

A service for 15th January, 2023 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 96 verses 1 to 3

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples. Amen.

Our opening hymn reminds us of our need for the light of God's love to guide us. It was written by Bernadette Farrell, a gifted Roman Catholic hymn-writer, a social activist from West Yorkshire, who was the first Deputy Director of Citizens UK and whose hymns span all denominations. We shall sing hymn number 706, 'Longing for light, we wait in darkness,'

1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness,

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,

Light for the world to see. *Chorus:*

Christ, be our Light!

Shine in our hearts,

Shine through the darkness.

Christ be our Light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice. *Chorus:*

3. Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,

Shared until all are fed. *Chorus:*

4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others,

Walls made of living stone. *Chorus:*

5. Many the gifts, many the people,

Many the hearts that yearn to belong.

Let us be servants to one another,

Making your kingdom come. *Chorus:*

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Let us pray.

Word of life throughout the universe, whose compassion sustains us, you bless us with your redemptive love for all peoples, a love we see revealed in the life, death and resurrection of your dear Son, Christ Jesus. We rejoice that he has broken the power of sin and death, reconciling fallen humankind to you, our heavenly Father. Jesus offers us everlasting life through his grace, not by anything we deserve, or can do to earn it.

Therefore, as we come to offer you all our praise, adoration and thanksgiving in our worship today, take away all distraction and anxieties, so we can celebrate upon your holiness, goodness and glory. Amen.

We come to the Lord again, as we offer our prayer of thanksgiving and confession. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.

Loving Lord, accept our wholehearted thanksgiving for this beautiful, self-sustaining planet that you made for us, for all the good things that we enjoy: for opportunities to serve you and our neighbours and for people who have guided, inspired and loved us. Most of all we thank you for continuing to love us even at our worst, when we know we are faithless, loveless and disobedient.

Merciful God, we confess our failure to live as you want us to, for we do not always love and serve you wholeheartedly and sometimes disregard your call to care for others in Jesus' name, although we often try to excuse our faithlessness and disobedience. In a time of reflection we bring to mind occasions when we have failed to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, of being self-centred, rather than Christ-centred.

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

Lord of righteousness, help us turn away from wrongdoing and back to you.

Warm and soften our hearts and guide us with your truth. Bring us into the light of your love as we seek your forgiveness, so our lives reflect the victory Jesus has won over sin and death, allowing us to play our part in building your kingdom here.

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

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and that you have not only pardoned us but call us to follow Christ Jesus as his disciples, without the burden of guilt. May the power of the Holy Spirit guide and perfect our service, so our lives become a beacon to draw others to know, love and serve our risen Saviour. Amen.

We shall say the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Our next hymn was written by James Montgomery, the owner and editor, of "The Sheffield Iris" in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century. He was no respecter of authority and his newspaper constantly supported the downtrodden and exploited, opposed slavery, poor sanitation, bad housing, the use of boy chimney sweeps and State Lotteries, but supported the teaching of reading and writing in Sunday Schools (State education did not exist until 1871). We sing hymn number 228, 'Hail to the Lord's Anointed,'

1. Hail to the Lord's Anointed,

Great David's greater Son!

Hail, in the time appointed,

His reign on earth begun!

He comes to break oppression,

To set the captives free,

To take away transgression

And rule in equity.

2. He comes, with succour speedy,

To those who suffer wrong;

To help the poor and needy,
And bid the weak be strong;
To give them songs for sighing,
Their darkness turn to light,
Whose souls, condemned and dying,
Were precious in his sight.

3. He shall come down like showers
Upon the fruitful earth;
Love, joy and hope, like flowers,
Spring in his path to birth;
Before him, on the mountains,
Shall peace the herald go;
And righteousness, in fountains,
From hill to valley flow.

4. Kings shall fall down before him
And gold and incense bring;
All nations shall adore him,
His praise all people sing;
To him shall prayer unceasing
And daily vows ascend,
His kingdom still increasing,
A kingdom without end.

5. O'er every foe victorious,
He on his throne shall rest;
From age to age more glorious,
All-blessing and all-blest.
The tide of time shall never
His covenant remove;
His name shall stand for ever,
His changeless name of Love.

© James Montgomery (1771 – 1854)

We come now to our prayers of intercession. Let us pray.

Lord of light and life, Christ Jesus came as the True Light in the sin-darkened, broken world, for which we pray now. In recognition of your boundless grace to us, we offer ourselves to play what part we can to build your kingdom here as we reach out to neighbours who are in distress or need. However, we know how limited our powers are, so we turn to you, our gracious heavenly Father, to whom nothing is impossible. Move the hearts and minds of people who wield power and influence to encourage them to bring about much-needed change.

