**7th February 2021**

Call to worship

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.

A prayer of adoration

Everlasting God, creator of heaven and earth,
your love causes our hearts to soar.
You know the number of stars in the universe
– just as you know the number of hairs on our head.
Mighty God: We love you.

You call each star by name
– just as you call us each by name.
Mighty God…

You supply the earth with rain to make the grass grow;
and provide food for the animals and birds
– just as you provide all we need to sustain us.
Mighty God…

You care about the details, seeing every tiny part of the bigger picture
– just as you care about the tiniest detail in our lives;
for you know the person you created each of us to be.
Mighty God…
Amen.

Prayers of penitence

A prayer of confession

People. People. Everywhere! Day in. Day out.
Seeking you, Lord. Hunting you. Following you.
Hungry for your presence. Wanting your attention.
Yet not once did you complain.

We’re sorry, Lord, that the weight of life’s demands causes us to stumble,
to lose our temper and at times to buckle under the pressure.
Help us to be more like you, Lord.

We’re sorry for not getting our priorities right.
Help us to know, as you did,
the importance of spending time with and drawing refreshment from the Father.
We’re sorry for allowing other people and things to take over and squeeze out our time with you.
Help us to draw daily on your refreshing strength in order to cope with whatever our day holds.
Lord, hear our prayer.
Amen.

 **Assurance of forgiveness**

The Son of God loves us.
And because of his love,
healing us and setting us free from sin’s guilt and power,
we are forgiven.
Amen.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Reading Mark 1.29-39**

**Sermon**

I went on a training course this week looking at ministry in a time of trauma. The speaker spoke about the phases of a trauma. There is the sudden impact realizing you are in a crisis. The adrenalin flows and the stress levels increase, and you go into a heroic phase – a time of activity, with the surge of energy. It can even be euphoric as you all sense that you are in it together. You identify heroes to inspire people and keep people going. But all that is unsustainable. The constant stress tips you over into exhaustion and disillusionment which is where we are at the moment. We won’t reach the end of this period until we can see an upturn in fortune and a restoration of some sort; when we can acknowledge that no amount of heroics can change the fact of the loss occurred but also that goodness still exists in life. And so, we press on in this pandemic hopeful that one day we can start to rebuild and restore.

Every crisis breeds its heroes and its villains, and this Coronavirus pandemic is no exception.

The sacrifices of our NHS staff and volunteers, and the dedication of our teachers around the UK have inspired us every day. But one of the heroes of the pandemic Captain Sir Tom Moore, died this week, of COVID-19 19, at the age of 100.

He was described as ‘the best of us’. Tributes to him said Sir Tom, personified in his 100-year-old frame, the nobility of the human spirit. He is a symbol of the 'never say die' attitude of those who, moulded in the furnace of past crises, rise to the surface to lead or inspire whenever danger or tribulation call.

Major General Roddy Porter, the chief executive of Military Ministries International, wrote thatTom Moore's whole life was one of service and sacrifice[[1]](#endnote-1), showing drive and motivation in his early years, a career in engineering was denied him by the advent of the second world war. Like so many of his generation, he endured privation and the heat of battle with determination and calm assurance. He was part of the forgotten 14th army fighting on in Burma after the war in Europe had ended.

After his war, he quietly got on with life in the army, then in business, marrying and indulging his adventurous spirit in his love of racing motorbikes, which he did with some success. And that might have been his postscript, until approaching his 100th birthday, April 6 2020 that sense of determination to 'do his bit' resurfaced, and he set off on his now famous garden walk, hoping to raise £1,000 for the NHS. "One small soul like me won't make much difference," he said in his first TV interview.

What happened next is well known: £32 million raised, an army guard of honour at the finish line, an RAF flypast and over 16,000 cards on his 100th birthday, not to mention a knighthood from the Queen and two entries in the Guinness Book of Records (for the most money raised in any individual fundraising walk, and for the oldest person to record a number one hit).

Captain Sir Tom Moore reminded Major Porter, that we can all do our bit to help our neighbour or our nation. Often the hardest part is simply starting off. Getting going. But Tom set off, and the rest is history.

