

Sunday January 22nd 2023
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Mr Ian Wood

Charity number 1134226

Call to Worship

Let us start this service by being quiet, releasing the tensions that we need to let go of, and breathing slowly and deeply of the breath of life.

-----silence-----

We wait in quietness for God alone, from whom all hope comes.

Here is the good news: The promised time has come,

God's rule on earth is at hand, turn and trust the gospel.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Hymn - StF 134 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cu1ZKM-IXZg>

1 Christ, whose glory fills the skies
Christ, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
Triumph o'er the shades of night;
Dayspring from on high, be near,
Daystar, in my heart appear.

2 Dark and cheerless is the morn
Unaccompanied by Thee;
Joyless is the day's return,
Till Thy mercy's beams I see,
Till Thou inward light impart,
Glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

3 Visit then this soul of mine,
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me, Radiance divine,
Scatter all my unbelief;
More and more Thyself display,
Shining to the perfect day.

Prayer of approach

Welcoming God,

you call us into your presence and affirm us as your children.

You have known and loved us before we ever came into being.

Each one has a special place in your heart and is named on the palm of your hand.

There is nothing about us which is unknown or strange to you

and it is in you alone that we can rest and be at home.

May we welcome our sisters and brothers, and move from being strangers to friends.

May we greet those in our midst with warmth and acceptance,
receiving all that is new and celebrating change.

May we have eyes to see, ears to hear

and humility to recognise your truth revealed in our midst from the unexpected sources.

Amen.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

God who calls us,

when the seas are calm and our nets are full, we praise you.

When the seas are rough and the fish are few, we trust you.

When you use our old skills for your new work, we praise you.

When our nets need mending and our boats are old, we trust you.

With all that we have been and with all we will become
we praise, trust and worship you.

Amen.

A prayer of confession

Lord Jesus, when you called those fishermen, they responded immediately.

Forgive us for the excuses we come up with:

we are too young or too old, we have too much work or too little time,

we want to think it over, we'll let you know tomorrow...

Forgive us, Lord Jesus.

Lord Jesus, when you called those fishermen, they left their boats.

Forgive us for the things that we cling onto:

the reasons we give for not responding to your call,

our home, our commitments, even our families.

We want to hold onto to everything rather than be willing to do anything.

Forgive us, Lord Jesus.

Lord Jesus, when you called those fishermen, they became fishers of men and women.

Forgive us for the chances we miss to fish for you:

the lady in the checkout queue, the neighbour when we share a cup of tea,

our friend on a bus journey, our work colleague across the desk.

Forgive us the lack of courage to risk speaking out for you!

Forgive us, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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.

1 Great is the darkness that covers the earth,
Oppression, injustice and pain.
Nations are slipping in hopeless despair,
Though many have come in Your name.
Watching while sanity dies,
Touched by the madness and lies.
Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit we pray.
Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit on us today.

2 May now Your church rise with power and love,
This glorious gospel proclaim.
In every nation salvation will come
To those who believe in Your name.
Help us bring light to this world
That we might speed Your return.
Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit we pray.
Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit on us today.

3 Great celebrations on that final day
When out of the heavens You come.
Darkness will vanish, all sorrow will end,
And rulers will bow at Your throne.
Our great commission complete,
Then face to face we shall meet.
Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit we pray.
Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit on us today.

Lesson - Matthew 4: 12-23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: *'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.'* From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Hymn - StF 248 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKP3fdKIXOQ>

1 I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast.'
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary and worn and sad;
I found in Him a resting place,
And He has made me glad.

2 I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'Behold I freely give
The living water, thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink and live.'
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.

3 I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'I am this dark world's light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright.'

I looked to Jesus, and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk,
Till travelling days are done.

SERMON - Matthew 4: 18-22

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.' From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' A new ministry was beginning: that of Jesus of Nazareth. Matthew alone records that Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum. Matthew tells us "he withdrew" after hearing of his cousin John's death.

Some may assume that Jesus saw Galilee as a less risky place to expand his ministry: after all Nazareth was close to the Roman stronghold of Sepphoris and an unsafe place to preach what might be viewed as revolutionary.

But Jesus was not playing it safe. He was continuing the ministry that his cousin John the Baptist had begun, and the reach of Herod Antipas was widespread, and so just as risky.

Matthew saw this relocation as fulfilment of the prophesy in Isaiah, who promises light in the darkness of this geographical region. When Isaiah originally wrote, it was the Assyrians who controlled the area, but now it was the Romans. Matthew saw the parallels, that Jesus was the light in the darkness, and used familiar words from the past to make his point.

Capernaum was not rich and powerful. Main inhabitants were farmers and fishermen... his ministry began among the common people.

There was considerable Greek influence – and the area was considered irreligious by Jews : they even nicknamed it "Galilee of the Gentiles"

The main focus of his teaching was the same as that of John : "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The Greek verb for "repent" (*metanoeo*) means literally "turn around." Jesus was looking for Transformation: not merely apology, but change: a change of direction, a change in thinking, a change in behaviour.

When Jesus says in Matthew 4:17 "The kingdom of heaven has come near."

