

**A service for 6<sup>th</sup> February, 2022 (StF)**

**Call to worship: Psalm 138 verses 2 to 5**

I will bow down towards your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word. When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stout-hearted.

May all the kings of the earth praise you, O LORD, when they hear the words of your mouth. May they sing of the ways of the LORD, for the glory of the LORD is great. Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written by Thomas Obadiah Chisholm in 1923. He was ordained as a Methodist minister in 1903. Unfortunately, his health broke down within a year and he was forced to stand down, becoming an insurance salesman in later life. Although it became a favourite hymn in the Moody Bible Institute, this hymn remained largely unknown in the United Kingdom for four decades. Mind you, when it appeared in “The Baptist Hymnbook” of 1962, it deservedly became popular with every denomination. We shall sing hymn number 200, ‘Great is thy faithfulness’.*

**1. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father,  
There is no shadow of turning with thee;  
Thou changest not; thy compassions, they fail not;  
As thou hast been thou forever shall be: *Chorus:*  
*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!***

*Morning by morning new mercies I see.  
All I have needed thy hand has provided.  
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

**2. Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,  
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,  
Join with all nature in manifold witness,  
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love. *Chorus:***

**3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! *Chorus:***

© Thomas O. Chisholm (1866 – 1960)

**Let us pray**

Almighty God, you spoke life into being throughout the universe, bringing light and order to darkness and chaos. You made this beautiful, self-sustaining planet upon which we live and entrusted us to exercise stewardship over the world. You created us in your image and have striven to draw us into the closest of relationships with you. Even when we set ourselves against you, you persevered and shared our mortal flesh as Jesus Christ, who grew up among people like us, sharing our hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, our trials and temptations, yet doing so without sinning, showing us how you want us to live. He is Emmanuel, God with us and alongside us. We believe his death and resurrection broke the hold of sin and death over us and we have eternal life through faith in him.

Amazing heavenly Father, may we pray to you in faith, sing your praises joyfully and listen to your guiding word, for you are the Lord of all and our Saviour. We offer you all honour, glory power and praise in our worship, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

***Let us offer a prayer of thanksgiving and confession to the Lord. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy', please reply, 'Hear our prayer'.***

Heavenly Father, we offer thanks for the many blessings we receive from you, day by day: for the many good things we enjoy; for people who have blessed us by their example and loving-care, but most of all that you love us even at our worst, when we are loveless and unlovable.

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

Merciful Lord, pardon us when we don't love our neighbours as we love ourselves and for times when we see neighbours in need or distress but don't help them. Forgive us, too, for our failure commit ourselves to you and to serve you whole-heartedly. Help us to change our ways, so that our lives become Christ-centred, not self-centred.

***'Lord, in your mercy', please reply, 'Hear our prayer'.***

Gracious and faithful God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only forgiven us, but you call us to follow you once more, unburdened by guilt. Therefore, Lord, as you offer us a fresh start, fill us now with the power of the Holy Spirit to love and serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully in the blessed name of Christ Jesus our Lord and Friend. Amen.

***We shall say the prayer our Lord taught his disciples:***

***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 Daniel Schutte in 1981. He was born in Wisconsin, USA, in the same year as me and became a Jesuit in the same year that he published this hymn. He entered parish ministry in Milwaukee serving as director of music at Immaculate Heart of Mary and then Our Lady of Lourdes parishes and is a prolific hymn-writer for the Catholic Church. Hymn number 857, '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. Let us pray.***

Sovereign God, Light of the world, you are our strength and refuge in times of trouble and our delight in good times. You bless us with your love, so, we turn to you, asking you to help us to act as your earthly hands by helping neighbours who are in need or any kind of trouble. Although our own powers are limited and at times the brokenness of our world threatens to overwhelm us, we are not afraid to ask you to reach out to inspire people with power and influence who can heal the suffering we see around us, for we know that to you all things are possible.

Lord, we are aware of the brokenness of this beautiful, yet fragile world and of our call to bear the gospel light of our Saviour, help us to play what part we can to build a better world by seeking justice for all, by campaigning to relieve poverty here and abroad, by sharing the earth's resources instead of fighting over them and by learning to co-operate with one another, accepting and even celebrating our differences, rather than allowing them to divide us.

We remember in our prayer the poor, disfranchised and marginalised in the world, particularly people from the Developing world whose lives are often painful, bitter and short and who are desperately short of COVID19 vaccines. We know that, the more people who are vaccinated, the less likely it is that new variants will develop, so we pray that excess vaccines will be distributed, rather than expiring in warehouses, in order that our poorer brothers and sisters will be protected against the pandemic.

Heavenly Father, we grieve at our inability to co-exist peacefully with our neighbours, especially as the tensions between Ukraine and Russia could spill into open conflict, adding to the number of wars that not only result in deaths, injury and destruction, but swell the number of refugees who face danger, exploitation and rejection in their search for a fresh, safe start. Teach the leaders of all nations to find better ways of resolving differences with neighbours, rather than resorting to force and inspire them to rule with justice and mercy, for only then can true peace prevail. In your mercy, remember people in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Sudan where strife is threatening to compound catastrophic famines, threatening the lives of millions. We ask that governments and relief agencies may be able to avert a large-scale catastrophe in these countries.

