

SUNDAY 24TH JANUARY 2021

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CALL TO WORSHIP

From God comes my salvation.

For God alone my soul waits in silence.

God alone is my rock and my salvation.

God is my fortress; I shall never be shaken.

PRAYER

The present form of this world is passing away.

Therefore, help us to keep our focus on you, Lord,

for true power and steadfast love belong to you. **Amen.**

HYMN Let us build a house where love can dwell

PSALM 62: 5-12

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.

Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.

Selah

Those of low estate are but a breath,
those of high estate are a delusion;
in the balances they go up;
they are together lighter than a breath.

Put no confidence in extortion,
and set no vain hopes on robbery;
if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

Once God has spoken;
twice have I heard this:
that power belongs to God,
and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.

For you repay to all
according to their work.

CONFESSION

Trusting in the promise of grace,
let us pour out our hearts before God.

Forgiving God,
we repent of all the ways we turn from you.
You call, but we do not listen;
you show us your path, but we prefer our own way.
Forgive us, heal us, and lead us back to you,
that we might show mercy to others.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord:
in Jesus Christ, you are forgiven by God and given new life.

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 fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for 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.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

*Speak to us your word, O God,
that we may hear Jesus' call to be his disciples. Amen.*

This Sunday marks the end of the annual week of prayer for Christian unity, and as we hear the gospel story of Jesus calling fishermen to be his disciples, to get up and follow him, we remember our own calling as Christians, followers of the same Jesus who first walked on the shores of the sea of Galilee two thousand years ago.

As we do, we are called to remember our unity in Christ with all those who have encountered the risen Lord, heard the summons, and answered the call to live out the gospel in our actions and in our words; to acknowledge those of other traditions from whom we have become divided, and with whom we must seek to make common cause for the sake of the kingdom of God, knowing that it is the one Holy Spirit that inspires us encourages us to follow where generations of disciples have gone before.

As Mark tells the story of the calling of the first disciples: Andrew and Simon, later to be called Peter, then James and John, they represent for us the response of people who, after encountering Jesus and hearing his command, 'follow me', respond immediately to the call, leaving their nets, getting up, and following where he leads them, on a journey whose end they cannot yet know. Theirs is the response of faith to the grace of God, as God in Christ comes to them and invites them to become co-workers in God's mission in the world.

We do not know why Jesus chose these four first: fishermen, yes, but neither as simple nor as poor as they are often portrayed. Fishing could be a lucrative business, and it's clear that these four were involved in what would have been the family business – James and John the sons of Zebedee certainly, and they could afford to hire servants to help in the work; Simon and Andrew have property, and Simon at least, had a wife and a home of his own. They are small businessmen, owning their boats, with families and homes of their own – which makes their response to Jesus all the more astonishing. To follow him, they must leave all that behind – all that is familiar, comfortable, and secure, to set out on a risky journey into the unknown. Their response to Jesus appears all the more to be a real leap of faith.

Theirs will be a costly discipleship, not only at the beginning, but while they accompany Jesus, and at the journey's end at the foot of the cross, and after the resurrection and ascension, as they continue the work Jesus has begun, and entrusted to them, to proclaim the Good News of God's kingdom coming, of life in fullness and a the dawning of a new era of peace and hope for all creation.

For this is the Good News, the gospel of Jesus Christ: that the time had drawn near, that moment long foretold by God's prophets, for which God's people longed, God's plan for the redemption and salvation of the world. God comes to us, in Jesus, the Christ, the long promised Saviour whose very presence on earth proclaims that God's kingdom has come near. In him, the reign of God becomes a present reality in the life of the world, inaugurating a new era in Creation's story which will, one day, be fulfilled and brought to perfection.

Mark began his gospel declaring that it is the good news of Jesus Christ; Jesus himself proclaimed the good news of God's coming kingdom; to leave their nets, and become fishers of people, bringing others to know and love God, to listen to Jesus, and to respond heart and soul and mind to the encounter of grace and love that has the power to change people, to change society, and to change the world.

And in that call there is also a sense of urgency the fishermen hear and respond immediately: they don't hesitate, or stop to weigh up the pros and cons of what they are asked. There is no time to waste, and what God is doing waits for no one. Like others whose stories are told in the gospel, when they encounter Jesus, they are confronted with making a decision: to follow him, or not, and if they are to follow him, they must be ready to drop everything and go.

Faithful, trusting, obedient to God's call they may have all been, but nothing in the gospel story says it was an easy decision to make. For us, two thousand years later, who are called

to follow where God leads, the choice is not an easy one. We are encumbered by so many things and circumstances that get in the way of hearing God's voice clearly, the words 'follow me' often lost in the din and clamour of the busy modern world; the responsibilities we may have for relatives, friends or work colleagues; the worries about providing for those we love, and for ourselves; the pressures of a secular, consumerist and individualistic society distracting us from what is truly essential to human fulfilment.

And it is not easy either, to wait in hope and expectation of Christ's coming when the promised new creation seems as far off as ever. It is too demanding, to maintain that sense of commitment, of faith and trust, that first brings us to knowledge of the living God, and too difficult to sustain the sense of the immediacy of the kingdom, to believe that its reality is imminent and immanent all around us, each day of our lives.

We are all called to discipleship, called to follow Christ in this world even as we await the next. A discipleship that means we have to put our trust in God, and not in material things, a discipleship that means taking a step back from the world that frees us from our worldly preoccupations with money and possessions which so often lead us into a spiritual dead-end; a discipleship that means we see the world from not as we usually see and understand it, but as God sees it.

God has not called us to be passive onlookers in mission to the world, but to be active participants: 'I will make you fishers of people' said Jesus, and not just in the sense that other people come to believe in him, but that they will be transformed by faith and love in readiness for the kingdom's coming, striving for justice, for peace, and for a world in which the kingdom's values are known and lived.

Together, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, Christ's disciples follow where Jesus led, and that following is the heart of discipleship, the proclamation of the good news and the effective witness not of empty words but of actions and lives that reveal the wonder and the beauty of God's love for all creation.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

God of new visions,
we pray for people highly placed in power,
that they may focus their eyes on you.

And we pray for the lowly victims of power,
that they may also focus their eyes on you.
We pray for those who bless with their lips
but curse with their mouths,
including ourselves.

We pray for those who are ill
and those facing the end of life.
Give them the gift of prayer,
that they may pour out their hearts to you.

We pray for the church and its leaders,
that we may hear and respond to your call
to be fishers of people.

Rock of our salvation,
through Christ and your Holy Spirit
bring us into the new world that you are shaping
even as this world is passing away. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

HYMN Praise, I will praise you Lord

CHARGE

Repent and believe the good news that
God is with us and calls us for a purpose!

BLESSING

May the God of second chances
renew your sense of call
and inspire you to go out and share
the good news of forgiveness and hope!