, a further update will be sent out to keep you up to date with whatever changes we hope to make.

MRS RUTH CARNEW

It is with sincere regret that I record the death of Mrs. Ruth Carnew, formally of Glendale Park. A service of thanksgiving for her life was held on Thursday 23rd July. I would ask you to remember her daughter Iris and the whole family circle I your prayers at this time.

CHURCH FLOWERS

The flowers on display on Sunday 26th July are provided by Mr and Mrs P Chambers, Rocky Road.

OPEN CHURCH

The church building will be open on Fridays 10am-12noon for private prayer. A one-way system, social distancing and hygiene procedures will be in effect. The facility to drop off church envelopes is also available during this time.

PRAYER

The Prayer Link will be sent out during the month of August, if you have any prayer requests please pass them on, if you do not receive the Prayer Link but would like to via email or printed copy please let me know.

PW

To all members(and prospective members) of Cregagh Presbyterian Women. Our theme for this year is *Side by Side* and although we may not be able to be side by side physically I know that many of you have found ways of supporting and encouraging each other during this period of isolation through phone calls etc and recently meeting in each others garden. Our theme for 2020/2021 is based on 1Thessalonians ch5 v11 *'Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.'*

As some of you are aware Ann Gamble and Lily Taylor had their 90th birthdays and Rosemary Davey her 85th during lockdown. We wish them a blessed and healthy year ahead and also to Dorothy Pollock who is reaching her magical one very soon. I trust we will be able to meet once it is deemed safe to do so. I pray that you will know God's peace and blessing in the days ahead. If I have missed someone's big birthday please forgive me and let me know.

Your leader Robyn: Mobile number is 07808745143

3RD LEVEL EDUCATION

Would anyone who is intending to start 3rd level education in September please give their name to either Michael Graham or Maureen Mulligan.

CHRISTIANS AGAINST POVERTY

Kick Start

is a brand new video-based course produced by CAP for people who have faced unemployment, shrinking incomes, worry or loss during this pandemic. It gives you an opportunity to begin to deal with some of the physical & emotional impact COVID-19 has had on your life.

The course will run for 4 Wednesday evenings beginning on WEDNESDAY 29 JULY at 7.30pm.

Sessions will include: WEEK 1 Anxiety and Worry, WEEK 2 Handling Loss, WEEK 3 Lifting Pressure, WEEK 4 Making your Money go Further

The course will be delivered over Zoom. To book your place, please contact James at jamesmyles@capuk.org or 07599 379839

GET IN TOUCH

Please do not hesitate to get in touch Rev. Edward McKenzie

07809674068

emckenzie@presbyterianireland.org