The Greek Verb is in the perfect tense. That means that the action expressed in the verb has already taken place in the past and still continues into the present. In other words, given this Greek form of speech, the kingdom of Heaven has already come and is still here.

Matthew is writing for the Jews and so uses the term Kingdom of Heaven where other gospel authors have used Kingdom of God. Matthew does not want to risk offending his audience, only too aware that Jews believed the name of God was too holy to be spoken aloud.

Jesus starts recruiting, and called first 2 sets of brothers – almost a casual encounter- not targeted in advance– but just as he was walking along...

Jesus can use anybody and everybody.

He tells them he wants them to fish for people, and Simon and Andrew immediately follow him. Then, James and John are no less unwilling to leave everything behind them to join his motley crew.

Perhaps they found the call of Jesus impossible to ignore, just as when a mother hears her baby cry, they have an inbuilt automatic urge to respond.

Discipleship is not our idea. It is not a suggestion we put to Christ. He takes the initiative. And the call is always there – we accept or reject...

We need not have anything special about us to be called to follow. Jesus does not target the cleverest or most industrious, the most pious or the most kind. He does not go out of his way to chose the elite, although they are as likely to hear the call as anyone else. Mainly Jesus called and still calls the ordinary... but he transforms them into the extraordinary.

Jesus does not promise an easy ride, in fact he says he will be sending them out as sheep amongst wolves, warns that they will be hated by everyone, and rejected for his sake.

The call is all or nothing. When we give our lives to Christ, as his disciples we must be ready to give up all if the Master asks.

The German martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

We cannot place ourselves at the Master's disposal and at the same time dictate our terms. Such a situation would not be discipleship but a self-improvement programme arranged to suit ourselves. People like this have a problem: at the very moment they want to follow, they also want not to follow. Such a person is not only at loggerheads with Jesus, they are at loggerheads with themselves.

When the disciples left their boats and their families, they embraced a new future in the company of Jesus - it would be far less secure – new places – new activities – new patterns of life – and it would not always be easy. But their response was immediate.

I wonder whether our following is a little more reluctant?

Matthew records this new ministry of Jesus, clear in his certainty that Christ is Light in the Darkness. We know that St John records Jesus as the Light of the World – Matthew is just as clear.

Jesus called and still calls others to help spread that Light, and announce the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.

It is a Kingdom of transformation:

Transforming lives and showing the lost that there is a way home.

Transforming Suffering into Joy; Darkness into Light; Oppression into Freedom

I suspect that when we look back at our lives, that we will recall the times we heard Jesus call us to follow, and we said "Yes".

But are we still following as closely as when we first responded?

Are we actively looking for new ways to fish for people, or merely sitting on the riverbank with our feet up?

I finish with some more words from Bonhoeffer to challenge us:

The disciple is dragged out of relative security into a life of insecurity; from a life where things can be observed and calculated, to a life where much is secret and unpredictable; out of a realm of limited possibilities into the realm of infinite possibilities.

May we be prepared to take risks instead of playing safe, share the news of the Kingdom with those on the margins, and help shed light in the darkness.

We do not need to be giant searchlights, but it is enough to be the pure clear lights that some of us sang about in Sunday school years ago in the song Jesus bids us shine.

Intercessory prayer

Gentle and forgiving God

we are painfully aware that much is wrong in our world
for rich as it is in its resources
many people endure the darkness of poverty and disease

We know that much is wrong in our land
for rich as it is in its resources
many struggle to make ends meet
and many more become homeless

And we confess that much is wrong in our own lives too
for although we too are richly blessed
we have not been as kind, as helpful or as honest as we should have been

Hear our prayers for all who following Christ's way of costly love
And refuse to walk past on the other side of human need

We pray for groups and individuals
who struggle for justice and seek the world's peace
who give voice to the concerns of the voiceless
who support people who are homeless
and help them make a fresh start in life

Bless our politicians and civil servant with wisdom, compassion and courage
that through the priorities they set and the policies they adopt
our common life will be marked by honesty and compassion,
a willingness to respect one another and a desire to serve the good of all.

We pray the light of peace into the darkness of violence.

We pray the light of trust into the darkness of broken relationships.

We pray the light of hope into the darkness of unemployment.

We pray the light of healing into the darkness of suffering.

We pray the light of integrity into the darkness of temptation.

We pray the light of your kingdom into all the places of darkness in our lives
and in our world.

In Jesus' name.

Amen

Hymn - StF 255 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vavK1736mQM>

The kingdom of God is justice and joy;
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy.
God's power and glory in Jesus we know;
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall
grow.

The kingdom of God is mercy and grace;
The captives are freed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to
share;
And hope is awakened in place of despair.

The kingdom of God is challenge and choice:
Believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
God's love for us sinners brought Christ to his
cross:
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal;
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole.
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his
call;
And all things cry "Glory!" to God all in all.

Sending out

Day by day, dear Lord, of thee three things I pray:
to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly,
and follow thee more nearly, day by day.

And now may Grace, mercy and peace, be our blessing from God ,
today and always. **Amen.**