

O God, we come to you out of the week just gone, with its successes and disappointments, its joys and its struggles. By your Holy Spirit, help us to focus on you now, to listen as you speak to our hearts, so that we may be better prepared to serve you in the week to come. Amen.

Sing or read:

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| 1 Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine :
O what a foretaste of glory divine !
Heir of salvation, purchase of God ;
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood :
<i>This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.</i> | 2 Perfect submission, perfect delight,
visions of rapture burst on my sight ;
angels descending bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love :

3 Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest —
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love : |
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Frances Jane van Alstyne, (Fanny Crosby) (1820–1915) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 548

Opening prayer

God of wholeness, we bring to you this today all within us that needs healing: that which is visible and that which is hidden; that which we have shared with others and that known only to you. Stretch out your healing hands and give us the courage to believe that you can use our weakness and our strength in your service, and that it is never too late to begin again. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Reading Mark 1:29-39 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Sermon What are your expectations of Jesus?

As Christians, we would all claim to be a follower of Jesus and we would all claim to be in a relationship with him. But what are your expectations of how he might impact your life? As with any relationship, it is something we grow into and our expectations change over the years as we gain more experience together. But it is far too easy to get stuck with a fairly naïve, perhaps even immature expectation of Jesus' activity in our lives...

For many people, they never move beyond treating Jesus a little like the Genie in the Lamp: if I pray to him and ask him for things, then I expect him to respond to me and give me what I ask for.

That Genie in a Lamp mentality doesn't represent the fullness of relationship that we are called to enjoy with Jesus. But it is very common amongst many people and it was particularly prevalent amongst the people who first knew Jesus when he began his ministry in Palestine 2,000 years ago.

In the first couple of verses, we twice come across the word 'immediately': - "And immediately they left the synagogue..." "And immediately they told him about her..." What is going on here? Mark is trying to stress the fact that there is urgency on the part of the followers of Jesus. Why might they be in such a hurry?

Well, they have been with him in the synagogue and they have just watched him heal a man with an unclean spirit and Simon's mind must have been racing - Here is a healer - a miracle man! "How else can we use his powers? I know - my mother-in-law is sick: let's get him to heal her too!" So, his followers rush him out of the synagogue and want to utilise his gifts for their own ends, perhaps a little bit like the genie in the lamp: there to grant wishes. And as I say, there is something a bit like that in all of us, isn't there? When we pray, how often do we treat God like a genie in the lamp; hoping that he will grant our every wish, our every desire? Here we are in a relationship with Almighty God who has all power and all authority, and the temptation is always there, isn't it, to ask him to do things for us that we want him to do. Not that there is anything wrong in praying for ourselves, of course; but we must always attend closely to our motivations and try our best to ensure that we are not being driven by desires. For us to want God to answer our prayers, just in the way we tell Him to.

Within days, Jesus has become objectified as a miracle worker who can meet their every need and that is how the people of Israel begin to relate to him. Nevertheless, Jesus' compassion transcends the misunderstanding of the people and we read in verse 34 that he "healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons..."

And so, we come to verse 35: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a wilderness place, where he prayed." And we are told in verse 35 that he prays there; finding himself in the wilderness alone with his God is a moment of reconnection for Jesus. A moment of deep intimacy in which he can breathe deeply and be himself with his Father. A beautiful moment...

Look then what happens, "Simon and his companions went to look for him. They've got more healings and exorcisms lined up for him.

And isn't it interesting that Mark doesn't call them "the disciples": he calls them "Simon and his companions". Why is that? Because, quite simply, they weren't behaving like disciples at this point! They weren't following their Lord in humble obedience. Instead, they were still treating Jesus like a genie in the lamp. "Come on Jesus, get off your knees, get back to Capernaum: there's work for you to do!"

Simon and his companions are tracking Jesus down. They are aiming to tell Jesus his job and just how much he is needed as a miracle worker! But Jesus is having none of it: 'Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else - to the nearby villages - so that I can preach there also. For that is why I came out".'

