



# Highcliffe and Bransgore Methodist Churches

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2021 Fifth Sunday of Lent**  
**Rev'd Phillip Dixon: "Encounters with Jesus – The Royal Official" John 4: 46-54.**

Lent is the season in which we focus our eyes and hearts explicitly and intentionally on the cross of Christ. We lay aside our own desires and instead concentrate on our heart's deepest longing, for our lives to be fully in tune with His. In these five weeks of "encounters" we have been travelling inexorably to Jerusalem, the place of suffering, crucifixion and the joyous fulfilment of resurrection. We have met people whose lives were changed forever by their encounter with Him – in this final week it is the Royal Official who meets Jesus and his life, and that of his whole family is changed forever.

**Opening words:** Welcome to our time together on this fifth Sunday of Lent which some call "Passion Sunday". Though separated in person, we gather from our own homes in expectancy and desire to encounter Jesus in worship and praise. Physical separation from each other only heightens our love for God, knowing it is He who, by His Holy Spirit, unites us with one another.

"We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life." His name is Jesus! <sup>1</sup> John 1:1.

**Opening Song: My Jesus, my Saviour StF 363**  
Sing/read/pray/proclaim words.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jABSW-UuT1o&ab\\_channel=LightGeneration](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jABSW-UuT1o&ab_channel=LightGeneration)

My Jesus, my Saviour  
Lord there is none like you  
All of my days, I want to praise  
The wonders of your mighty love  
My comfort, my shelter  
Tower of refuge and strength



Let every breath, all that I am  
Never cease to worship You.

Shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing  
Power and majesty, praise to the King  
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar  
At the sound of Your name  
I sing for joy at the work of your hands  
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand  
Nothing compares to the promise I have  
In You.

My Jesus, my Saviour  
Lord there is none like you  
All of my days, I want to praise  
The wonders of your mighty love  
My comfort, my shelter  
Tower of refuge and strength  
Let every breath, all that I am  
Never cease to worship You. Darlene Zschech (b 1965).

## **Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Lent:**

Most merciful God,  
who by the death and resurrection of your Son  
Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world:

grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen** Church of England Common Worship

### Opening Prayer:

Loving God we gather with joy and faith this morning, unite us and help us be of one accord with our spiritual family: our brothers and sisters in Bransgore, Highcliffe, believers in many places around the country, the ends of the earth and the saints in heaven. We are separated by distance but not in our desire, love and devotion to You. We welcome Your Holy Spirit to flood our homes and our lives afresh this morning as we worship You in Truth and Spirit, may Your beautiful fragrance of peace, love, truth and power permeate our homes and our lives. **Amen.**

### Prayer of Confession:

*Christ himself carried up our sins in his body to the tree, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds we have been healed.* 1 Peter 2:24

We are sorry that we have often forgotten or relegated your command to love each other as you love us; for times when we have made the reading and studying of your word a task to do rather than a labour of love. Forgive us for the times when our faith weakens and we become fearful of our circumstances, unwilling to place our lives and wellbeing fully into your hands. Forgive us that we are often impulsive, hasty and deaf to your voice.

We trust in your mercy...**Lord forgive us.**

We are sorry that we are too often obsessed with the trivialities and distractions of life so that our priorities as your followers are distorted and we become blinded to your perfect will for us. For times when we allow position, power or pride to

rise up within us.

We trust in your mercy...**Lord forgive us.**

Forgive us Lord for the times when our worship of you becomes a selection of what we like, a tradition rather than a heartfelt expression of love and adoration. At this time of Lent when we consider your unconditional sacrifice for each one of us we are sorry for not making you the centre of our praise.

We trust in your mercy...**Lord forgive us.**

Gracious God, Renew us and keep us firm in our faith and strong in your service; create in us a new heart that we may respond to your great love and mercy. **Amen**

*In a time of silence we bring our own failings, things that we ask forgiveness for, areas of our lives that we resolve, with Your help, to make right. Listen to hear what God may be saying to you.*

God gave Himself to us in Jesus to redeem us from all sin and error, to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift of forgiveness! **Amen** Based on Titus 2:14.

