



February 6<sup>th</sup> 2022

A service of worship for use at home

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## Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and our Calling

**Welcome** A very warm welcome to our worship this morning, You are all very welcome.

**Hymn** In Christ Alone STF 351

<sup>1</sup>In Christ alone my hope is found  
He is my light, my strength, my song  
This Cornerstone, this solid ground  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm  
What heights of love, what depths of peace  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease  
My Comforter, my All in All  
Here in the love of Christ I stand

<sup>2</sup>In Christ alone, who took on flesh  
Fullness of God in helpless Babe  
This gift of love and righteousness  
Scorned by the ones He came to save  
'Til on that cross as Jesus died  
The wrath of God was satisfied  
For every sin on Him was laid  
Here in the death of Christ I live, I live

<sup>3</sup>There in the ground His body lay  
Light of the world by darkness slain  
Then bursting forth in glorious Day  
Up from the grave He rose again  
And as He stands in victory  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me  
For I am His and He is mine  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

<sup>4</sup>No guilt in life, no fear in death  
This is the power of Christ in me  
From a life's first cry to final breath  
Jesus commands my destiny  
No power of hell, no scheme of man  
Could ever pluck me from His hand  
'Til He returns or calls me home  
Here in the power of Christ I stand

### Introduction

On 6<sup>th</sup> February 1952, Princess Elizabeth was doing a tour of Kenya with her husband Philip. They had spent the night at Treetops Hotel in the Aberdare National Park when the shocking news came through of the sudden death of her father, George VI, which meant that, at the very young age of 25, she was now Queen. It is not at all what she was expecting. Until she was nine years old she wasn't ever expecting to be queen, since her father was second in line to the throne after his brother Edward VIII. And even after Edward's abdication she certainly wasn't expecting to become Queen for many years. Her father was only 56 when he died so it came as a complete shock. So, although she wasn't crowned until June 2<sup>nd</sup> that year, which is when most of the celebrations will happen, today we are celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the queen's accession to the throne. So, as we sit, let's pray:

## Prayer of thanksgiving for the Queen

Gracious God, giver of all good gifts, we praise you for the incredible 70-year reign of Elizabeth, our Queen. We thank you for her sense of duty and commitment to her people; for her loyalty, dignity, faith and sheer hard-work, even well into her 90's, when most of us, if we are still alive, will have our feet up and be letting others do the work. We thank you for her and pray that we might learn from her example. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Saviour and King. **Amen.**

## Hymn

Be Thou My Vision

STF 545

<sup>1</sup>Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;  
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art  
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night,  
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

<sup>2</sup>Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true  
Word;  
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;  
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;  
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

<sup>3</sup>Be Thou my battle Shield, Sword for the  
fight;  
Be Thou my Dignity, Thou my Delight;  
Thou my soul's Shelter, Thou my high Tower:  
Raise Thou me heavenward, O Power of my  
power.

<sup>4</sup>Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,  
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always:  
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,  
High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art.

<sup>5</sup>High King of Heaven, my victory won,  
May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heaven's  
Sun!  
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

## Reading Isaiah 6:1-13

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and lifted up, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:

'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'

<sup>4</sup> At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> 'Woe is me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.'

<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'

<sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'

<sup>9</sup> He said, 'Go and tell this people: "Be forever hearing, but never understanding; be forever seeing, but never perceiving."<sup>10</sup> Make the heart of this people hard;

make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”

<sup>11</sup> Then I said, ‘For how long, O Lord?’ And he answered:

‘Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, <sup>12</sup> until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. <sup>13</sup> And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.’

## A Question

On her 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday in April 1947 Princess Elizabeth (as she then was) said:

‘I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service..... But I shall not have strength to carry out this resolution alone unless you join in it with me, as I now invite you to do. I know that your support will be unfailingly given. God help me to make good my vow, and God bless all of you who are willing to share in it.’

Well, today she has reached exactly 70 years of service as our Queen. So, let me ask you: What are the qualities that you really admire in her? (Take some time to think about this.)

However, calling is not a straightforward thing, is it? Which is why we read not just the 1<sup>st</sup> eight verses of Isaiah 6, but the whole chapter. It all sounds great up to the point where Isaiah says: ‘Here am I. Send me.’ Tough - but inspiring. ‘Yes! Bring it on. I’m up for it.’

But then God tells him what is **actually** going to happen. And what is going to happen is disaster and appalling tragedy. It will not turn out at all as Isaiah might have hoped when he had that amazing vision of God and that wonderful sense of God’s call. Isaiah will speak and people will listen. But they won’t understand. They won’t be receptive to God’s word. And as a result there will be an invasion, and crushing defeat, and slaughter, and exile, and slavery in a far distant land, for many years to come.