Lord, guide leaders of the wealthy nations to be generous to the people of countries where there is great poverty and suffering, in particular lands afflicted by famine and natural disasters. We ask a blessing on charities like the Disasters Emergency Committee, All We Can and Christian Aid which are working to provide them with desperately-needed aid.

We pray, too, for people in this country who are struggling to live as inflation increases to record levels and the cost of food and fuel spirals out of control. We thank you for food banks, warm spaces and for other initiatives which are helping the poor, but pray that new ways may be found to help people who are facing the awful choice of heating their homes, or of eating during the winter.

Heavenly Father, we ask your blessing on the National Health Service at this time of crisis: for service-users and the doctors and nurses who are caring for them. We remember, too, the teams of street pastors who have striven to keep late-night revellers from coming to harm. May your healing hand rest upon them and fill them with your peace.

Jesus came to heal and comfort the marginalised and sick whom he met, so we pray for the healing of everybody we know who is sick in body, mind or spirit. Grant them wellbeing, hope and peace not only through the professional care and support they are given, but by feeling your presence during their time of need.

We know this time of year is especially difficult for many people who have been bereaved, or those who are lonely, or who feel undervalued, or who are homeless and unemployed, for seeing others celebrating sharpens their grief and loss. Help us to be sensitive to the needs of people around us, so we can befriend and support them. In a period of silence, we pray for everyone we know who needs your help at this time Loving Lord, hold them in the warmth of your love, so it may bring them healing, comfort, hope and peace.

At this time of year, we recall that the infant Jesus was forced to escape Herod's wrath by fleeing to Egypt, so we pray for the victims of war, terrorism, prejudice and oppression. Lord speak to the hearts and minds of national leaders, so they turn away from using violence as a means of gaining their own way. Instead, may they govern with mercy and justice which are the foundations of true peace.

Heavenly Father, we offer our prayer for victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and persecution. We pray particularly for an end to the war in Ukraine and the heartbreaking suffering of the civil population. Bring an end to their anguish and help them rebuild their lives in peace and security. Help us promote peace, too, by the way in which we treat our neighbours. Warm our hearts with your love, so peace begins with us.

Saviour, we pray for this church and churches in our Circuit, that we may be a light of hope to a sin-darkened world. We pray, too, for the World Church, that old differences may be set aside and all Christians learn to serve you in unity of mission to draw many to you. Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing to do your holy will.

Abba, Father, bless us our families and our friends as we answer our call to serve you. May the Holy Spirit inspire us to share the abundance of your love with all-comers, so we honour you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is John chapter 1 verses 29 to 42

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said,

“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said,

“Look, the Lamb of God!” When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?”

They said, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?”

“Come,” he replied, “and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him,

“We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said,

“You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter). Amen.

Our next hymn is on our sheets and is a modified version of one written on New Year’s Day 2017, after I had been to worship at Amblecote Wordsley. We sing, ‘The Lord invites us, ‘Come and see,’

1. The Lord invites us, ‘Come and see,

Leave all your work and follow me:

Spend time with me and you shall see

My grace can save humanity.’

Christ Jesus calls us; let us go

And talk with him, our hearts aglow.

2. The Lord invites us, ‘Eat with me;

The Bread I bear will set you free.

I bring good news for one and all

If they but listen to my call.’

Christ Jesus calls us; ‘Let us eat,

And I shall make your faith complete’.

3. The Lord invites us, ‘Stay awhile:

Restore, forgive and reconcile.

Pray for this world of greed and pain,

And seek to make it whole again.’

Christ Jesus calls us; Don’t delay!

Let love and justice win the day.

4. The Lord invites us, ‘Walk with me:

Where’er you serve, there I shall be.

Friends, be my hands, my eyes, my voice

Use all your talents and rejoice.’

Christ Jesus calls us; ‘Follow, friends;

Come, live the life that never ends’.

Martin Rider – 4th January, 2023 (to ‘Careys’ StF 454i, ‘Abingdon’ StF499, or ‘Mount Sion (Pleyel)’ StF661)

Sermon: “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.” John 1:39

It is fascinating to see how the characters of Simon Peter and Andrew were so different, yet how effective each was in his discipleship. Simon Peter was high profile, enthusiastic to the point of recklessness and he often found himself out of his comfort zone when he spoke or acted without thinking of the consequences. However, for all his flaws and failings, he was humble enough to acknowledge his weakness and to

pick himself up and continue his discipleship without sulking. Even the account of how Simon tried to walk on water is not a sign of hubris, but his sincere wish to imitate Jesus before he realised that Christ was not just a miracle-working rabbi, but God in man. Although he was the Rock on which Jesus built the Church, Peter would have been the last person to claim to be infallible.

