

Call to Worship Psalm 62: 5 – 7

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and my honour; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

Hymn StF 183

Praise to the God who clears the way
preparing room and space;
for power and pride will lose their sway
as peace comes in their place.

Praise to the God who comes to judge
the truth of word and deed,
who calls our minds and wills to change,
rebuking wealth and greed.

Praise to the God who waits with us
for hope and joy to reign,
who shares our suffering and our loss,
embodied in our pain.

Praise to the God who comes to bring
comfort to all who mourn.
The whole creation 'Glory' sings
as Christ the light is born.

Jan Berry

Prayers of Praise and Confession

God, who made the world, and everything in it,
we marvel at the variety and richness, and we adore your name.

God, who continually recreates the world,
forgiving and offering new opportunities, we marvel at your generosity, and we adore you.

God, who shares our experiences, both good and bad,
we marvel at your faithfulness to us, and we adore you.

Loving God, you spoke to us, and we did not listen.

'I am sending you', said God.

We looked around to see who would go,
then as realisation dawned, we made off in the opposite direction.

So we pray: forgive us, and send us.

'I need workers', said God.

We looked around to see who would respond,
then, making our excuses, we tried to tip-toe gently away.

So we pray: forgive us, and empower us.

God hears our prayers and forgives our sins.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Introduction

According to a 2021 study at least 2/3 of people will have broken their New Year Resolutions by the end of January, so if yours are still going strong, congratulations. But, if not, don't worry, you are in the majority. And the better news, you can pick it up again at any point – we are all allowed a second chance, even third, maybe fourth. Basically, at any point, we can stop what we're doing and start again on a better course, a better way, whether it's January or later in the year. We keep trying and are rewarded for our efforts.

Hymn 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 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?

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.

John L Bell and Graham Maule

Readings Jonah 3: 1 – 5, 10

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it.

Mark 1: 14 – 20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Reflection

Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four gospels, and Mark doesn't waste time on non-necessities. Plus, he is aware that fuller stories are being told out there, and they can elaborate. So, when he starts this passage with, 'after John was arrested', it can be a vague timeframe or it may be cause and effect. That is, Jesus was still working out what he was going to do and say whilst John the Baptist was calling on people to repent and be baptised, but once John is arrested and off the scene, Jesus needs to step in and step up. The forerunner has done his job.

Jesus comes and immediately, according to Mark, sets out his manifesto:

'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;' he doesn't announce himself, he turns everyone to God, back to God. 'Repent' means change your mind and think differently (and for yourself) about all that is happening around you – this was a time when there was political upheaval, violence and war.

And so, as Jesus is walking along the Sea of Galilee, a place teeming with trades, family firms, businesses and peoples of all sorts, he sees Simon (who will be renamed Peter) and Andrew, brothers in the act of fishing with nets and he calls out to them: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people."

Follow me seems to be more than 'come with me', which sounds like he's inviting them for a drink and a chat, it implies a deeper relationship, a lasting commitment. As these brothers were out in their boat, they may or may not have got back to shore before Jesus calls the next brothers away from their father. I always wondered whether he had encouraged them, or tried to dissuade them, or even whether they had just left without consultation!

But I suppose the most striking matter is what Jesus says when he calls them – I will make you fishers of people – a most intriguing phrase, and obviously personal to fishermen. And this is something we see throughout the Gospels, Jesus using personal messages, right for the occasion. He doesn't just use the same phrases until they are exhausted. Each person, situation and circumstance are treated individually, and this appears to be part of the message, makes his words attractive, adds to his charisma.

And we know that these soon to be disciples are just ordinary people, from ordinary families and backgrounds, doing ordinary jobs, leading ordinary lives, which gives us all hope and a chance to be disciples and followers. Because it shows that God can, and does, use anyone to bring forth the message of Good News. We may be like these fishermen and join up immediately, even if we don't fully understand our purpose, and we learn on the way, making mistakes as we go, repenting and growing. Or we may be like Jonah, given a specific task and second chances to fulfil our role in life, even when we know the consequences, and we know it could be difficult and dangerous for ourselves and others.

So I believe that it doesn't matter how we are called, or how many times we are called, God still needs us and will give us the time, space and thoughts to answer in the affirmative, because God knows, and we know, that we will.

We pray for strength and courage to be ready and willing to discern and answer when we are called, to whatever we may be asked.



Hymn StF 660

Called by Christ to be disciples
every day in every place,
we are not to hide as hermits
but to spread the way of grace;
citizens of heaven's kingdom,
though this world is where we live,
as we service a faithful Master,
faithful service may we give.

Richly varied are our pathways,
many callings we pursue:
may we use our gifts and talents
always, Lord, to honour you;
so in government or commerce,
college, hospice, farm or home,
whether volunteers or earning,
may we see your kingdom come.

Hard decisions may confront us,
urging us to compromise;
still obedience is our watchword –
make us strong and make us wise!
Secular is turned to sacred,
made a precious offering,
as our daily lives are fashioned
in submission to our King.

Martin Leckebusch

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

God, our loving parent, we pray for:

Those who run away, those who run wild, and those who do not respond to your word.

Those who see what needs doing but do not want to be involved, those who do not know how to be involved, and those who cannot see what God wants them to do.

Those who use words too readily, or irresponsibly, those who hide behind words, and those who cannot find the right words to tell the good news.

For those who seek peace, keep peace, make peace.

We thank you for those who have spoken to us – by word and action – of the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. In silence we remember them...

Make us faithful to our calling, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Hymn StF 563

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end;
Lord, be for ever near me,
my master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle
if you are by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if you will be my guide.

O let me feel you near me;
the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me, and within;
but, Jesus, now draw nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear you speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
Lord, speak, and make me listen,
O guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, you have promised
to all who follow you,
that where you are in glory
your servant shall be too;
and, Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end;
O give me grace to follow
my master and my friend.

John Ernest Bode

Blessing Go and tell others the good news of the nearness of God's kingdom, by your words and your actions. God will be with you, giving you courage, endurance and love. Amen.