

The Restored Worker.

Our call to worship for this morning comes from the writing of Peter when he says; “Humble yourself under God’s mighty hand and he will lift you up.” 1 Peter 5:6.

How many of us have wondered about the hymn written by the author of *‘Pilgrim’s Progress’*, John Bunyon (1628-1688) who an English writer and Puritan preacher, *‘Who would true valour see’*, as found in the Church Hymnary 4 number 535. This is the only hymn that John is credited with writing and it first appeared in part 2 of *‘Pilgrim’s Progress’*, written in 1684. It’s the third verse, *‘Hobgoblin nor foul fiend’* that has us asking, what is this all about? Well, a hobgoblin is a spirit of the hearth, typically appearing in folklore, and once considered helpful but since the spread of Christianity has often been considered mischievous.

The words were modified extensively by Percy Dearmer for the 1906 The English Hymnal and at the same time it was given a new tune by British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, who used a melody taken from the traditional song *‘Our Captain Cried All Hands’* which he collected in the hamlet of Monk’s Gate in West Sussex – hence the name of *‘Monks Gate’* by which the melody is referred to in hymn books.

I make mention of the hymn, because I think the words, and more so those of the revised version by Percy Dearmer, speak of the life of our New Testament person today and all who would persevere in being a true disciple and apostle, “one sent out” for Jesus and his gospel of good news for all people.

John Bunyon’s 1684 Version

Who would true valour see,
let him come hither;
one here will constant be,
come wind, come weather;
there’s no discouragement
shall make him once relent
his first avowed intent
to be a pilgrim.

Whoso beset him round
with dismal stories,
do but themselves confound;
His strength the more is.
No lion can him fright;
He’ll with a giant fight;
but he will have a right
to be a pilgrim.

Hobgoblin nor foul fiend
can daunt his spirit;
he knows he at the end
shall life inherit.
Then fancies fly away,
he’ll fear not what men say;
he’ll labour night and day
to be a pilgrim.



Percy Dearmer’s 1906 revised version

He who would valiant be
'gainst all disaster,
let him in constancy
follow the Master.
There's no discouragement
shall make him once relent,
his first avowed intent
to be a pilgrim.

Who so beset him round
with dismal stories,
do but themselves confound
his strength the more is.
No foes shall stay his might;
though he with giants fight,
he will make good his right
to be a pilgrim.

Since, Lord, thou dost defend
us with thy Spirit,
We know we at the end,
shall life inherit.
Then fancies flee away!
I'll fear not what men say,
I'll labour night and day
to be a pilgrim

Join now with this prayer:

Loving God, I come into your presence today so that in my worship I once again may open my heart to you. Make real your love because I need your presence in my life. Refresh, renew and heal me with the power of your loving Spirit

I come grateful for the new opportunities this day brings, the new experiences of your love I shall share in, the new life you have given to me in Jesus, the new light he brings on your promises of old. God of truth, renew my heart.

God, Creator of all people, in our amazing diversity of size, shape, colour, and giftedness: guide me, by your grace, to recognize the beauty and fitness of all whom you have made in your own image. Give me gifts of humility and generosity of spirit to recognize in all people, the face of my Saviour, Jesus, and to practice his commandment to “love one another,” toward the end of bringing harmony and peace among persons of all colours, origins, and abilities, for the sake of your Kingdom. Help me to be a faith pilgrim in my life journey as I live to love and serve you Jesus, my Lord and my Saviour. Amen.

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Our **Scripture Reading** for today is from the book of Acts 12:25, the Acts 13:4-6a and 13-15, reading from the NIV translation.

### **Barnabas and Saul Sent Off**

When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

### **On Cyprus**

The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. They travelled through the whole island until they came to Paphos.

### **In Pisidian Antioch**

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.”

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John Mark

We’ve been considering what it means to be an apostle, “one sent out” for Jesus and we have been reflecting on the lives of some of the people in the early church and how they became apostles. To set the scene for today, we need a little background and at the close of Acts 12:25, we read that “when Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem taking with them John, also called Mark”. The mission had been when the disciples sent Barnabas to investigate the news that Gentiles in Antioch has become believers in Jesus and Barnabas had invited Paul to join him when he saw the Antioch Church needed a good teacher. Barnabas and Paul had spent a year in Antioch. During that time a famine befell Jerusalem and the Antioch believers sent gifts of aid, with Barnabas and Saul to the Jerusalem Church. Barnabas and Paul then return to Antioch, and now they have a new colleague with them by the name of John, also called Mark. So who was this man and what can we learn of his life?

