



The Church's prayer for Sunday 17th October

God, our light and our salvation:

illuminate our lives,

that we may see your goodness in the land of the living,

and looking on your beauty

may be changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible Readings and Reflection for Sunday 17th October

A reading from Hebrews 5:1-10

Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. ³ This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honour on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was.

⁵ In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him,

“You are my Son;
today I have become your Father.”

⁶ And he says in another place,

“You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek.”

⁷ During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ¹⁰ and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

A Gospel reading from Mark 10:35-45

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

³⁶ “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

³⁷ They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

³⁸ “You don't know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

³⁹ “We can,” they answered.



Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

A reflection from Revd David Newton, Acting Team Rector and Lead Minister for Comberton, Caldecote and Toft

On Wednesday this week a team of folk at St Mary’s Comberton were working in the churchyard as part of the ongoing project there (which is primarily aimed at increasing biodiversity). A lady turned up who I had not met before. She arrived whilst everyone was on coffee break and asked, slightly indignantly, when the work was going to happen - she wanted to get going! So, she was given a job, and off she went. She reappeared several hours later having worked away diligently and patiently.

I, on the other hand...well, I did some work clearing out brambles and planting some seeds in the spring meadow. But I also gave jobs to people, “oversaw” the work, “made sure it was all going okay” and so on. Perhaps I am being a little hard on myself and the contrast not that clear cut. But you get the point. One of us was serving, the other was perhaps just a little bit more like those Gentile rulers Jesus was talking about.

I am sure you have all met people who you desperately want to be on a team with. Those folk who just get on and do things, who quietly and humbly serve. Such folk are the engine room of any institution – whether it be the church, or the village hall, or the local business. They think not of themselves and their own aggrandizing, but simply of how best to serve the project in front of them and those around them. They find opportunities to offer their gifts and don’t simply wait to be asked. They don’t demand or command the attention, but if they weren’t there, the whole shop would fall apart.

Such people, it seems, model something of Jesus... who came not to be served but to serve.

In Christ, we see a radical new way of being – that is not about self-promotion and self-aggrandizing, that is not about seeking to be at the top of the pile, but instead to be at the bottom, as the servant.

Too often, the radical edge of this story is blunted. Over the millennia this story has seeped into our cultural imagination. So now, all sorts of leaders, whether in politics or business will speak about their work as service.



It is not as if they are wrong to do so. I am sure some are using the rhetoric to hide the reality that they are in fact tyrants and despots. But for many I expect there is a genuine desire to serve... And we indeed pray that those with power and authority, those who lead or govern, do see their work in terms of service. But we must realise that such a move takes us quite a long way from what Jesus is getting at here.

Jesus did not serve by being a political or business leader. He quite literally took on the role of a slave, washing his disciples' feet. And then he was hung outside of the city walls, on the rubbish dump; forgotten, betrayed, and irrelevant to the might and power of the Roman Empire.

Here is a servant of a different order. Or in the language of Hebrews a high priest of a different order. The high priests of old were of course servants of the people. They offered sacrifices and mediated to God. Yet they were still the political and religious elite. They were the centre of attention, the ones with power, wealth, and status. Alongside the kings, they called the shots.

Jesus was not a servant in these terms. He was a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Now, Melchizedek is an obscure character from that book of beginnings: Genesis. He appears in chapter 14 as King of Salem. He blesses Abram (who was to become Abraham), and Abram in turn offers him a tenth of all he has. That's all we know of Melchizedek, but later writers are clearly intrigued by this elusive character. He comes to stand for this distinct and different order of high priests.

And Jesus – so our writer from Hebrews says – belongs to this order.

Here is one who is high priest in different way. This is *not* about 'service in power' (good as that can be). Rather in Jesus we see service through giving power away, empowering others, becoming nothing himself, but liberating others.

If this is the kind of service that we see in Jesus, then we must also say that this is the kind of service that we see displayed in God.

For God does not command attention. God is invisible, never directly present and always in some sense hidden. God serves from 'behind the scenes', sustaining creation, loving all things into existence, but never directly visible. God speaks, but only ever through others. God's power is found in empowering us. God seeks nothing for Godself, but gives and gives and gives out of love for creation.

Even within the very life of God, we speak of the Father, Son and Spirit, each attending to the other; of "deflecting" attention away from themselves and onto the other persons in a dynamic and never-ending circle of truth, goodness and beauty.

In God we see perfect service. We see it in God's own life, as each person does not seek attention for themselves but attends to the others. We see it in the creative act of God – in sustaining all things invisibly. We see it in Jesus who took the form of a slave, humbled himself, and became obedient, even unto death, death on a cross. (As Philippians 2 has it).



To serve as God serves then means getting down in the dirt. Not seeking attention or praise but getting on with things behind the scenes. Not seeking power but seeking to empower others. Not seeking our own good and promotion but the good of others.

In doing that we echo the servant King, the one who is forever hidden and invisible, whose life is forever turned outward. Amen.