From what I’ve seen of Captain Tom he seemed to possess a degree of humility and reserve and I’m sure would be embarrassed at all the tributes put on him. Who knows what he was really like? Often when you become a public figure people project on to you, depending on their mood, certain attributes or qualities in their desire for a hero or indeed the reverse, a villain. Our Christian understanding of our human condition would say that we are all capable of the heroic, but equally capable of acting selfishly and even harmfully – we can be both hero and villain and need God’s continual forgiveness and renewal and daily repentance and grace.

There were many people trying to ‘do their bit’ during this pandemic – why did Captain Tom grab the media and public focus? Was it his age, was it the medals on his chest, was it something else? In many ways the money raised for the NHS, whilst welcome, raised difficult questions about what activities and concerns should be funded by charitable giving and what should be funded by the state and the collective taxes we pay for the running of our country. The Government has found a magic money tree during this pandemic to pay billions for things like vaccinations, furloughing staff, and businesses, handing out contracts for PPE etc. etc... We wonder when the reckoning will come for how and who pays for the magic money tree?

Nevertheless, Captain Sir Tom became a symbol of service and duty and optimism in lifting people’s spirits. His famous line was "Please remember, tomorrow will be a good day."

His determination to make a difference reminds us that to take the first simple step in obedience to God's word, or his calling, is to unleash the full power of heaven in our support.

In Mark 1.29-39 we see Jesus living by clear priorities. He knows what he must do – telling people about God and forgiveness, healing and praying. Jesus’ actions and words continue to impact millions across the world across all generations.

When politicians or chief executives begin a new role, they often set out a list of priorities for their first 100 days, giving a sense of the direction of their thinking. Then, we critically evaluate their achievements against their stated hopes and goals.

We are still in the first 100 days of a new American presidency. Ever since Roosevelt first coined the term in 1933, the end of the ‘first 100 days’ has been seen by the US establishment as the point at which to assess the effectiveness and likely success of a new president.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Mark chapter 1 is something like the equivalent of the ‘first 100 days’ in Jesus’ ministry. Mark seems to present it like that. Or, rather, it has in it a little bit of everything that will be revealed and explored in a little more detail in the rest of Mark’s Gospel account. In short order, it tells almost all you need to know about Jesus. By the end of the chapter, you know who Jesus is and what he is about. You have enough information to make a ‘first 100 days’ type of assessment.

In this week’s section, after a successful start to his ministry in Capernaum, and with his fame already beginning to spread, Jesus heals one more person – Peter’s mother-in-law. Interestingly, this happened on the sabbath. Later, healing on the sabbath would get Jesus into hot water – but here it seems to go unnoticed, perhaps because it was not a public event. The next day, the disciples try to get him to return to Capernaum for more of the same, but Jesus is adamant that it is already time to move on. The message and the work must be taken to other places.

How many of us would have walked away from a project that had only recently started and was flourishing? How many of us prefer to stick with what we know, and what we know works? God had other plans for Jesus. Perhaps his early morning prayer time in a deserted place had something to do with it.

He went to a desert place and began to pray. Modern employers often talk about ‘work-life balance’, and some even instruct their employees not to engage with work emails outside office hours. Yet for many people the stress of work and life is becoming almost unendurable and there are rising levels of problems with mental health. Churches are not immune to this – sometimes we even point proudly to how busy we are. Can we as a church try to model a different way of life that learns from Jesus’ practice of taking time out and making space to be with God? To reflect on what and how we are doing and whether it’s the right thing to be doing?

 Perhaps if we spend enough time with God, and truly listen, we will learn what God really wants us to do – and not make assumptions that it is what we are already doing.

Captain Tom knew what he wanted to do for others and became a people’s hero bringing hope and courage – he made a difference. He knew his priorities and moved from a good intention to completing his feat on tired feet every day! To encourage others to battle loneliness, he reminded us to walk and talk more. [[3]](#endnote-3)

What actions can you take in these coming weeks, which can safely bring hope to someone feeling lonely? In this last year, have you developed any new priorities? The focus this week is demonstrating priorities through action. Perhaps Jesus wants you to live out a priority with more impact – how can you do that?

Is Jesus calling you to do something, some act of obedience, or some decision to step out in faith? Why don't you take a leaf out of Captain Tom's book and take the first step and see what God will do?

And go with the hope of God. ‘Please remember, tomorrow will be a good day.’

Prayers of intercession

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

Renew our strength and bind up our wounds
Help us to hope in you.

