

### **Opening prayers**

God of awe and wonder, worthy of honour and praise, you know us from our beginning to our end, and in every day of our lives. We come into your presence amazed by your love for us and your delight in knowing us.

We come to worship you, ready to be changed.

Loving Living God, we thank you for creating the universe, for the wonder and beauty of creation and the changing seasons;

We thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ your son, who came to live among us, who died on the cross to save us from all that harms us and to offer forgiveness and grace to all;

We thank you for his resurrection to new life and for the gift of new and eternal life you offer us in him;

We thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit who calls us to follow you and helps us to become the people you created us to be.

Forgive us Lord, for the times when we've hurt you and each other by what we've thought, said and done; when we haven't loved you with our whole heart; and when we haven't loved our neighbours as ourselves.

Forgive us when we haven't listened to what you're saying to us and have ignored your call on our lives.

Thank you that when we come to say we are truly sorry you forgive us, you give us a new start and a clean slate, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we humbly make this prayer as we say the prayer he taught us:

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-10,19**

In those days, when the boy Samuel was serving the LORD under the direction of Eli, there were very few messages from the LORD, and visions from him were quite rare. One night Eli, who was now almost blind, was sleeping in his own room; Samuel was sleeping in the sanctuary, where the sacred Covenant Box was.

Before dawn, while the lamp was still burning, the LORD called Samuel. He answered, "Yes, sir!" and ran to Eli and said, "You called me, and here I am."

But Eli answered, "I didn't call you; go back to bed." So Samuel went back to bed.

The LORD called Samuel again. The boy did not know that it was the LORD, because the LORD had never spoken to him before. So he

got up, went to Eli, and said, "You called me, and here I am." But Eli answered, "My son, I didn't call you; go back to bed."

The LORD called Samuel a third time; he got up, went to Eli, and said, "You called me, and here I am." Then Eli realized that it was the LORD who was calling the boy, so he said to him, "Go back to bed; and if he calls you again, say,

"Speak, LORD, your servant is listening."

So Samuel went back to bed.

The LORD came and stood there, and called as he had before, "Samuel! Samuel!" Samuel answered, "Speak; your servant is listening."

As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and made come true everything that Samuel said.

### **John 1: 43-51**

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come with me!" (Philip was from Bethsaida, the town where Andrew and Peter lived.) Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets also wrote about. He is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth."

"Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

Nathanael asked. "Come and see," answered Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, he said about him, "Here is a real Israelite; there is nothing false in him!"

Nathanael asked him, "How do you know me?"

Jesus answered, "I saw you when you were under the fig tree before Philip called you."

"Teacher," answered Nathanael, "you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Jesus said, "Do you believe just because I told you I saw you when you were under the fig tree? You will see much greater things than this!" And he said to them, "I am telling you the truth: you will see heaven open and God's angels going up and coming down on the Son of Man."

### **Song (STF 462)**

Come with me, come wander, come welcome  
the world

where strangers might smile or where stones  
may be hurled;

come leave what you cling to, lay down what you  
clutch

and find, with hands empty, that hearts can hold  
much.

*Sing hey for the carpenter leaving his tools!*

*Sing hey for the pharisees leaving their rules!*

*Sing hey for the fishermen leaving their nets!  
Sing hey for the people who leave their regrets!*

Come walk in my company, come sleep by my side,  
come savour a lifestyle with nothing to hide;  
come sit at my table and eat with my friends,  
discovering that love which the world never ends.

Come share in my laughter, come close to my fears,  
come find yourself washed with the kiss of my tears;  
come stand close at hand while I suffer and die  
and find in three days how I never will lie.

Come leave your possessions, come share out your treasure,  
come give and receive without method or measure;  
come loose every bond that's resisting the Spirit,  
enabling the earth to be yours to inherit.

*John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958) © 1987,  
WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow G2 3DH Scotland.  
<www.wgrg.co.uk>*

## Reflection

I wonder if you've ever been in a situation where you meet someone but can't remember where you know them from, or their name, but they obviously know you?

It can be quite embarrassing, can't it?

So it's comforting to read about these two instances of non-recognition in today's Bible stories about Samuel's calling, and the calling of Philip & then Nathanael, as Jesus chooses his disciples.