John was his Jewish name and Mark was his Roman name, like a surname. Prior to the mention of his two names coinciding with his entrance into the company of Barnabas and Paul, we hear of an account in Acts 12 of when Peter escapes from prison, after King Herod arrested some belonging to the church. Peter goes to the house of a prominent woman in the church in Jerusalem, in whose home the disciples were

praying for Peter when he had been seized by Herod. Her name is Mary according to Acts 12:12 and she is the mother of John, also called Mark. Mary seemed to be a wealthy woman because she owned her own house. Her husband is presumed deceased. Like many industrious Jews, Mary earned her wealth outside of Jerusalem before she came back to live in the Holy City. We also learn that Barnabas' is related to John Mark because Paul in his letter to the Colossians (4:10) in sending greeting includes "and so does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas".

Mary's home was large and had been a centre of social importance before she became a follower of Jesus. It was only natural that now her home became the place of Christian activity. Her home was one of the many house-churches in which the thousands of early believers met in Jerusalem. As a haven for believers, where we first meet John-Mark in the year AD 44, Mark would have been acquainted with leaders like Peter, James, John and the other disciples. It seems that Mark had a special relationship with Peter, because Peter calls Mark "his son" (1 Peter 5:13). It would seem to indicate that Peter had led young Mark to become a follower of Jesus. Mary's home was where Peter gravitated that night when he was miraculously released from prison. Mark would have found himself in the circle of Christian leaders and was already a Christian and a respected member of the church in Jerusalem. So John Mark came from a godly home and it is wonderful to see how wealthy people can use their riches and social standing to serve Christ.

However, it was Barnabas and Paul, having finished their mission in Jerusalem that they take a colleague now simple called Mark back to Antioch with them. Barnabas and Saul had now been officially set apart by the Holy Spirit and the church to carry the Gospel to other areas and they needed a helper, so they approached Mark inviting him to accompany them on their first missionary journey. To be in their company was an unusual privilege and honour for this young man. What kind of help would Mark have to give them? Suggestions have been made that Mark may have had to help in the preaching or instruction to new converts or baptise new believers. Maybe he would to be an advance agent, arranging lodgings and travel plans for this evangelistic team. He may have served as a secretary, handling the business details. Whatever it was, the novelty of going on this adventuresome mission with these two great men would appeal to Mark, especially since the leadership was in the control of his cousin Barnabas.

They had just sailed from the island of Cyprus to the city of Perga, on the south side of Asia Minor, still in the very early stages of their projected mission, when suddenly, "Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem." (Acts 13:13) What caused Mark to defect? Some have thought he may have been home sick or worried about his mother's well being and the duties he may be neglecting back home. Maybe his desire was to be with Peter. We're not really told. One of the suggested reasons given is the possible loss of Barnabas' leadership to Paul. Barnabas after all had been the pre-eminent one for several years. Now with Paul suddenly taking over, perhaps Mark could not bear to see his cousin take second place. If Mark resented Paul's ascendancy and this was one reason, a second may have been Paul's aggressive attitude to evangelising Gentiles. Mark may have been uneasy about this, for we do know that Barnabas too had misgivings in this area and Paul had rebuked him on one occasion for separating himself from Gentile believers. (Galatians 2:13)

Upon return from their missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas reported that many people had been saved and new churches planted. The door of faith was opening to Gentiles and so it was not surprising that about a year later a second missionary journey was planned. Paul and Barnabas wished to see how the new believers were progressing and Barnabas wanted again to take Mark with them. Paul flatly refused indicating Mark was unreliable. How could Mark, who had forsaken before be trusted again, especially if in danger? Paul's refusal hinted at Mark's lack of enthusiasm for gentile evangelism which Paul felt had been no legitimate reason for defecting. After all, Mark had put his hand to the plough and looked back and was unfit for kingdom service. What were Mark's thoughts? Well he had to live with the fact that one of the world's bravest saints considered him a quitter, unfit for service? How many of us have maybe

experienced that kind of rejection, because at first the task felt daunting or we were afraid? I think we can identify with Mark, who probably never was fully happy he left Perga, not now when he heard the reports of all God had accomplished through Paul and Barnabas. Peter, Mark's hero, had testified that Gentile conversion needed no Judaistic ceremony to complete it. So any prejudice Mark might have had against preaching salvation to the Gentiles disappeared as he came to accept Paul's leadership over Barnabas. Mark had a change of heart.

Someone in Mark's shoes, who having been rejected, would have reacted with angry defiance and fallen into deeper shame. However to his credit, Mark resolved in his heart to show Paul, by faithfulness to the Lord in his future course of life, that he could make a man out of himself yet. His defection to his cousin Barnabas didn't seem like permanent desertion. Paul however was not convinced and although Barnabas pled Mark's case, Paul still turned him down. This led to the painful separation of Barnabas and Paul, because Barnabas the encourager wanted Mark to have a second chance and so he took Mark on a separate missionary journey to Cyprus.