God of love,
you call worlds into being; you number the stars and call us all by name.
You created a world of plenty and beauty, of magnificence and diversity.
As backlash builds over the UK’s permission for a new coal mine in Cumbria,
we pray for faithful climate leadership here and across the world.
We ask for bold and brave decision-making that recognises the crisis we are in –
decision making that challenges our dependence on fossil fuel.
that works to restore decades of damage from greed and exploitation.
God of all creation, you restore the face of the earth:
stir us up to action to protect our planet.
May our feet tread lightly on the earth
and our actions and priorities bring healing to our battered world.

Renew our strength and bind up our wounds
Help us to hope in you.

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.

Renew our strength and bind up our wounds
Help us to hope in you.

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 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.
May we hear the cries of the powerless
and by our words, choices and actions
may we be agents of healing in the world.

Renew our strength and bind up our wounds
Help us to hope in you.

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, especially…
and as we look to the future,
may we work to build connection rather than separation
and restore the fabric of community.

Renew our strength and bind up our wounds

Help us to hope in you.

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.
Send your blessing on all who are afraid or alone or hungry,
on those whose lives are being destroyed by abuse or violence,
and on all for whom home is not a safe place.

Renew our strength and bind up our wounds
Help us to hope in you.

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.



A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Let us come to the Lord’s Table and feast together.

The lord Jesus invites all from north south east and west to gather at the table of the Lord.

Lord, you know our hearts and our motives.
We don’t always understand your motives, Lord,
but then you are God
and who are we to question you when you see the bigger picture?

We thank you, Lord, for the bit we do see and understand.
That we can come to you in order to recharge our batteries.
And that we can come alongside others
in your strength and serve our community
in areas we’ve been healed in and can relate to.
Thank you, Lord.

WE take inspiration from you Lord Jesus. As we at bread and drink wine we remember your love poured out for amny, your body broken and given for the sin fo the world, but raised to new life to bring us hope, that tomorrow will be a good day.

**Dying, you destroyed our death.**

**Rising, you restored our life.**

**Lord Jesus, come in glory.**

Come, Creator God: renew the face of the earth;

come, eternal Saviour: remake us in your likeness;

come, Holy Spirit, transform these gifts:

that Christ may be known to us in the breaking of the bread

and that we may be strengthened to serve him in the world.

May we on earth be one with all Christ’s people,

and, when all things are complete,

be raised up to be with him,

[with .all *the saints; those who have died]*

and with all your faithful servants in the heavenly places,

the homeland which we seek by faith,

and where he reigns in glory,

with you, Father, and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever.

**Amen.**

The peace of the Lord be with you.

**Peace be with you.**

The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed

took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said:

‘This is my body which is broken for you.

Do this is remembrance of me.’

In the same way he took the cup also after supper, saying:

‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,

you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.]

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us.

Therefore let us keep the feast. I Corinthians 5:7

The bread which we break is the communion of the

body of Christ.

The cup of blessing which we bless is the communion

of the blood of Christ.

Jesus, Lamb of God:

**have mercy on us.**

Jesus, bearer of our sins:

**have mercy on us.**

Jesus, redeemer of the world:

**grant us peace.**

Holy things for a holy people.

**Only one is holy, the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**We are made holy in him.**

Take, eat; this is the body of Christ, broken for you.

Do this in remembrance of him.

This cup is the new covenant in the blood of Christ,

shed for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sin.

Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of him.

**After communion**

God of a love stronger than death,

you have given us new birth into a living hope

through the gift of your Son.

God with us,

like a mother you have fed us with yourself

and strengthened us for journeying ahead.

Jesus, help us to know you more deeply,
to understand your love for us.
We know that you knew and did what God wanted.
Speak to us about what God wants from us,
and lead us in your ways.

**Gracious God,**

**may the love which bids us welcome at this table**

**gather all your children into one,**

**in your eternal presence,**

**whole and free at last. Amen.**

Amen.

A sending out prayer

Lord Jesus,
go with us into the world this week.
Help us to remain focused upon you
and to make your priorities our priorities in
all the places you are sending us.
Amen.

1. https://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/What-Sir-Tom-Moore-taught-me-about-Christian-service-sacrifice-and-obedience [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2021/111-january-february-2021-b/epiphany-5/explore-and-respond [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2021/111-january-february-2021-b/epiphany-5/the-week-in-focus [↑](#endnote-ref-3)