

**A service for 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2023 (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 (born 1958)

***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 that formed and sustains all life throughout the universe. Awesome God, your love for sinful human beings is as boundless as your creative 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 shared our joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, our trials and temptations and 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 through faith, not through anything we can earn or deserve.

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, though we know we have not treated with the care it requires. Help us to make changes in our lifestyles that mean forthcoming generations will have a planet worth inheriting. Loving Lord, we reflect upon the good things we have received from you: things that have brought us pleasure; 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. We confess that we have not loved you wholeheartedly, nor have we loved other people as we would like them to love us. Merciful Lord, for the sins we have committed and for the good we have neglected to do, forgive us in Jesus' name, as we turn back to the path you call us to walk with you.

Gracious, loving God, we believe that you hear and answer all prayers and, trusting that in your great goodness and mercy you have pardoned us, teach us to serve you as you desire, so that, by helping and loving others in Jesus' lovely name, we may bring you honour and glory for as long as we live. Amen.

***We shall say the prayer that Jesus taught us.***

**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. Let us pray.***

Almighty God, Christ Jesus came as the True Light for this beautiful, yet broken and sin-darkened world for which we pray now. In recognition of your boundless grace to us, help us play what part we can, however small, to help build your kingdom here as we reach out to neighbours who are in distress or need. However, we know our powers are

limited, so we turn to you, our gracious heavenly Father, to whom nothing is impossible. Warm the hearts and minds of people who wield power and influence to encourage them to bring about much-needed change.

Lord, we pray for 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. May we be generous in our support, too.

We pray, too, for people in this country who are struggling to live as inflation, the cost of food, energy and fuel spirals out of control. We thank you for food banks, warm spaces and for other initiatives which are helping the poor. May new ways 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, paramedics and nurses who are caring for them. May ways be found to address the issues that are threatening the institution.

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. 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.

Lord of shalom, we offer our prayer for victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and persecution. We pray that national leaders will turn from aggression to the path of peace and will govern with justice and mercy. We pray in particular for an end to the war in Ukraine and the heartbreaking suffering and privation 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 bear light of hope to a sin-darkened world. At the end of the Week for Christian Unity, 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. 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. Keep us safe in your care and help us lead Christ-centred lives by sharing the abundance of your love with everybody we meet, so we honour you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 4 verses 12 to 23**

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. Amen.

*We continue our worship as we sing a hymn on our sheets which is a modified version of one I wrote in 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:  
Engage 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 – 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2023 (to ‘Careys’ StF 454i, ‘Abingdon’ StF499, or ‘Mount Sion (Pleyel)’ StF661)*

**Sermon:** “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” Mtt. 4:19  
The gospels’ accounts of the calling of the first disciples seems contradictory, for whilst Matthew and Mark’s accounts broadly agree, Luke precedes their call with a miraculous catch of fish and John’s gospel tells of how John the Baptist pointed out Jesus as “The Lamb of God” to Andrew and another disciple, whereupon the pair pursued Jesus. However, the contradiction is comforting, because the four gospels were written independently, many years after the event, in different parts of the Middle East, so it

would be more worrying if they agreed on every detail. As an old schoolmaster, I became suspicious if witnesses to an incident I was investigating used the same words and details in their evidence – because it sounded like collusion. We also need to remember that the gospel accounts were never intended solely as historical facts: the essential events were interpreted in ways to encourage the readers to follow.

It is clear that the arrest of John the Baptist galvanised Jesus' mission, for he moved to Capernaum and called the twelve as he began his public ministry. He may have chosen the region of Galilee because it was relatively free from government interference, or perhaps because it was radical in its views towards both Herod and the occupying Romans, so the people might be less inclined to make trouble for him when they heard his preaching. His choice of Galilee also fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah: **“In the past the Lord humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honour Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;”** Jesus first brought the light of God's Good News to a district where there was a complex mixture of Jews and Gentiles, showing that God the Father's new covenant with human beings was to be for all people who would accept it, not only Jews.

