

**September 19, 2021**

**Morning Worship**

### **Opening Words**

*'God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.'* 1 Corinthians 1.27-29

### **Opening Prayer**

Almighty God, you are Lord all, we come to you to worship you for you are sovereign over heaven and earth.

Lord, you love all people equally: people of different nations and cultures, of different ages and stages of life; of people in all different positions of society.

Lord forgive us for ranking people differently according to their social position or status in society, or according to their intelligence, attractiveness, level of ability or occupation. Help us not to subconsciously evaluate some people over others, but to view people as you see them, all of equal value and worth, human beings made in your image.

Open our minds and hearts to all you are doing by your Spirit. Teach us more of your ways of justice and mercy, kindness and compassion as seen in Jesus, who taught his followers how to pray, saying: **The Lord's Prayer**

**Bible Readings**    Psalm 1; Mark 9.30 - 37

### **Sermon**

Have you been reading about Emma Raducanu over the past week since she won the US Open? She is amazing and I loved watching her win – she played exceptional tennis and I have no doubt that she will win further Grand Slams in her career. I am thrilled for her, . . . but, I am also worried about how she will be able to deal with the publicity, and the corporate businesses who will want to sponsor her and the vast amount of money she will make. She is now considered successful in the eyes of the world – beautiful, a winner, clever – and gracious in her win. She has achieved fame and fortune. But will she be able to keep her head and to remain focussed on enjoying tennis and remaining humble and kind when the repercussions of her win sink in?

Over the past few weeks, we have been hearing about Jesus ministering to thousands of people all around Galilee. The disciples were thrilled with his popularity and must have thought that he was gaining public support before he marched on Jerusalem to set up his kingdom.

However, in the first couple of verses of our passage for today, Jesus instead tells his disciples that he will be betrayed, killed, and then rise from the dead after three days. This was unthinkable for them. They believed that the Messiah would be a great, successful, and strong leader who will be able to overthrow the Romans. This just doesn't make sense. They have questions, but they're too afraid to ask and to reveal their confusion. So, they stay quiet. It is as if he hadn't said it.

So, they continue on their a high after Jesus' powerful teaching, his feeding of the 5,000 and the many healings he had performed. He was a great success with the crowds. They assumed that he would become the long-awaited ruler like King David, - and they were his closest companions! I suppose it would sort of be like being Emma's coach, Andrew Richardson, who was born in P'boro and up till Dec 2020 was coach at Culford school in Bury St Edmonds. Is he wondering if Emma would like him to continue coaching her? If so, it would be a big step up for him. The disciples start wondering what their positions in Jesus' kingdom will be. But Jesus catches them arguing with each other about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. When Jesus asks them about their disagreement, they stay silent again, too ashamed to confess how they were jockeying for status and position.

Then Jesus pulls out a child from behind the taller adults and says something completely the opposite, flipping worldly power and success on its head: "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not only me but the one who sent me." The greatest in the kingdom of God are the least.

In Jesus' day children were the most vulnerable people in society. They did not have a voice; just like during the Victorian era, they were to be seen and not heard. Yet it is these, not the rich and powerful people who, Jesus says, his followers are to be like. He is saying that their dependent and humble position is not to be looked down upon, they are to be valued and honoured. It reminds me of the song of Mary, the Magnificat: the proud and arrogant are to be scattered, princes will be removed from their thrones and the lowly are exalted; the hungry will be satisfied with good things, and the rich sent away empty handed. It echoes Jesus' sermon on the mount: it is the meek who shall inherit the kingdom of God. Jesus says that the kingdom of God completely turns upside down the values, perspectives and approaches of the world.

We know this teaching, yet how much do we actually put it into practice? Do we have unconscious biases and prejudices against others who are different and/or of lower social status than us? How much do we welcome, support and listen to those who are poor, weak and vulnerable in our society? Jesus ate with tax collectors and prostitutes of his day; he went beyond the city walls to touch and heal lepers. He welcomed and respected women as his followers and he blessed little children.

Our neighbourhood and churches tend to be mostly of white middle class people, and so we don't have much opportunity to mix and learn from others. How can we show that we value those who are shown little respect in our society? The homeless; refugees, low paid factory or farm workers, carers, cleaners and so on? Are we ready to welcome and accept any in these positions into our church fellowship?

And how do we measure success in life? Is it achieving wealth, power, and social status? These are not necessarily wrong in themselves, but so often they lead people astray: wealth leads to greater greed; power corrupts, and high social status leads to arrogance. God cares more about our character than our wealth, popularity and position in society. The world looks on the outward appearance; God looks on the heart. The questions we as Jesus' followers today should be asking ourselves are: Are we kind, loving, patient and considerate of others? Are we appreciative, and

thankful for what we have? Or are we people who are always moaning and complaining? Are we forbearing of others, and ready to serve others? Or are we self-centred and selfish? Are we peace loving or combative? Are we ready to forgive and be reconciled? Or are we angry, bitter and irritable with others? These qualities are more important to God.

I hope that Emma Raducanu is supported and given wise council as she goes forward in her career. It would be a great shame if she became big headed and turned by all the wealth she will make. I saw that she was wearing a cross. I hope that she is a Christian, and that she retains her graciousness toward opponents and remains thankful for those who support her. I hope that she is encouraged to share her vast wealth with charities caring for those who do not have the opportunities that she had, and so will inherit the kingdom of God. We too, are challenged to seek first God's kingdom in our lives and thereby achieve real success. AMEN.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Eternal God, we talk of being one world, but we know in reality that it is not. We know that the world is divided into different classes, religions, races, between rich and poor, healthy and sick, powerful and powerless and sadly that these divisions seem to grow ever greater.

We pray for our troubled and divided world. We pray for those who strive to bring greater equality and acceptance of all people. We pray for those who are suffering from religious and political persecution for those experiencing racial bigotry, from dictatorships and oppression – we think of Black people, of people in Afghanistan and Hong Kong. We pray for your help for those who strive to bring peace, to let go of long-held prejudices and promote dialogue and reconciliation. May fears and suspicions that divide be overcome.

We pray for all those still suffering from Covid across the world and pray that vaccines will be made available to all. We pray for those who are not well either with chronic conditions or acute illnesses or injuries, Lord we pray for your healing touch. Help us to care and support them where we can.

Sovereign God, come again to our broken world and bring your healing. Bring peace where there is war, love where there is hatred, good where there is evil and wisdom where there is foolishness. We pray for your kingdom to come. In Jesus' name, AMEN.