### Song: Trust and Obey SoF 599

Sing/read/pray/proclaim words.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQB\\_rYBz2pE&ab\\_channel=BESTWorshipSongs-OFFICIAL](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQB_rYBz2pE&ab_channel=BESTWorshipSongs-OFFICIAL)

When we walk with the Lord  
in the light of his word,  
what a glory he sheds on our way!  
While we do his good will,  
he abides with us still,  
and with all who will trust and obey.

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way  
to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

Not a burden we bear,  
not a sorrow we share,  
but our toil he doth richly repay;  
not a grief or a loss,  
not a frown or a cross,  
but is blest if we trust and obey. [Refrain]

But we never can prove  
the delights of his love  
until all on the altar we lay;  
for the favour he shows,  
for the joy he bestows,  
are for them who will trust and obey. [*Refrain*]

Then in fellowship sweet  
we will sit at his feet,  
or we'll walk by his side in the way;  
what he says we will do,  
where he sends we will go;  
never fear, only trust and obey.

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way  
to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.* John H  
Sammis (1887).

#### **Our Lord's Prayer (the Christian family prayer):**

Our Father in Heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your Kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For Yours is the Kingdom and the power  
and the glory forever. **Amen.**

**Prayer:** Loving Lord God, as we read Your Holy Word and the accompanying notes, we pray today that our hearts and minds will be fully open to hear what You are saying to us. That we will encounter Jesus during this time. May Your Word always be revelation to us, filled with truth and fresh insight. **Amen**

#### **Scripture Reading: John 4: 46-54**

<sup>46</sup> Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. <sup>47</sup> When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him

and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

<sup>48</sup> "Unless you people see signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."

<sup>49</sup> The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

<sup>50</sup> "Go," Jesus replied, "your son will live."

The man took Jesus at his word and departed. <sup>51</sup> While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. <sup>52</sup> When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him."

<sup>53</sup> Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and his whole household believed.

<sup>54</sup> This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee. New International Version  
UK edition

#### **A time to pause, read again, pray, and reflect.**

**Preaching Notes:** *these notes are a supplement to the weekly video which can be viewed on our YouTube channel.*

Within these nine short verses we have a message and testimony that encourages us to have full faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the One who has come to reconcile the world to Himself. John's gospel is very uncomplicated and easy to follow when you keep in mind what he writes near the end (John 20:31) "But these (signs or wonders) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John's gospel is breath-taking and beautiful in equal measure and for many Christians it is the most precious book of the New Testament. According to William Barclay "it is the book on which we can feed our minds, nourish our hearts and give rest to our souls". We use

the symbol of the eagle to represent this gospel because of all the living creatures it soars high above, giving a unique perspective and providing a penetrating gaze that can look directly at the sun and not be dazzled. John recounts for us seven specific signs with dialogue and encounters surrounding them. Our passage today is the second of these signs, the healing of the Royal Official's son.

Jesus is travelling and returns to Cana in Galilee from Judea. Much has happened since leaving Cana after the wedding and the water into wine. A visit to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples (John 2: 12). A Passover in Jerusalem with the incident in the temple turning over the tables (John 2: 13 onwards). The encounter with Nicodemus (in Jerusalem), the trip through Samaria and the ministry to the people there and now arriving back in Cana. There is so much we can only assume but it may be that the Jesus is there "cultivating the seed" from all that he did at the wedding feast amongst the guests, the servants and the couple themselves.

The Royal Official must have been a senior figure as he clearly "had his finger on the pulse" of where Jesus is. Perhaps a network of those loyal to the Royal Court of Herod? As soon as he hears that Jesus has arrived he travels the 20 miles or so and goes to him. MacArthur states that, "The official's faith was little more than a desperate hope that led him to ask for Jesus' intervention....his belief in Jesus was not yet driven by a desire for salvation for his own soul, but by desperation for his son." How many of us have a similar story? A faith that started with a desperate need.

