



Create a peaceful space to pause, and allow yourself to feel God's presence alongside you, as near to you as your own breath. In following the reflection below, as a church we will draw closer to God and to one another as we grow in faith and deepen our sense of belonging to God.

### **Mark 8:34-35 'Jesus Taking Up His Cross'**

<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

What mask are you wearing today? This was a question that a group of which I was a part was asked on a course many years ago. We were asked to find out as much as we could about the person sitting next to you so that in three minutes, we would be able to describe him or her to the others. Of course, we were to be careful not to stray into a person's privacy. For example, what they enjoy doing or dislike doing, whether they are shy or have a sense of humour and whether they liked school. Do they have a job or what they would they like to do for a living? In what ways were they different from you. Some examples are subjective – a person may be felt to be shy by one person but not by another. Very often we put on one face or mask for one group of people and another for another group. When we go for a job interview, one group of interviewers may think you are good but another less so. 'Masks' can vary opinion!



When we read the gospel accounts of Jesus calling his disciples and meeting others, it is striking that he did not do a job interview or character assessment. They did not face annual assessments of their achievements. The group of disciples were a random group who remained with him throughout his ministry. Jesus taught them and then expected them to follow his example with total commitment. They managed this sometimes better than others.

It is human nature to want to be comfortable and in control when conversing with another. When Jesus asked his disciples who people were saying he was, they replied that some said he was John the Baptist, others said he was Elijah and still others that he was one of the prophets. It was Peter who stated that he was the Messiah. It was as though the others were not sure, maybe nervous, to say what they thought, but Peter 'took his mask off' to see Jesus more clearly.

Then what happens? Jesus teaches that the Son of Man must suffer and be put to death. Suddenly, it was if Peter once again 'put on his mask' to rebuke Jesus! Jesus replies that his thoughts were of human nature and he taught the crowd and disciples that 'all masks' have to come off. All must forget self and carry their own cross, if they wish to follow him. For Mark, this is the turning point: from then he has Jesus preparing for the last days of his life. Jesus knew what was coming to him but his disciples did not yet see it. We do not fully understand what lays ahead for our personal lives and for us as Emmanuel, but we can put our trust in Christ who has 'removed his mask' to lead the way.

### **Prayer:**

Lord God, as we go through Lent help us to be able to see you more clearly, so that we can reflect you in our lives to our neighbours, work colleagues, friends, strangers and families. Help others and us to come to know you as Lord and Saviour. Amen.