

Good morning, welcome to our worship service. Whether you're here or at home or wherever you are, it's so good to be able to come together to praise our wonderful God.

Psalm 100

'O be joyful in the Lord, all the earth;
serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song.

**Know that the Lord is God; it is he who made us and we are his;
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.**

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and bless his name.

**For the Lord is gracious; his steadfast love is everlasting,
and his faithfulness endures from generation to generation.'**

Will you come and follow me

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.

Let us pray:
Come Holy Spirit of God,
and search our hearts with the light of Christ.

We keep silent for reflection.

**Almighty God, long-suffering and of great goodness:
I confess to you, I confess with my whole heart
my neglect and forgetfulness of your commandments,
my wrong doing, thinking and speaking;
the hurts I have done to others, and the good I have left undone.
O God, forgive me, for I have sinned against you;
and raise me to newness of life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Collect for The Third Sunday Before Advent

Almighty Father,
whose will is to restore all things in you beloved Son, the King of all:
govern the hearts and minds of those in authority,
and bring the families of the nations,
divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin,
to be subject to his just and gentle rule; who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Mark 1: 14-20

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Talk

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” (Mark 1:17) Can you picture the scene? Two fishermen were casting their net into the lake, trying to catch fish, while a little further along two more fishermen were still preparing their nets before they started work. Four friends, brothers Simon and Andrew, James and John were busy doing what they always did every day. Four friends simply doing what they probably expected to be doing for the rest of their lives. And then along came Jesus ‘proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”’ (Mark 1:15). As he walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw those four friends and called them to follow him. St. Mark tells us that, straight away they left their nets to follow Jesus.

If we look at this story out of context, you might think that this was the first time those four friends had heard about Jesus. St. Mark doesn’t give us much information as to what had been happening before this event, but he does tell us how John ‘came, baptising in the desert and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’ (Mark 1:4). St. Mark also describes how Jesus was baptised by John in the river Jordan before being sent out into the desert by the Spirit for 40 days where he was tempted by Satan (Mark 1:9-13). If we look in St. John’s Gospel, we find out that Andrew was one of two disciples of John the Baptist who, on hearing Jesus described by John as the ‘Lamb of God’ decided to follow Jesus. (John 1:35,36). People would already have known that perhaps there was something different about Jesus when he came ‘proclaiming the good news of God’ after John had been put in prison. But that doesn’t detract from the fact that Simon and Andrew, James and John took a huge leap of faith when they responded to the call to follow Jesus, leaving everything and everyone they knew and loved in order to be made into ‘fishers of men’.

Each of those four friends responded as individuals and so must we, but they were called to be with Jesus in community. I don’t know about you, but I find it extremely hard to be a follower of Jesus on my own. I need the friendship and support of other Christians as I try to live up to my calling to be a ‘fisher of men’. There have been times in my life when I have found myself looking at what Christian discipleship means and at the way I express my faith in worship. I realised that for me there were bottom lines, the bare essentials of how I felt comfortable with worship. I realised that the things I’d always thought to be important – the form of worship, the music and the activities of the church – were all peripheral. I realised that for me the essentials of worship were being able to go to a church where Jesus was given his rightful place, I could feel that he was near me during worship and where I could take Communion regularly.

Then came lockdown and suddenly it felt that even these basic essentials were out of reach but I have come to realise that, while my priorities haven't changed, the way that I experience 'Church' has. Instead of being able to go to church to meet each other physically, church has come to our homes through Facebook, Zoom meetings and television programmes. I have still been able to experience the presence of God through the power of the Holy Spirit during worship, reaching out to me through the computer screen. And now, while some of us are able to meet together again, others prefer to stay shielding or perhaps have yet to find a church to call their spiritual home. But that's OK. 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever' (Hebrews 13:8). He understands exactly where we are and what's best for us. Whatever our circumstances we can still hear his call to 'follow me'.

It's a long time since I first responded to the call of Jesus on my life to 'follow him'. Over the years he has led me in many unexpected ways, turning my life upside down. I suppose I heard his call first of all as a teenager when I wanted to be confirmed like my friends in school, but it was only after we were married and Noel and I first moved to Hull that I met people who lived out their faith 24/7. They didn't need to use words as the love of Jesus shone out in their actions and I realised that there was more to this Christianity than I had realised and I wanted what they'd got in my life.

I was a homemaker when that happened and I certainly never imagined that I would hear a call to formal ministry within the church and become a Reader. I couldn't even read music, so I certainly never dreamt that I would learn the piano and flute, pass an 'A' level in music and go to university to study for a music degree. I certainly never imagined that I would discover how much I loved singing and that I'd be able to teach other people how to sing. I didn't know that, but God, who holds the future did. We thought Noel would be in the same job until he retired, but he was made redundant in 2002, 10 years before retirement age. Suddenly I had to find a job and the most sensible thing for me was to take on more pupils. God is so good – I loved teaching and after a few years of unemployment Noel was able to return to work.