We do not know this man's name but by using the writings of later historians we can speculate that it may have been Chuza, Herod's steward.

At the conclusion of chapter 2 we read words that speak directly into this encounter "for he (Jesus) knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person" (John 2:24,25). Jesus knows the

heart of this Royal Official and clearly feels great compassion upon him, although the words of the rebuke (verse 48) could say otherwise perhaps they were meant more for those around him who were looking for reasons to condemn Him. Spurgeon speaks of this Royal Official's condition with words that will encourage each person facing a crisis that brings them to Christ, "this nobleman came himself to Christ and personally 'besought him that he would come down and heal his son'. If your faith is weak in some respects, yet strong enough in others to drive you personally to Christ to pray to him, it is faith of an acceptable order. If it leads you to pray to our Lord with all your heart, beseeching him, then your faith is of the right sort. If it leads you to beseech Christ to have mercy upon you, it is the faith which saves the soul. It may be little 'as a grain of mustard seed', but its importunity shows that there is pungency in it; it is true mustard."

Note that the official does not react to Jesus' rebuke as one may expect but humbly requests that Jesus accompany him. It has not occurred to him that Jesus can perform this miracle (sign) without being physically present, his mind (and his faith) is immediately expanded.

American theologian and New Testament scholar Grant Osborne links the original, crisis faith that the Royal Official had, that which compelled him to make the journey and believe that Jesus could indeed save his son's life, with a trust and assurance that what Jesus said would indeed be accomplished, "The man's focus finally shifted to Jesus, and the man believed what Jesus said. His faith became properly centred on the power of Jesus' words, and he started home."

Osborne continues, "This is the key to a burgeoning faith, one that combines belief with response. The royal official proved the reality of his belief by beginning the journey back to Capernaum." The words of Jesus "your son will live" echoing in his mind.

We rejoice with the Royal Official, notice now described as "the father", as he discovers from his servants, coming to meet him from the

opposite direction , that his beloved son is living. Imagine his utter amazement and extraordinary joy when he is told that the fever left the boy at the exact time that Jesus confirmed to him that, "your son will live."

We conclude with the words of Baptist Pastor James Smith, "Some of God's brightest blessings come to us clothed in the dark weeds of mourning. If this nobleman's heart had not been moved through the sickness of his son, he never would have known the healing power of Jesus Christ through faith. Blessed is that sorrow which constrains us to go believingly to the Son of God."

From this sign his whole family and many other people came to believe and become followers of Jesus, then, and by a full understanding and a preparedness to believe, also now. The witness of the Royal Official continues throughout the ages, from generation to generation. **Amen** Written by

Rev'd Phillip Dixon

### **Song: Your will for us and others Lord H&P 398**

*Join in singing to the tune of "The king of love my shepherd is" or read, pray and resolutely proclaim the words as your own.*

Your will for us and others, Lord,  
Is perfect health and wholeness,  
And we must seek for nothing less  
Than life in all its fullness.

As Jesus dealt with human ills,  
Your purposes revealing,  
So may your servants in this day  
Be channels of your healing.

For suffering bodies, minds and souls  
That long for restoration,  
Accept our prayers of faith and love,  
And grant us all salvation.

So we would claim your promised grace,  
Your presence and protection;  
And, tasting now eternal life,  
Press on toward perfection. Freda Head (1914-

### **Prayers of Intercession:**

*You know that after two days the Passover is coming and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified. Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. (Matt.26v.1-4)*

Today is Passion Sunday, beginning the path Jesus takes to crucifixion and death.