Gracious Lord, hear our prayer for people who have lost loved-ones because of COVID19, or during this pandemic; others who are suffering from long COVID19, or who lost employment because of the end of furlough or lockdown; people who are burdened by debt as a result of the pandemic; neighbours who are lonely, afraid, or who feel abandoned by families and friends; people whose relationships have broken

down and children whose lives have been restricted and whose education has been damaged during the last two years.

Jesus came to bring healing and wellbeing, so we ask you to look with compassion on people who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, particularly those whose condition is a result of events of the last two years. Help them find healing, renewed strength and hope, not only as a result of the care and support they receive, but by experiencing your loving presence in their need. We pray, too, for people who live with a dementia and their friends, families and carers for whom the pandemic has been almost unbearable. Loving Lord, comfort them in their distress and ease their brokenness.

In a time of silence, we bring to mind people around us who are in special need of your care and, as we name them before you, we are confident you will know their needs and will reach out to them in loving-kindness: .....

Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but embrace everybody for whom we pray with the warmth of your love, offering them healing, courage, comfort and lasting peace.

Holy God, we pray for our church, churches in our district and, indeed, for the World Church as we begin to emerge from the shadow of the pandemic. Help us learn new, effective ways to serve our communities and to reflect the goodness and grace of Jesus by proclaiming Good News with one voice and serving him with united hearts.

Lord, hear our prayer as we ask you to bless people who have worked steadfastly to support us throughout this pandemic: workers in the NHS, carers in both homes and in the community, scientists who are developing both anti-COVID vaccines and medicines, besides key-workers in production, transportation, warehousing and retail throughout the country. May they remain successful and safe in their work, Lord.

Abba, Father God, look upon us, our families and our friends with compassion. Keep us safe and guide us in your holy ways, so we may bear the light of the gospel message into the darkest corners of your kingdom, in the glorious name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

*We continue our worship with a hymn written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. They often set hymns to Scots ballad tunes, in this case “Kelvingrove”. We shall sing 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.**

*© John Bell & Graham Maule WGRG (1987)*

**The Old Testament reading is Isaiah chapter 6 verses 1 to 8**

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. He was sitting on his throne, high and exalted, and his robe filled the whole Temple. Round him flaming creatures were standing, each of which had six wings. Each creature covered its face with two wings, and its body with two, and used the other two for flying. They were calling out to each other:

“Holy, holy, holy! The LORD Almighty is holy! His glory fills the world.”

The sound of their voices made the foundation of the Temple shake, and the Temple itself was filled with smoke. I said,

“There is no hope for me! I am doomed because every word that passes my lips is sinful, and I live among a people whose every word is sinful. And yet, with my own eyes, I have seen the King, the LORD Almighty!”

Then one of the creatures flew down to me, carrying a burning coal that he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with the burning coal and said,

“This has touched your lips, and now your guilt is gone, and your sins are forgiven.”

Then I heard the Lord say,

“Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?” I answered,

“I will go! Send me!” Amen.

**Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 5 verses 1 to 11**

One day Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret while the people pushed their way up to him to listen to the word of God. He saw two boats pulled up on the beach; the fishermen had left them and were washing the nets. Jesus got into one of the boats—it belonged to Simon—and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Jesus sat in the boat and taught the crowd.

When he finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Push the boat out further to the deep water, and you and your partners let down your nets for a catch.”

“Master,” Simon answered, “we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets.”

They let them down and caught such a large number of fish that the nets were about to break. So they motioned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full of fish that the boats were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he fell on his knees before Jesus and said,

“Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!”

He and the others with him were all amazed at the large number of fish they had caught. The same was true of Simon’s partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus said to Simon,

“Don’t be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” They pulled the boats up on the beach, left everything, and followed Jesus. Amen.

**Address: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” Luke 5:10**

The passage describing the call of Isaiah is not intended to be literal, but is a metaphor about God’s grandeur and holiness. God’s presence not only filled the temple – his presumed dwelling-place – but the cries of ‘**Quadosh! Quadosh! Quadosh Adonai!**’ ‘**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord!**’ by the seraphim made the whole building shake and smoke. I use the word ‘seraphim’, instead of angels because ‘seraph’ in Hebrew means ‘burning being’ as well as noble or holy and that matches Isaiah’s description. The Lord’s holiness overwhelmed Isaiah, as he bewailed his inadequacy and impurity, besides the impurity of his people. The seraph who touched his lips with a glowing coal from the altar symbolised Isaiah’s purification, allowing him to answer God’s call to serve as a prophet. And serve he did, for this Isaiah – and there were probably at least three who proclaimed in his name – continued in his ministry for forty years.