I really enjoy being able to be a 'fisher of men' but above all I know that Jesus has called me, as he called those disciples first of all to be with him. I am loved and valued just as I am. I don't need to do anything to earn my salvation, I can simply enjoy being with Jesus as I seek to follow him. We have a little dog called Poppy. She is an extremely intelligent Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. I've taught her to 'help' me by picking up the socks I drop when I am taking the washing from the bedroom to the utility room. She gets my slippers for me every morning or when I come home from getting the shopping or whatever. She keeps us

active as we take her for her daily walk. She loves to help and she can be very useful, but we don't value her because of the jobs she does. We value Poppy because she gives us unconditional love and we like having her around. Even imperfect humans are capable of loving others for who they are not for what they do. Jesus loves us so much more than we can ever imagine.

The disciples left everything they knew, family, friends, their way of life in order to follow Jesus. Does anything mean more to you than Jesus? Perhaps you've been following Jesus for many years or perhaps you're just starting out, but are you prepared to leave your comfort zone if he asks you to? Jesus calls us to follow him to spend time with him, individually and together, to become part of his team of fellow disciples here on earth. Jesus calls us to be 'fishers of men' and each of us has a job that only they can do. St. Paul tells us in his letter to the church in Ephesus that we are 'God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do' (Ephesians 2:10). Are you doing what Jesus has called you to do, or is there a risk that you are allowing the 'good' things that you do to be the enemy of the 'best'?

Have you heard Jesus call you to 'follow him'? Have you said 'Yes' or are you still undecided? Wherever you are on your journey Jesus understands. In his book 'Surprised by Joy' C. S. Lewis, who wrote 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' writes about this experience which happened while he was a student at Oxford university. 'You must picture me alone in that room at Magdalen, night after night, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.' C. S. Lewis goes on to describe the 'divine humility' which accepted his response 'kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape'. Perhaps you're like that, or you know someone who is. That's OK. Jesus understands but he will never stop calling us. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

Living Lord Jesus, thank you that you call each one of us to 'follow you'. Give us grace to respond to your call and help us to become 'fishers of men'.

Prayers

Our loving, kind Heavenly Father, you loved us so much that you sent to us Christ Jesus, the atoning one, to show You to us because anyone who has seen Jesus has seen You, the Father, to show Your love and compassion for us and

to say “come follow Me”. Jesus said My sheep will know Me and know My voice and follow Me and not a stranger. And we thank You that we have the Holy Spirit so that we can hear You speaking to us through Your Spirit.

Heavenly Father, through Jesus You have brought us to that place of relationship with You and we thank You that as our loving Father You listen to and respond to our prayers. Please help us as Your children to also listen to You, to hear Your voice as You speak to us through Your Spirit, as You speak to us individually and as You speak to us corporately as a body of believers. As we are in our individual times of prayer, worship and scripture study let us listen and hear from You as You speak through Your still small voice perhaps through a Bible passage, perhaps as we pray, perhaps as we listen to a worship song. And as a church we remember that You spoke to the New Testament congregations through the apostles, through their epistles and through the Revelation given to John and we know that You love us today and still speak to us today. Let us reach out to You in prayer as a people and let us hear from You that Your kingdom will come and Your will be done in this place.

And as we come to pray about the many situations of concern in the world – the pandemic, the situation in Afghanistan, climate change and the conference in Glasgow and so many other things – we know that You listen but let us also listen to You as You respond that we may know how we should respond ourselves in these situations and we pray that the leaders of the nations will listen to You and receive wise counsel from those who hear Your voice including those who are called to be a prophetic voice in these days. And we pray for those that we know and love who are in that place of difficulty at this time – health, financial, family, work or whatever it may be. In the quiet we name these people now.....We know that You hear us. We pray that we will hear You as You respond concerning these people to us as to how we should pray for them and how we are called to support and encourage them. Help us Lord to hear and respond to Your voice. Speak Lord for Your servants are listening. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

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.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours.
now and for ever. Amen**

My heart is filled with thankfulness

My heart is filled with thankfulness
To Him who bore my pain;
Who plumbed the depths of my disgrace
And gave me life again;
Who crushed my curse of sinfulness
And clothed me in His light
And wrote His law of righteousness
With pow'r upon my heart

My heart is filled with thankfulness
To Him who walks beside;
Who floods my weaknesses with strength
And causes fears to fly;
Whose ev'ry promise is enough
For ev'ry step I take,
Sustaining me with arms of love
And crowning me with grace.

My heart is filled with thankfulness
To him who reigns above,
Whose wisdom is my perfect peace,
Whose ev'ry thought is love.
For ev'ry day I have on earth
Is given by the King;
So I will give my life, my all,
To love and follow him.

Closing prayer and Blessing

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or
conceive, by the power which is at work among us,
to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all ages. **Amen.**

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to himself,
the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen us in his service,
the joy of the Lord Jesus fill our hearts;

and may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among us and remain with us and with those we love this day and always.
Amen.

Service prepared by Nina Lloyd-Hirst

Prayers prepared by John Dawson

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Quote from 'Surprised by Joy' C. S. Lewis first published in 1955.