Our Queen has always felt intensely that she is called of God, called to serve God as our monarch. Yet she has been our head of state through turbulent times – in the life of nation and commonwealth, but also in her personal, family life. You don’t need me to remind you about Princess Margaret, Princess Diana, Prince Harry or Prince Andrew, to name but four.

And you don’t need me to tell you, those of you who have known God’s call, that being called to follow is far from plain sailing. There are joys, ,delights, wonderful moments, amazing blessings, mountain-top experiences. But there is also pain, struggle, disappointment, loss, anguish, doubt, discouragement - to name but a few of the trials that confront us. It’s no wonder Jesus tells us we need to **take up our cross** to follow him. The way of the cross is hard and costly. It offers life and love and hope and blessing and salvation. But it costs nothing less than pain, anguish, defeat and death.

And it is in the midst of all this that God meets us in his only son, Jesus Christ, who came to earth, to live our life, to walk in our shoes, to face abuse, discrimination, rejection, lies, injustice, torture and a painful, lingering, agonizing death. Whatever we face in our calling, Christ has gone through

before us. And Christ is with us in it, alongside us, now. He has heard our cry, heard our pain, and he is with us through it all, as our next hymn proclaims:

**Hymn**                      I the Lord of Sea and Sky                      STF 663

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.  
Who will bear My light to them? Whom shall I send?

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

I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have born my peoples 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?

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.

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 be satisfied.  
I will give My life to them, Whom shall I send?

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

**Reading**      Luke 5:1-11

One day as Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee, the people were crowding round him and listening to the word of God. <sup>2</sup> He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup> When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.'

<sup>5</sup> Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught a thing. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.'

<sup>6</sup> When they had done so, they caught such a huge number of fish that their nets began to break. <sup>7</sup> So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

<sup>8</sup> When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' feet and said, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' <sup>9</sup> For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, <sup>10</sup> and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.'

<sup>11</sup> So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Thanks be to God for his Holy Word.

## Sermon

God's call is often a surprise – as it was for Elizabeth our Queen. As a child she grew up not expecting to be Queen at all. And later, as a young woman, not expecting to be Queen for many years. But fate took a different turn and the rest, as they say, is history.

I wonder if you have felt the God of Surprises calling you? I certainly have. In 1972 a member of our church in Birmingham went to work in Argentina and my wife and I, who were students at the time, were asked if we'd start a small group to support her. So, wanting to be better informed, we went to a conference run by the South American Mission Society at Scargill House in the Yorkshire Dales. And it was there, to our utter surprise, that we felt God saying to us, 'Yes, **YOU** need to up sticks and go to Argentina, as well!' So, a few years later, we did, with me working as an engineer on a big development project among indigenous people in the hot scrubland of the Northern Argentine Chaco.

But God hadn't finished his handbook of surprises. And so it was that Dalmira Robles, the wife of our church minister, came banging on our door at 2.30pm, the hottest part of the day at over 40 degrees C, when everyone was having a siesta. I got up from our bed and answered the door. She stood there, sweat pouring down her face and said: 'Alan, what you're doing is great, but the Lord is calling you to be **ordained!**' And with that she turned round and went home, without another word. That was in 1978. We used to sing a hymn in church, which I've never found an English version of. It goes:

'Tengo que gritar, tengo que andar. Ay de me si no lo hago.

Como escapar de ti, como no hablar, si tu voz me quema adentro?'

It is from Jeremiah chapter 20, where Jeremiah is complaining that God has tricked him into being a prophet and that all he ever gets is abuse and mockery. But, says Jeremiah: 'If I say I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name, then his Word within me is like a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I am weary of holding it in, and indeed, I cannot.'

Well, I tried to hold it in for quite a few years, but in 1989, 10 years after Dalmira's first siesta-time visit, I was, finally, ordained. But responding to God's call is only the beginning. It is, as Jeremiah and many, many others have found down the centuries, no bed of roses.

And we don't always get it right, either. Like the Queen, stuck in Balmoral after Princess Diana's death, completely out of touch with the mood of a grieving nation, desperate to see her with her people.

And that has been true of me, too. Often getting it wrong. Like the time my church warden made a completely false accusation against our children's worker. I knew it was false because I was present at the time of the incident. But the Church warden was the mother of our brilliant youth worker and they both threatened to resign if I didn't do something about it. Well, our church was on a troubled council estate where leaders were hard to come by. So, instead of standing up for what I knew to be right, I tried to appease them, and in so doing alienated everybody, including our wonderful children's worker, who was extremely upset that I hadn't defended her. Or the time someone mentioned to me that Mrs Frost was ill and would appreciate a visit. But I delayed, even though she only lived just down the road from me. And by the time I got there, she had died. I felt like Peter, after the miraculous catch of fish, who falls down at Jesus' feet and says: 'Away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.'