Samuel is still a young boy, sent by his mother Hannah to work in the holy temple as gesture of gratitude to God for giving her the son she'd longed for for so many years.

Eli the temple priest has begun to go blind we're told, perhaps not surprising for a man of his age, but in Eli's case there may be a metaphorical blindness and a questionable ability to listen, as is hinted at earlier in the story, when Hannah goes to the temple to pray & weeps over her childlessness. Eli the priest see her lips moving silently through her tears and accuses her of being drunk, but when she explains the cause of her desperation, he then blesses her.

In this story Samuel has been serving in the temple and then goes to bed, and while he's asleep he hears someone calling him & goes to

ask Eli what he wants. The first 2 times Eli says "I didn't call you" because he doesn't realise what's happening either.

For Samuel not to recognise the Lord's call is understandable, he's still young and we're told he did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD hadn't yet been revealed to him.

But Eli is a high priest, who seems to have lost his ability to recognise the call of God as he once did. Finally, the third time Samuel goes to rouse Eli, Eli does realise it's the Lord who's calling Samuel, and tells Samuel to go back to bed and if he hears the Lord's call again to say "Speak Lord, your servant is listening", which is what Samuel does.

In the gospel story Jesus calls Philip to follow him, Philip then goes to find Nathaniel, who responds rather sarcastically: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

We don't know the reason for his dim view of Nazareth – some suggest a Roman army garrison was stationed there, so perhaps the town had a poor moral reputation as far as the Jews were concerned, and the people of Nazareth certainly rejected Jesus later on. But whatever the reason for his reaction, Nathaniel clearly didn't think it wasn't a good address to come from.

But Philip says "Come & see". And when he does, he gets a surprise doesn't he? He discovers that Jesus knows all about him & has assessed his character as he's approaching.

It must have been a shock for Nathaniel, who doubted that any true Israelite could come from Nazareth, to be greeted as one, by Jesus! And his response is as if to say (as we might) "I'm sorry I don't think we've met have we? How do you know a/b me?" And then gets another surprise when Jesus tells him he saw him sitting under the fig tree before Philip even went to find him.

Nathaniel is so moved by Jesus' insight into what he was doing & who he is that he sets aside his doubts & salutes Jesus as the Son of God and the King of Israel.

And Jesus follows that with even more revelations for Nathaniel: "Do you believe b/c I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You'll see greater things than these. . . . You will see heaven opened & the angels of God ascending & descending upon the Son of Man."

This passage is a wonderful reminder that whether or not we recognise Jesus or his

presence in our lives, he is there, he knows us & he's calling us to follow him.

We know that Nathanael became a disciple of Jesus & witnessed many amazing things. But if he'd stuck to his original prejudices he may not have had any of those experiences. He needed help and encouragement from Philip to go and see, to recognise Jesus for who he was.

Often we need help and encouragement from others on our spiritual journeys, but we also need to be open to others who can help us discern the presence of Jesus in our lives, and willing to listen for God's call to us.

Samuel's story is a reminder that God calls the most unlikely people to do his work. God called Samuel before he knew who God was, before he'd had any formal teaching about faith (although I suspect his mother may have told him about God's faithfulness to her), yet it's Samuel who hears God calling, even though there was a priest of many years' standing in the same building.

So many Bible stories show that God often calls the most unlikely people. He chooses ordinary, flawed people and enables them by his transforming love and power to achieve extraordinary things – just think of Moses (a former murderer) and Paul (who also oversaw several murders). And as the seasons of Christmas and Epiphany draw to a close, it's worth remembering that Mary was a teenage girl of no status, the shepherds were virtually outcasts and the so-called wise men were probably pagan Zoroastrian astrologers, but God chose each of them to be bearers of the good news of Jesus' arrival.

God has a tendency to use the most unlikely candidates, including you & me, to do his work & follow his calling. So we need to stay alert & listen out for God's calling in our lives (& in the lives of others) and resist the urge Nathaniel had initially to rely on our own prejudices or assumptions about who's the best person to do God's work. And if we're listening to God, we're more likely to recognise his presence in others.

Listening is a skill we neglect at our peril. General George Marshall once said that the key to good listening had 3 elements:

1. listen to the other person's story
2. listen to the other person's full story

3. listen to the other person's full story first.