Simon's brother, Andrew, was a much quieter character, keeping to the background, rather than being pushy. Both were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee and, like many Jews of their time they were anxiously looking for the Messiah, God's anointed, who would redeem his chosen people. After all, for six centuries the Jews had been occupied and oppressed by Gentiles: Babylonians, Greeks and Romans. Most Jews wanted to be able to rule themselves without foreign interference and thought, wrongly as it happened, that the Messiah would come to restore Judea politically and militarily.

When they heard of a startling new prophet, John the Baptist, who lived near **Qumran** with the priestly **Essenes**, the brothers became his disciples. John the Baptist was the son of a priest, yet he had chosen to live in the monastic community of the Essenes, rather than follow his father. John dressed and lived simply, rather like **Elijah** had. He wore a camel hair habit, secured with a leather belt and lived on wild bees' honey and locust, food sought by the poor. John was a Nazarite, for he had been pledged to the Lord by his parents and his message was as stark as his appearance: **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."** He offered baptism to the crowds who came to hear him, for although it was not part of Jewish religious practice, baptism symbolised the washing away of sins and the offering of a new beginning to their relationship with the Lord.

Simon and Andrew were drawn to John because of his uncompromising message and its urgency, for they wanted to be a part of Judah's salvation. They would have been delighted when multitudes came to be baptised and like many contemporaries they may have wondered whether or not he was the Messiah, but he quashed such speculation as he told the crowds, **"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."**

One day, out of the blue, John the Baptist pointed at Jesus as he walked past, telling his followers, **"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'** John added that he had offered baptism with water so that this man might be revealed to the people. He declared that he had seen the Holy Spirit descend and remain on Jesus and testified that he was the Son of God. This testimony was important for early Christians, because it unequivocally declared Jesus to be the Messiah and not the Baptist.

Next day, John pointed out Jesus to Andrew and another follower, saying, **"Look, the Lamb of God."** The pair must have been amazed: after all, Jesus was apparently an ordinary man – a carpenter from Nazareth as well as a relative of John. Nevertheless, they took John at his word and followed Jesus until he asked them, **"What do you want?"**

They said, **"Rabbi, 'where are you staying?'"** which was a traditional way of inviting themselves to join him. Jesus replied, **"Come, and you will see"** and so they spent the rest of the day with him. I can imagine that as they talked, ate, laughed and prayed together Jesus must have made a great impression on Andrew, for the first

thing he did when he returned home was to tell his brother, Simon, **“We have found the Messiah!”** Without further ado, Andrew took Simon to Jesus, who declared that he would call him **Cephas**, an Aramaic name equivalent to **Petros**, or Peter, meaning a rock. Although it was a play on words, it was not a joke, for that name change also marked a transformation of Simon Peter’s life and the beginning of Christ’s ministry. However, whilst Simon Peter remained high-profile, Andrew worked behind the scenes as a facilitator and a bringer of people to Jesus. It was Andrew who brought a boy with the five loaves and two fish to Jesus before Jesus fed the five thousand and, soon after Christ had raised Lazarus, when some Gentiles asked to see Jesus, it was Andrew and Philip who took them to him.

A fortnight ago, Pope Benedict was buried with great ceremony and before a huge crowd. As Pope Emeritus, he was a figurehead within the Church and we need leaders to provide guidance and vision. However, the Church also needs its Andrews and Andreas, people who work quietly within their communities, sharing good news, offering fellowship and support and, not the least, asking neighbours to, ‘Come and see’ when they want to know why they’re different from other people they know.

Do you recognise the Jesus about whom I have testified? Is he special to you? Like Andrew, are you being challenged to bring others to know and follow him? Does that challenge scare you? If so, don’t panic. You don’t have to go from door to door preaching; nor do you have to stand in a pulpit to fulfil Jesus’ wishes. No, let the love and joy of Christ shine through everyday situations, for when people see that there is something special in our lives, some will want to know what makes us different. Then we can quietly invite them to come and see, then leave the rest for the Lord. May the love of Christ Jesus bless each of us and may we in turn be a blessing to God’s kingdom. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. As with many of their hymns, it is set to a Scots ballad, in this case “Kelvingrove”. Hymn number 673, ‘Will you come and follow me,’

1. Will you come and follow me

If I but call your name?

Will you go where you don’t know

And never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown,

Will you let my name be known,

Will you let my life be grown

In you, and you in me?

2. Will you leave yourself behind

If I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind

And never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare

Should your life attract or scare,

Will you let me answer prayer

In you, and you in me?

3. Will you let the blinded see

If I but call your name?

Will you set the pris’ners free,

And never be the same?

**Will you kiss the leper clean
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean
In you, and you in me?**

**4. Will you love the 'you' you hide
If I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside,
And never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around
Through my sight and touch and sound
In you, and you in me?**

**5. Lord, your summons echoes true
When you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you,
And never be the same.
In your company I'll go
Where your love and footsteps show.
Thus, I'll move and live and grow
In you, and you in me.**

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Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and for evermore. Amen.