Gracious God, as we think about the Passion of Jesus and his struggles as he journeys to the cross, so we bring to you all those who struggle, suffer and are bewildered today. We pray for the people of Myanmar, Nigeria, Yemen, Syria and all places where there is unrest, turmoil and disruption. We pray for migrants and displaced people who have experienced injustice and exploitation and also for all who feel they don't belong anywhere and who live in fear of the future. **Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.**

We pray for our country; for those in authority, that they will have integrity in their decision making. We give thanks for the progress of the vaccination programme and for the reduction in infection and deaths from Covid-19. We thank you too for all who work in organisations which seek to relieve hardship, enabling people to have better lives. May your Spirit move throughout our nation, engendering respect for others, care for the needy and concern for those who find it difficult to face each day.

**Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.**

Today in the Methodist Prayer manual we are asked to pray for the church in Japan. We give thanks for the United Church of Christ in Japan and we pray for the revival and growth of the Christian Community in that country. We pray for our church in Highcliffe and Bransgore. We bring before you all members of our fellowships, praying for our future together and for the time when we shall be able to meet and express fully our love of Jesus as we worship together. Give us the courage to step out in faith and to trust in

you for our future. Enlarge our vision, fill us with the power of your Spirit and enable us to bring light and hope to the world.

**Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.**

We pray for the sick and bereaved, for those known to us who are going through difficult times. May they know your loving arms around them and may they experience your power to heal body, mind and spirit. We thank you for those we have known and loved and who are now part of the communion of saints in heaven.

**Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us with the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ, and serve you in holiness and righteousness all our days. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** Christine Stuckey, Local Preacher at Highcliffe.

**Closing Song: Rejoice the Lord is King! StF335**

Sing/read or proclaim the words.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipRM9AeIP6w&ab\\_channel=EmuMusic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipRM9AeIP6w&ab_channel=EmuMusic)

Rejoice the Lord is King,  
your Lord and King adore.  
Mortals give thanks and sing,  
and triumph evermore.  
*Lift up your heart,  
Lift up your voice, rejoice  
again I say, rejoice.*

Jesus the Saviour reigns,  
the God of truth and love.  
When he had purged our stains,  
he took his seat above.  
*Lift up your heart...*

His Kingdom cannot fail,  
he rules o'er earth and heaven.  
The keys of death and hell  
are to our Jesus given.  
*Lift up your heart...*

He sits at God's right hand,  
till all His foes submit.  
And bow to his command

and fall beneath his feet.

*Lift up your heart...*

Rejoice in glorious hope,  
Jesus the judge shall come.

And take his servants up  
to their eternal home.

*We soon shall hear  
the archangel's voice, the trump of God  
shall sound, rejoice.* Charles Wesley (1707-1788).

**Benediction:** May God's tender and everlasting love fill us in new and fresh ways. May Christ always be beside us in times of despair and struggle and should we weaken or stray give us strength and guide us back to Your path. As we glance back over these weeks past and look towards Jerusalem and the cross, may our minds and hearts be first and foremost on what is to be accomplished by the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. In peace and love we will serve the Lord – in the name of Christ- **Amen.**

**Encounters with Jesus:** In these past five weeks we have joined with those who encountered Jesus in the early part of John's gospel. We have heard our preachers encourage us to take action. To cease being just observers of Jesus and instead be active participants. Pauline Crispin gave us the words that Jesus spoke to the first disciples, "Come and see", Christine Stuckey, in recounting the wedding at Cana encouraged us to "join in", Caroline Churcher suggested we personalise John 3:16 and insert our name and last week Diana Middleditch concluded with an invitation concerning the Living Water, "go on, drink it". The message this week from the Royal Official is, when all seems lost, "just believe". How will you respond to these pictures of participation?

Next week's service will be Palm Sunday following which we will distribute Worship at Home resources for Holy Week. You are always welcome to contact me 01425 673350 or [phillip.dixon@methodist.org.uk](mailto:phillip.dixon@methodist.org.uk)

YouTube links are external resources and are provided to help you engage with the songs. Singing the Faith and Hymns and Psalms resources are provided under license: CCLI 178182.