There's a couple of things to notice about this verse. Firstly, Jesus says that he wants to move on to other villages, and the phrase he uses is: "so that I may proclaim the message there also". No mention of healings, no mention of exorcisms but only that he has a message to bring. Again, Mark is contrasting Jesus' self-understanding with the expectations of the crowd. He wants to preach - they want him to perform miracles. Secondly, notice what he says: "For that is why I came out". Many English Bibles translate this wrongly; they usually say, "That is why I have come", or something similar but the Greek doesn't say, "That is why I have come", it says "That is why I came out". The difference is important

because if we translate it, “That is why I have come”, we can read this as a statement by Jesus about his ministry and vocation in its totality. But if we translate it directly from the Greek, “That is why I came out”, it is a comment on the fact that Jesus has come out of Capernaum and Peter’s house and that takes on a completely different meaning... Jesus is saying that he came out of Capernaum and Peter’s house because he wants to escape from people’s wrong expectations of him: he is not a tame miracle worker; he is a man with a message about the Kingdom of God and he must come out of the box they have put him, so that he can preach that message. Jesus will not be contained in their box. Jesus is not a genie in the lamp; he is the Son of God with an entirely different mission. He will never forsake us. Such is the love of God for us and we are eternally grateful for his forbearance and forgiveness.

Prayers for others

God of love, you give power to the faint and strength to the powerless.

Many are exhausted, juggling with school at the kitchen table, responding to demands of work or family life or dealing with isolation, joblessness and fear. We pray for the leaders of our church...

Encourage and strengthen them in their work, give us all fresh vision for the future of church and renew our Imagination, creativity and wisdom as we address financial and ministerial challenges. Turn us towards each other in acts of loving service.

then turn us outwards to carry your gospel of healing into the world.

God of love, you restore what is broken and you bring together what has been split apart. Today we pray for Myanmar in the aftermath of a military coup where there is now a year-long state of emergency. We ask for peace in a dangerous and fragile situation, where streets are once again full of fear. Although the past is marred by compromised leadership, we pray for a negotiated political settlement for the country and for the free and fair votes of the people to be recognised.

Although our leaders may often fail us, may we trust again that there is a world of possibility where the mistakes of the past can shape a better future.

God of love, you defend the voiceless.

We pray for the UK where society is marred by vast inequalities of life chances, opportunities and money, and where COVID-19 has revealed the vast wealth owned by some and the struggles of others just to make ends meet.

Today we pray for people living in flats covered in unsafe cladding who are afraid to sleep at night. We ask for a just settlement of this crisis and commitment from government to ensure this is never repeated.

Help us to be alert to the pain of others and actions may we be agents of healing in the world.

God of love, we pray for the renewal of our cities so that in them people can live, work, play and find space to breathe.

We ask that priorities would work for people rather than speculative investment; for the common good rather than corporations.

We pray for the social cohesion of our neighbourhoods and are aware of lost networks of support and care. We pray for charities struggling because of the pandemic and as we look to the future, may we work to build connection rather than separation and restore the fabric of community.

God of love, you heal the broken hearted and you gather in all who are lost.

We give thanks today for the life of Captain Sir Tom Moore and we pray for his family and for all who are mourning the loss of family members or friends.
We offer to you all who are suffering in mind or body, asking for peace, and for your healing presence in their need.

God of love, your kindness is everlasting. Surround us with your arms of love; keep our eyes fixed on you and make us ready to follow where you lead, trusting that you will provide for us, today and always. Amen.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed 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 for ever. Amen.**

Sing or Read:

Lord, you have my heart,
and I will search for yours ;
Jesus, take my life and lead me on.

Lord, you have my heart,
and I will search for yours ;
let me be to you a sacrifice.

And I will praise you, Lord.
(I will praise you, Lord.)
And I will sing of love come down.
(I will sing of love come down.)
And as you show your face,
(show your face,)

ALL : we'll see your glory here.

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The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and with those you ought to love this day and forever more. Amen



In a comfortable chair, you may wish to re-read Mark 1:29-39. Then close your eyes and imagine the story. Where are you in the story? Are you one of the onlookers watching the events unfold? Or maybe you can imagine Jesus taking hold of your hand or the hand of a loved one....imagine what happens next.

