

A service for 18th January, 2026 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 27 verse 1

The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community and is set to a Gaelic melody, like many of their hymns. We sing the first three verses of hymn number 28, 'Jesus calls us here to meet him'.

1. Jesus calls us here to meet him

As, through word and song and prayer,

We affirm God's promised presence

Where his people live and care.

Praise the God who keeps his promise;

Praise the Son who calls us friends;

Praise the Spirit who, among us,

To our hopes and fears attends.

2. Jesus calls us to confess him

Word of life and Lord of all,

Sharer of our flesh and frailness,

Saving all who fail or fall,

Tell his holy human story;

Tell his tales that all may hear;

Tell the world that Christ in glory

Came to earth to meet us here.

3. Jesus calls us to each other,

Vastly different though we are;

Creed and colour, class and gender

Neither limit nor debar.

Join the hand of friend and stranger;

Join the hands of age and youth;

Join the faithful and the doubter

In their common search for truth.

© John L. Bell (born 1949) & Graham Maule (1958- 2019)

Let us pray

Heavenly Father, you have called us here to worship and adore you. Grant us the time and space to reflect upon your boundless wisdom and might which formed and sustains all life throughout the universe. Awesome God, your love for sinful human beings is as boundless as your holiness and power, yet although we defied your attempts to draw us close to you, you revealed yourself to us by taking our mortal flesh and living amongst us as Jesus Christ. Through him, you know each one of us completely. By his life, death and resurrection, Jesus not only demonstrated your faithful grace, but broke the power of sin and death, offering us everlasting life. 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 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'.

We thank you, Lord, for all that you have done for us and given to us throughout our lives. Thank you for this amazing, beautiful and self-sustaining world on which we live,

the good things we have received from you which have brought us pleasure; for special people who have enriched our lives; experiences that have left us powerful memories and challenges that have added zest to our lives.

Amazing God, your love for us is beyond our understanding, yet we fall short of what you would have us be. Whereas you are holy, 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 quiet 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 to hold us back. 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.

We continue our worship with a hymn by the wife of a Nineteenth Century Primate of all Ireland, the remarkable Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander. Cecil was a quaint Irish custom of naming a child after a family sponsor. Needless to say, she was called Fanny by family and friends! Hymn number 250, 'Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult'.

**1. Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult
Of our life's wild restless sea,
Day by day his clear voice soundeth,
Saying, "Christian, follow me."**

**2. As of old apostles heard it
By the Galilean lake
Turned from home and toil and kindred,
Leaving all for his dear sake.**

**3. Jesus calls us from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store:
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love me more."**

**4. In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil, and hours of ease,
Still he calls, in cares and pleasures,**

“Christian, love me more than these.”

**5. Jesus calls us! By thy mercies,
Saviour, may we hear thy call,
Give our hearts to thine obedience,
Serve and love thee best of all.**

© Cecil Frances Alexander (1818 – 1895)

We come now to our prayers of intercession for people nearby and far away.

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 greater power and influence to encourage them to bring about much-needed change. Nevertheless, help us to play our part to build your kingdom by our discipleship.

Heavenly Father, we pray for people in the Caribbean and Filipinos who are recovering from a recent hurricane and typhoons, for Californians and Sumatrans who have experienced severe floods, too. May they swiftly receive the help they need to rebuild their damaged properties and disrupted lives. Grant them courage and resilience to deal with the effects of these disasters and to rebuild what they have lost.

Jesus came to bring healing and comfort to the marginalised and ill whom he met, so we pray for 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. In your mercy, hear our prayer for people who are lonely, depressed, or anxious, for those who are experiencing problems with addictions, or with relationships and for those who have been bereaved. 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 who need your help at this time Loving Lord, hold them in the warmth of your love, so they experience comfort, hope and peace.

Sovereign Lord, we pray for the victims of war and man's inhumanity to man. We pray for peace in the many lands where fighting mars the lives of ordinary people, especially Ukraine and the Holy Land, and in countries like Iran where people face brutal repression. Remember those affected by terrorism, oppression and discrimination. Guide the leaders of the world to seek justice and mercy in their dealings and to resist the temptation to use force in order to impose their will on others. Teach them instead to see value in negotiation and compromise when disagreements arise.

Lord of all, may your Holy Spirit fill, guide and inspire your church, not only here, but churches in local Circuits and, indeed, the World Church. Unite us in love and service, so we may proclaim good news in words and actions. Help us all to bear the Christ-light faithfully so that our actions and our words proclaim your transformative, redemptive love to all-comers.

Abba, Father, bless us our families and our friends as we answer our call to serve you. May our joy of knowing how dearly you love us inspire us to let the light of your love shine through everything we do, 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 a modified version of one I originally wrote 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,
Now leave your work and follow me:
Spend time with me and you shall see
I’ve come to save humanity.’
Christ Jesus calls, so let us go
And talk with him, our hearts aglow.**

**2. The Lord invites us, ‘Eat with me;
The Bread I share will set souls free.
I bring good news for everyone
Bowed down by sin and woe-begone.’
Christ Jesus calls us; ‘Share my Bread,
I have a gospel you must spread’.**

**3. The Lord invites us, ‘Hear my word,
Reflect, then spread what you have heard.
Go to this world of greed and pain,
And seek to make it whole again.’
Christ Jesus calls us; Don’t delay!
Let loving-kindness win the day.**

**4. The Lord invites us, ‘Follow, friends,
I bring good news that never ends.
Come, be my hands, my eyes, my voice;
Use all your talents and rejoice.’**

Christ Jesus speaks; let's heed his call:

And share good news with one and all.

Martin Rider – 29/01/2025 (to '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 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. 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.

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.**

We close our worship with a hymn by Jacqueline Jones to challenge us. She was originally from South Africa, but now lives in Christchurch, NZ as a vicar's wife!
Hymn number 662, ‘Have you heard God’s voice; has your heart been stirred?’

1. Have you heard God’s voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

**Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
Though the way be rough and narrow? Chorus:**

***Will you walk the path that will cost you much
And embrace the pain and sorrow?***

***Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
The disciples of tomorrow?***

**2. Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
When the multitudes are silent?**

**Will you make a choice to stand your ground
When the crowds are turning violent? Chorus:**

**3. In your city streets will you be God’s heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?**

**Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
Will you share your faith with the faithless? Chorus:**

4. Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith

And believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint? *Chorus:*
We will walk the path that will cost us much
And embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to us
The disciples of tomorrow.

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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 evermore. Amen.