I wonder how many of us do that? Listening – real active attentive listening – isn't always easy, it takes time and effort.

David Barkan once said "Easy listening only exists on the radio!"

Richard Moss said that "the greatest gift you can give someone else is the purity of your attention."

Paul Tillich, the theologian, said that "the first duty of love is to listen". So If we love God, if we love Jesus, then listening attentively to him & what he says through his Holy Spirit is part of our calling as people who love him isn't it?

And (like Nathaniel perhaps) our calling also involves being willing to be surprised by God & ready to have all our preconceptions blown out of the water, because God is a God of surprises.

Jesus constantly challenged the preconceptions of those around him – especially the religious authorities.

Perhaps the invitation for us in these two passages is to continue to respond to Jesus' invitation to us to "Come and See" where he's at work in our world, and, to be ready, as Philip was, and eventually even old Eli was, to invite others to "Come & See" too.

To be ready to point out the signs of God's activity, to help others to recognise God's presence where they hadn't see it before, and to encourage them to discover that Jesus knows them even before they're ready to recognise him, and he loves them deeply- enough to die for.

To be ready to invite those we have contact with who don't yet know how much they're loved, to come and see who this Jesus is that we love, who loves us and them, and follow him.

Amen

### **Song (STF 666)**

Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,  
Waiting for thy gracious word,  
Longing for thy voice that cheereth;  
Master, let it now be heard.  
I am listening, Lord, for thee;  
What hast thou to say to me?

Speak to me by name, O Master,  
Let me know it is to me;  
Speak, that I may follow faster,  
With a step more firm and free,

Where the Shepherd leads the flock  
In the shadow of the rock.

Master, speak! Though least and lowest,  
Let me not unheard depart;  
Master, speak! For O thou knowest  
All the yearning of my heart,  
Knowest all its truest need;  
Speak, and make me blest indeed.

Master, speak: and make me ready,  
When thy voice is truly heard,  
With obedience glad and steady  
Still to follow every word.  
I am listening, Lord, for thee;  
Master, speak! O speak to me!

*Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)*

### **Prayers for ourselves & others**

Loving and generous God, we pray for ourselves;  
We want to love and follow you, Lord, so please  
help us to hear your call to each one of us.  
Help us to be willing to step out in faith with you,  
to allow you to lead us to the places where we  
can be the people you have called us to be,  
where you can grow and shape us and challenge  
us and bless us in ways we can't yet imagine.

We ask for your blessing on all the people in this  
world who seek to follow the ways of Jesus and  
to share your grace and love with those they  
meet with day by day.

We pray especially for brothers and sisters who  
can't meet freely to worship you for fear of  
persecution and ask that you will protect them  
and give them strength and courage  
Help us all to be united through your Holy Spirit,  
and to play our part in helping others to discover  
the joy of knowing and being known by you, Lord  
Jesus.

Help us to serve you in humility and truth so that  
others can see glimpses of the love of Jesus in  
what we do and say.

Inspire and lead all those who hold authority in  
the nations of the world:

fill them with a deep desire for truth and for  
justice and peace for all people, regardless of  
their colour or background.

Make us alive to the needs of our community  
here and across your world, and help us to share  
each other's joys and burdens.

Look with kindness on our homes and families:  
and help your love to grow in our hearts.

We pray for all people who are suffering from  
sickness, grief or trouble today, including those  
known to us personally:

help each and every one to know your healing  
presence in heart, mind, soul and body.

We remember those who have died and give  
thanks for their lives, especially those who have  
encouraged and helped us to learn how to follow  
you.

Help us, Father, through your Spirit, to see where  
we can be answers to our own prayers  
which we offer to you in the precious name of  
Jesus our Risen Lord and Saviour.

### **Song (STF 662)**

Have you heard Gods' 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?

*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?*

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?

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?

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 footprint?

*We will walk the path that will cost so much and  
embrace the pain and sorrow.*

*We will trust in One who entrusts to you the disciples of  
tomorrow.*

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### **Blessing**

Lord Jesus, you call us to follow you.

Go with us into the world.

Go before us in all we do.

Bless us with your presence and your Spirit  
as we go out in your name

and help us to love and serve you,

to share your love with all those we meet,

and to be your light in the world.

Amen.