Luke’s account of how Jesus called his first disciples provides us with an insight into the nature of being called and has elements that I recognise in my own call to preach. Luke tells us that Jesus was almost forced into the waters of **Lake Gennesaret**, otherwise the **Sea of Galilee**, by a large crowd that wanted to hear him preach. Jesus noticed two fishing boats at the water’s edge and decided to proclaim the Good News from a floating pulpit, so he asked Simon Peter if he could use his boat as his preaching post. Simon and his fellow fishermen agreed, for they were washing their nets after a signally unsuccessful night’s fishing on the lake and probably felt that they needed to have their spirits raised. Moreover, Jesus had recently healed Simon’s mother-in-law, so Simon was almost certainly curious about him. Clearly, he hoped to find out more about Jesus.

Our Lord preached from Simon’s boat, which was close to the shore. It is noteworthy that he preached sitting down, not because he was afraid of tipping Simon’s boat over, but because Hebrew preachers sat when they spoke the word of God and stood when they read the Scriptures. Once he had finished preaching, Jesus directed Simon to put out into deep water and to lower their nets to catch fish. As an experienced fisherman, Simon knew he could expect to catch nothing in daylight, so he said, “**Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.**” The Greek word, translated as ‘**Master**’, is ‘**Epistata**’, and is a term of respect, though not comparable to ‘**Rabbi**’. In other words, Simon recognised Jesus’ authority, but lowered the net only to oblige him, rather than

expecting that Nazarene carpenter to be able to show him how to do his job. However, as a result of obeying Jesus, Simon saw his nets begin to tear, such was the number of fish they had caught. Indeed, when James and John went to share the load, both boats were so full that they were in danger of sinking!

Simon was filled with such awe that he fell onto his knees before the Lord and pleaded, **“Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”** Like Isaiah in the temple, Simon felt lost, inadequate and fearful in the presence of somebody who was clearly more than a wise man, for such a catch heralded Jesus’ divinity. He no longer used **Epistata, but Kyrios**, which is used for a supreme authority, or even God. As with Isaiah, Simon was put at his ease and called to serve the Lord, though in Simon’s case there was no touching of his lips with a live coal, but instead Jesus’ injunction, **“Do not be afraid,”** followed by his commission, **“From now on you will be catching people.”** Having responded to the invitation to serve the Lord, both Isaiah and Peter and his friends wholeheartedly committed themselves to their new life.

I have experienced three distinct calls from God, yet to my shame I only answered one of them at once. The first came when I was a lapsed Anglican for, as an ATC officer, most weekends were occupied with gliding, flying, shooting and other activities. It was a complete surprise, when, having started a family, resigned my commission and, finding our parish church unwelcoming, we attended Wordsley Methodist Church for a Brownies’ Parade Service. At the end of the service, Carol and I turned to one another and said simultaneously, **“This is where we’re meant to be!”**

Soon afterwards I realised with more than a little apprehension that I was being called to preach. Now, being called to become a Methodist was one thing; being summoned to preach was another matter entirely! I was perplexed and afraid. For a start, I was painfully aware that my knowledge and understanding of the scriptures was woefully inadequate and, like Simon Peter, I felt that I was the wrong sort of person to preach the gospel. Therefore, I reasoned that, with my teaching career, as Secretary of 888 Squadron ATC, a youth club leader at New Street and a governor at Buckpool School, I could take on no more responsibilities without seriously damaging my family, or my health, or both! Nevertheless, my call remained, gentle and insistent, so when the Local Preachers arranged an Open Day, I said I’d go. However, when school business prevented me from attending, I triumphantly declared that it must have been conceit on my part; otherwise God would have ensured that I attended the meeting.

A few months later, on Christmas Day, I read a lesson and, at the end of the service, Sister Jane Day, our preacher, challenged me: **“You’ve been called to preach, haven’t you?”** I rolled out all the well-worn excuses, but to no avail. **“If God wants you, he’ll make time and give you the resources you need!”** she assured me. Two days later, The Superintendent Minister, Revd. Alan Elgar, visited my home at Sister Jane’s request – not mine – and a couple of hours later I had a note to preach, as a result of which many lunches in at least three circuits have been transformed into burnt offerings!

The third call I received was to become a chaplain. Seventeen years ago Carol saw an advertisement in the “Express & Star” for a Chaplain at MHA in Wednesfield. When I read the job specification I knew that Jesus was giving me yet another chance. While the post offered a considerable drop in my income, it was full of new, exciting challenges, so I applied at once, was offered the job and, have been richly blessed by a Saviour who never gives up, even with a hopeless case like me.

My experiences have taught me to listen to and answer Christ’s call, even if it seems beyond my ability or is outside my comfort zone. Is anybody here experiencing a

call to serve the Lord in any capacity whatsoever? If you feel a call to serve, don't try to justify why you are unsuitable, offer yourself in Christ's service and explore your calling. After all, the God who gave his Only beloved Son to redeem sinners like us at such a terrible cost is hardly likely to let us down when we try to do his will and share both his love and Good News. Trust and obey the Lord, for you will be amazed at what his grace will let us do in his holy name. Amen.

*We close our worship with a hymn by Jacqueline Jones that challenges us. Jacqui is a contemporary Christian singer-songwriter, originally from South Africa, who was based in the UK for 5 years and 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 now and for evermore. Amen.**