What, therefore, is Matthew's version of the call of Andrew, Simon Peter, James and John? To begin with, Jesus called ordinary people engaged in mundane tasks. The first four disciples were fishermen who would have required the following qualities: courage to brave the sudden squalls on the Sea of Galilee; patience to wait for the right conditions to cast their nets; teamwork to fulfil their duties and confidence that God would provide the fish to catch. These qualities suited them to the calling of the Lord. Nevertheless, other people would have struggled to see anything special about these men, so Matthew was teaching that Christ can do extraordinary things with simple people like us. Jesus did not need to call in consultants, experts or spin-doctors, for his message is simple and needs no spin: **‘Turn from your old way of life, follow my path and be a member of God's kingdom’.**

Both Matthew's and Mark's accounts of the calling of the first four disciples say that they answered the call at once, which is almost certainly not meant literally, for they had both business and family responsibilities, so they would have needed to make provision for both before they left home. After all, what kind of people would they have been if they'd simply walked out of business and home? It is certain that Andrew, Peter, James and John had known Jesus before their call, so they would have already set plans in train before Jesus called them away. Matthew and Mark used the immediacy of responding to Christ's call to encourage readers to act quickly, before others could dissuade them, or their enthusiasm waned; after all, the longer we wait before we begin a challenging task, the more likely it is that we'll be filled with doubts and will give up. Just as Jesus called, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near,”** so we need to strike while the iron is hot, rather than finding excuses not to act.

One person who answered Christ's call and made a huge difference to many people's lives as a result was William Booth, who was born to a poor Nottingham family in 1829 and was apprenticed to a pawnbroker in Nottingham. His work led him to see how miserable were the lives of the poor, especially when men drank away their pitifully small wages and left their families little to nothing to live on. When he was seventeen, he felt his church was more concerned for themselves than for others, so he tried to test their faith by taking some tramps into the church for morning service. The horrified congregation made William take his guests to the back of the church, ignoring William's protests that the tramps were the very people Jesus was calling them to serve.

Soon afterwards, he went to London and began to preach but it wasn't until he was thirty-six, married and father of eight children that he gathered supporters in London, to open soup kitchens to feed the poor and homeless. Despite attacks from mobs supported by the owners of 'gin palaces' which William and his friends spoke out against, the poor people grew to trust them. William and his friends believed they were waging war against ignorance, wickedness and poverty, so they adopted military-style uniforms, organised themselves loosely on military lines and called themselves the Salvation Army. They carried the Good News onto the streets and learned to compose and play cheerful hymn melodies, because William demanded, "Why should the devil have the best tunes?" As a result, by the time William Booth died, the Salvation Army had spread throughout the U.K. and was established in the USA and other countries, too. Most importantly, it had built a reputation for being Christians, who got their hands dirty for Jesus' sake, Christians whose actions spoke as loudly as their words. It gets my vote, if for no other reason that the Salvation Army is banned in Putin's Russia as a subversive organisation!

A Christian poster once asked, **'If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?'** May all of us be able to answer 'yes' to that and may our words and deeds provide clear evidence as we answer our call to follow Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Our closing hymn was written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. John Bell is a frequent contributor to Radio 4's "Thought for Today" and believes in a social ministry. Their hymns are usually set to old Scots ballads, but this is sung to a French carol melody, 'Noel Nouvelet'. We sing hymn number 251, 'Jesus Christ is waiting'.*

**1. Jesus Christ is waiting,  
Waiting in the streets;  
No one is his neighbour,  
All alone he eats.  
Listen, Lord Jesus,  
I am lonely, too:  
Make me, friend or stranger,  
Fit to wait on you.**

**2. Jesus Christ is raging,  
Raging in the streets,  
Where injustice spirals  
And real hope retreats.  
Listen, Lord Jesus,  
I am angry, too:  
In the kingdom's causes,  
Let me rage with you.**

**3. Jesus Christ is healing,  
Healing in the streets,  
Curing those who suffer,  
Touching those he greets.  
Listen, Lord Jesus,  
I have pity, too:  
Let my care be active,  
Healing, just like you.**

**4. Jesus Christ is dancing,  
Dancing in the streets,  
Where each sign of hatred  
He, with love, defeats.  
Listen, Lord Jesus,  
I should triumph, too:  
Where good conquers evil,  
Let me dance with you.**

**5. Jesus Christ is calling,  
Calling in the streets,  
'Who will join my journey?  
I will guide their feet.'  
Listen, Lord Jesus,  
Let my fears be few:  
Walk one step before me;  
I will follow you.**

© *John L. Bell (B 1949) & Graham Maule (B 1958)*

***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.