Luckily though, God has no write-offs among the motley crew he has called to follow him. Peter fails again and again. Jesus even has to say to his face: 'Get behind me Satan.' And then, in the hour of Jesus' greatest need, Peter not only runs away, but on three occasions swears with an oath that he's never even met Jesus. Surely that's it now? Surely Jesus will dispense with him and choose someone else? But no, Jesus forgives him, reinstates him, calls him again to tend his lambs and feed his sheep. There are no write-offs in God's economy.

I have been very impressed, in the past few years, hearing the story of Timpsons, the people who cut keys and repair shoes. They have a policy of recruiting ex-prisoners. They work with people before they are released and then take them on in their shops. And part of their policy is that, in the first week they are employed, they are sent to the bank with the cash, as a sign that they are trusted. It is an amazing example of giving people a second chance.

And that is what God does with us. He gives us another chance after we've blown it. And not just one other chance, but chance after chance. Whenever we fess-up, honestly accept what we've done wrong and seek forgiveness, he takes us back – again and again. I wish certain politicians would fess up and honestly accept what they've done wrong – but that is another story.

God's call is not just for Christmas, as the RSPCA advert says. It is for life. Even when we've chewed the slippers, scratched the paint on the door and pooped on the carpet – or whatever else we've done. And it doesn't have a retirement age. One of the things I find deeply challenging about the Queen is that she is still determined to serve the country – even though she is 95.

**Ninety five!** Astonishing. I have to keep reminding myself: 'God has not finished with you yet Alan. His call doesn't stop when you get to 65 or even 70. It's for life.'

Peter says to Jesus: 'I'm done. I'm no good to you. Away from me Lord, for I'm a sinful man.' But Jesus says to Peter: 'Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. Follow me.'

And that is just as true for **us** too. For **all** of us. For God's call is not confined to the clergy, or the stewards. It is for absolutely everyone. God's call is not fluffy or fur-lined. It is hard, costly, challenging and full of pitfalls. We will fail at it, again and again. But if we own-up, admit our faults, face our failures, honestly, openly, he will take us on again, and again, and again, and again, right into old age. Like HM the Queen.

Being called is for life. And God will be with us every step of the way. It will be tough. We will fall and we will fail. And **He** will pick us up, and dust us off, and set us back on the right path. And it will be a great, amazing blessing: for you, for your family, for your community, for the world. And it will prove to be the very best choice you ever made. So let us offer ourselves to God again as we quietly sing.

**Hymn**                      Take O take me as I am                      STF 781  
Take O take me as I am  
Summon out what I shall be  
Set your seal upon my heart and live in me

**Prayers** Let us now take some time to turn our thoughts into prayer.  
After each section, and before the response, you may care to think about people and situations on your own heart. Let us pray.

We give thanks today for Elizabeth our Queen. Thank you for her steadfastness, her commitment, her strong sense of duty, her sheer hard work over so very many years. We pray for her in her old age, now without her life partner, for your grace, strength and wisdom. We pray for those who will one day succeed her, especially praying for Charles and William. May they too have that deep sense that they are called by you, O Lord, to be an example of service, dedication and integrity; a light for our nation.

Lord in your Mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for the leaders of the nations in the light of the grave crises which face us. Ukraine. Afghanistan. Myanmar. Taiwan. Covid. Global warming. Poverty and inequality. The plight of minorities and of women. Raise up, we pray, women and men of integrity and honour; able people; people committed to justice and to peace. And forgive us, as a nation, that our politics has descended so low.

Lord in your Mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for your church and for ourselves, as we consider what your call on our lives means for us in practice. We hold ourselves and our leaders before you, with our many failures to follow in your footsteps, both together and as individuals. Forgive us Lord.

Thank you that there are no write-offs in your kingdom. You always pick us up, dust us off and trust us to start afresh.

Lord in your Mercy **Hear our prayer**

Let us now hold in our hearts before God those we know who are struggling to follow your call, or no longer want to. And those who are simply struggling with life in many other ways. Let us pray for them now.

Have mercy, O God, on all who cannot see the light, who have lost hope, who cannot set one foot in front of another. Give them courage and patience and help them to know that you are with them and will never leave them, whatever befall.

Lord in your Mercy **Hear our prayer**

**Amen**

**Lord's Prayer**

Finally, let's join together in the words Jesus taught us, saying:

**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 forever. Amen.**

**Hymn** Will you come and follow me? STF 673

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?

Will you leave your self 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?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?  
Will you set the prisoners 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?

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?

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.

**Blessing and Sending**

The God who has called you is faithful and he will do it.  
May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be among us and remain with us, now and always. **Amen.**

This is the day that the Lord has made  
**We will rejoice and be glad in it**

We will not offer to God  
**Service which costs us nothing**

So let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**