For the next decade, Mark is not mentioned again. Tradition says he went as a missionary to Egypt and founded the church in Alexandria, but what really happened in the interim, we do not know. What we do know is that Mark was faithful in his association with Barnabas. He was a steadfast and valuable companion to Peter. The toughness of Paul, along with the tenderness of Barnabas helped to bring about reconciliation. Mark wholly recovered Paul's good esteem as Paul watched Mark's career with deep interest and yes, increasing joy for the next time we hear of Mark we find he is with Paul in his first imprisonment at Rome. Their differences long since resolved. Mark became one of Paul's few remaining loyal workers. A great tribute is paid to Mark, in Paul's last recorded letter written in Rome not long before his execution. Paul asks Timothy to bring the cloak left at Troas as well as books and parchments and he wants Timothy to come before winter and adds one final request; he has a friend he wants Timothy to bring. "Take Mark, and bring him with you: for he is profitable to me for the ministry." (2 Timothy 4:11) What crowning words! The man who failed at first has made good. What an encouragement to us too, no one is beyond the grace of God when called to serve Jesus. God will always make good and leave his servants rewarded.

Mark went on to thrive as Peter's son in the faith as Peter is considered to be the man who probably led Mark to the faith. Tradition says Mark was an attendant, interpreter and close friend of Peter, maybe even Peter's secretary. Mark may well have transcribed Peter's two letters and was long been approved in the eyes of Peter who, because of his own denial of Jesus and later restoration, could so easily sympathise with Mark.

Christian scholarship and tradition maintain that Mark received much of the material in his Gospel from Peter. Of course the Holy Spirit inspired Mark, but the Spirit also provided some of the material from Mark's relationship with Peter. The character of Christ as servant is presented so fittingly in Mark's gospel as one who is supposed to be doing rather than speaking. Where more than the other three Gospels, the emphasis is on the eyes of the Lord looking around and the hands of the Lord ministering, is given. Only an eye-witness, like Peter, could have provided some of the details described in Mark's Gospel. It is also believed Mark may have been one of the followers of Jesus during Jesus' earthly ministry. It is thought he was the young man who followed Jesus after his arrest in Gethsemane and when he was seized by the young men of the arresting mob, Mark left his linen cloth fleeing naked. It is significant, that Mark is the only one of the four Gospel writers who records this incident (Mark 14:51f). Who else would have known this, if not Mark himself?

Yes how fitting, that Mark who was a helper wrote the servant Gospel. How fitting that he who failed at the beginning made good after failure, so much so, that the second book in the N.T. bears his name. For us today, we, who may so often fail when we fall, can take courage and know that we too can be restored.

Join now in this **prayer**:

Father God, how do I find the faith to believe in Jesus? How do I grasp the truth? I know I can only accept it; refusing to reduce it to scientific debate or historical literalism, other than to kneel with humility and awe beside the blood-stained cross and the empty grave; for then, I am your witnesses.

How do I understand the mystery of your death and life, Jesus? How do I explain it? I can only live it; allowing it to permeate every grain of this dust and sand that forms me every thought, every priority, every act and every interaction, for only then am I your witnesses, and you deserve nothing less from me.

Lord Jesus, Emmanuel, God with me, when I privilege my own agenda, hurt others in the effort to impose my will, or chain myself to my fears, tumble me off the throne of my pride and release me into finding my worth in your love. You know me, you love me, you free me, then call me to follow you and I bless you. Your mercy meets me in my confusion; may your spirit meet me in my everyday living.

Most Holy and Almighty God, I bring now my prayer for others. You created the earth and all that is in it, and gave dominion over it to our first parents in the days of their innocence. Look with compassion upon the whole human family, and when we fail to treat each other with the dignity your children merit. Free us from all arrogance and hatred, that our hearts and hands may be made clean in your sight.

Break down the walls we build to separate and divide us, for without your help we perish in our isolation and division. Forgive us our faults and sins, our hasty judgments and our rash presumption, for you alone are judge, and know the secret faults of every person. Unite us in the bonds of love, that we may truly be your children.

Lord Jesus, comfort those in time of loss, those I and others love and cherish, for you seek and find the lost, and preserve them in your care. Enlighten us in our confusion and distress, that we may do your will in peace and harmony. Even in the midst of our anguish and our pain, in our memory of loss and destruction, I turn to you, O Lord my God, and give you thanks, for your continued mercies and the gift of hope.

I thank you for inspired hearts and helping hands, for all who work to recover and rebuild. I thank you for the skill and care of those who heal the wounded, and comfort those who mourn, give them strength and courage in their task. I think and pray for the people in Beirut after the terrible chemical factory blast this week. Be with the grieving, this injured and all who have been affected.

I thank you for the leaders of community, of our nation, and our world, especially in these times of the pandemic. Give them the wisdom and patience to choose your path. I thank you for all who seek the truth, who love justice and mercy, and who walk in your ways. Give them the humbleness of spirit to love and serve you always.

I thank you for the knowledge of your continued presence with me and all you love. For you will not leave us comfortless. You are the God who works wonders and in you only is our trust. Hear my prayer in the words you taught me to say Lord Jesus, Our Father ... Amen.

The Blessing:

Grace and peace be yours in fullest measure, from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with you now and always. Amen.