

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 in 1998 by Brian Doerksen, a Canadian singer-songwriter, when he was only thirty-three years old. He was something of a prodigy – his earliest hymns were published when he was in his mid-twenties. Hymn number 24, ‘Come, now is the time to worship’.

Come, now is the time to worship.

Come, now is the time to give your heart.

Come, just as you are to worship.

Come, just as you are before your God, come.

One day every tongue

Will confess you are God,

One day every knee will bow.

Still, the greatest treasure remains

For those who gladly choose You now.

Come, now is the time to worship

© Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

Let us pray

Heavenly Father, you have called us here to worship and adore you. Grant us the time and space in our worship 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 intimately. 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 wonderful, 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. Most of all, thank you for Jesus, our Saviour, without whom we are helpless and hopeless.

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 sinfulness and 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, we are ashamed for letting you down. 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.

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:

Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your Name; your kingdom come; your will be done; on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Our Old Testament reading is Isaiah chapter 9 verses 1 to 4

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he 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; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Amen.

Isaiah's oracle speaks of the Lord's redemption for Judeans living in exile in Babylon, points towards the coming of the Messiah. Daniel Shutte, a member of the St. Louis Jesuits in the USA, wrote our next hymn in 1981. This hymn uses imagery from the call of Isaiah and has become one of our most popular hymns.

Hymn number 663, 'I, the Lord of sea and sky,'

1. I, the Lord of sea and sky,

I have heard my people cry;

All who dwell in dark and sin

My hand will save.

I, who made the stars of night,

I will make their darkness bright.

I will speak my word to them.

Whom shall I send? Chorus:

Here I am, Lord.

Is it I, Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord,

If you lead me;

I will hold your people in my heart.

**2. I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them –
They turn away.**

**I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone;
I will speak my word to them.**

Whom shall I send? *Chorus:*

**3. I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame,
I will set a feast for them –
My hand will save.**

**Finest bread I will provide
Till their hearts are satisfied;
I will give my life to them.**

Whom shall I send? *Chorus:*

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

Lord of light and life, Christ Jesus came as the Saviour of this 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 know 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 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.

Our next hymn is a modified and, I hope, improved version of one I originally wrote on New Year's Day 2017, after I had been to worship at Amblecote Wordsley, during which the words sprang to mind. It is sung to “Mount Sion”, used for Charles Wesley's hymn, 'Give me the faith which can remove'. We shall 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 – 29th December, 2025 (to 'Abingdon' StF499, or 'Mount Sion (Pleyel)' StF661)

Sermon: "*Come, follow me,*" Jesus said, "*and I will make you fishers of people.*" Mtt. 4:19 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 prophesies 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 is the significance of Matthew's account 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? 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. I am grateful for Sister Jane Day who literally prodded me to answer my call to preach after a decade of backsliding. Ira Sankey was given no choice.

The American evangelist, Dwight Moody was only modestly successful in his hometown, Chicago, even though he was a very gifted preacher. However, in 1870, thirty year-old Ira Sankey travelled to an international YMCA convention at Indianapolis, for a rally led by Dwight Moody. Despite Dwight Moody's inspired preaching, the rally

was clearly failing to inspire the congregation, for the music was abysmal. The organist played too slowly and the singing lacked conviction. Sankey waited until there was a pause, then rose and sang William Cowper's, "**There is a fountain filled with blood**", unaccompanied. There was an awed silence during the first verse; then everyone stood to sing the remaining verses with gusto. Thereafter a new spirit flowed through Mr. Moody's rally.

At the end of the meeting, Dwight Moody sought out Ira Sankey and immediately enquired,

"Where are you from? Are you married? What is your business?" Ira Sankey replied **he was from Newcastle, Pennsylvania, was married with two children and was a government tax inspector.** Impulsively, Mr. Moody retorted, **"You will have to give it up!"** adding, **"I have been looking for you for eight years."** Thus began a twenty-six-year evangelical partnership that brought thousands to know and serve the Lord.

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. 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.

We close our worship with a hymn by Revd. Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr., one of the most prolific and theologically thoughtful hymn writers in the United States at the turn of the Twenty-first Century. He was Professor of Preaching at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg until his retirement in 1989. It was an active retirement, as he continued to teach, preach, lead workshops and conferences, and write hymns, many of which challenge us. Hymn number 674, 'Would I have answered when you called'

1. Would I have answered when you called,

'Come follow, follow me!'?

Would I at once have left behind

Both work and family?

Or would the old, familiar round

Have held me by its claim

And kept the spark within my heart

From bursting into flame?

2. Would I have followed where you led

Through ancient Galilee,

On roads unknown, by ways untried,

Beyond security?

Or would I soon have hurried back

Where home and comfort drew,

Where truth you taught would not disturb

The ordered world I knew.

3. Would I have matched my step with yours

When crowds cried, 'Crucify!',

When on a rocky hill I saw a cross

Against the sky?

Or would I too have slipped away

And left you there alone,
A dying king with crown of thorns
Upon a terrible throne?

4. O Christ, I cannot search my heart
Through all its tangled ways,
Nor can I with a certain mind
My steadfastness appraise.
I only pray that when you call,
'Come follow, follow me!',
You'll give me strength beyond my own
To follow faithfully.

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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.