

## WORSHIP AT HOME FOR 24<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2021 – COME AS YOU ARE

Dear Friends,

As always I hope that things are going as well as could be for you all – I expect that some of you have now had the vaccine – a light at the end of the tunnel. I hope that this will lead us to being able to meet again, and to worship together again, even if there are still some restrictions. In our written worship for this week we can remember Jesus' words – 'Come as you are' – and be thankful that we, too, are able to turn to him just as we are, knowing that he will accept us and transform us, leading us on a journey to look for a new home in God's heavenly kingdom, beginning here on earth. Thinking of you all, *Margaret*.

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**Call to worship:** Jesus, who calls us – we come to you as we are - and where we are - to worship you. We come to you with our strengths and our weaknesses – with our hopes and our heartaches. We come to you in urgency and in hesitancy. However we come, we come as we are, knowing that you welcome us. **Amen** Lord, you approach us that we might approach you. You call us that we might call others. So, today, we your disciples look to you to lead and guide us in the ways of your kingdom, that we might lead and guide others. We, your people, are ready to offer our hearts and our hands in your service, and our lives to your glory. **Amen**

### **The words to 'The kingdom of God is justice and joy' written by Bryn Rees [1911–1983] StF 255**

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

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

3 The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,  
believe the good news, repent and rejoice!  
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,  
our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

4 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!

**Prayer:** God the Father – we stand in awe of you, the one who spoke and brought the world into being; who shaped our bodies and breathed into us the gift of life. Majestic, awesome and wonderful, yet at the same time tender, loving and kind.

**God our Father, we love you with all our heart.**

God the Son, we stand in awe of you, the one who gave up the treasures of heaven to live on this planet alongside us. You showed us how life should be lived, and paid the price in full on the cross.

**God's own Son, we love you with all our soul.**

God the Spirit, we stand in awe of you, the one alongside the Father at creation; you inspired and strengthened his Son on earth, and came in your fullness at Pentecost, to lead and inspire your people.

**God's Holy Spirit, we love you with all our strength.**

God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we take a moment to stand in awe of you. Together you are beyond our understanding; three, but bound together in one purpose. As we are here now before you and as we worship you, bind us together into your purpose.

**God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – we love you with all our mind. Amen**

Lord, we confess before you that we have not always followed our calling: we have not served you as we should. We fall short in so many ways, perhaps putting ourselves before others. We want to say we are sorry and we call to mind our shortcomings.

Because of what Jesus did, our sins are forgiven. **Thanks be to God. 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.**

**Isaiah 8: 20 to 9: 1-4: using the New Living Translation:**

Look to God's instructions and teachings! People who contradict his word are completely in the dark. They will go from one place to another, weary and hungry. And, because they are hungry, they will rage and curse their king and their God. They will look up to heaven, and down at the earth, but wherever they look, there will be trouble and anguish and dark despair. They will be thrown out into the darkness.

Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that lies between the Jordan and the sea will be filled with glory.

The people that walk in darkness will see a great light, for those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. You will enlarge the nation of Israel, and its people will rejoice. They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest and like warriors dividing the plunder. For you will break the yoke of their slavery and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders. You will break the oppressor's rod, just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.

**Comment:** At this time when Isaiah spoke of the great light of hope appearing in the darkness, and the yoke of oppression finally being lifted to bring people their freedom, the people of Israel were being threatened with a takeover bid and exile by Assyria, if they didn't sort out their values and reconcile themselves to God. All their dreams as a nation could be wiped away in one stroke if they were taken captive – if the yoke of oppression lay on their shoulders. They would be taken away from their beloved homeland – they would lose their city – and their temple. [In fact – this did happen to them at a later date, when the Babylonians overran them]].

As Susan Sayers, retired Anglican priest and author, puts it – 'any of us who have watched our hopes and dreams crash in pieces around us will have some idea of how such an experience takes us on a journey through questioning, self-doubt, anger, guilt, reassessment and eventually [hopefully] into a new maturity born of acceptance, greater self-knowledge, forgiveness and the value of encountering human suffering.' She goes on to point out that, in their collective experience, the people then were given hope, both in the short term as Jerusalem was indeed saved from the Assyrian threat and, as we can now see, in the long term since Jesus clearly fulfils the prophet's words as he treads the ground of galilee, preaching, teaching and healing. Jesus' liberation however is not tied to one generation – as for those in Isaiah's time the threatened invasion was averted just then. When St Paul wrote to the Corinthians [1 Corinthians 1: 10-18], the liberation which Jesus brings is for every person who senses that power of God's forgiving love. If we too can sense that power it will set us free to live life to the full.

**Matthew 4: 12-23 – again from NLT:**

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee. He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah. 'In the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, beside the sea, beyond the Jordan river, in Galilee where so many Gentiles live. The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow, a light has shined.'

From then on, Jesus began to preach: 'Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.'

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers – Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew – throwing a net into the water for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them: 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people'. And they left their nets at once and followed him.

A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.

**Comment:** Perhaps the arrest and imprisonment of John the Baptist acted as a catalyst in making Jesus take up his ministry – he left Nazareth – he left home and travelled to Capernaum to live. It was now that his life of ministry and salvation really began. The area of Galilee is the most northerly district of Palestine. Not all that big, being about 50 miles from north to south, and 25 miles from east to west – but it is very fertile and so it was densely populated. Josephus records that there were 204 communities with populations of over 15,000 people there. So Jesus began his mission where there were the most people likely to hear him. Being surrounded by Gentile nations, it was an area more open to new ideas; more used to change so more likely to be open to the teaching and ministry of Jesus.

Matthew tells us that Jesus began to 'proclaim' – a word generally used of a herald who speaks with certainty of his message. The herald speaks with authority because he speaks on behalf of a king from a source beyond himself. Jesus speaks the word of God. David Adams, once vicar on Lindisfarne and also an author, tells us: 'True preaching is the word of God and not our own ideas and opinions on the subject! The message is: Repent, turn around, turn to God. Seek God. If you but know it, God's kingdom is near.'

Jesus now calls his first disciples. The initiative came from Jesus and they answered that call. God in Jesus often calls us too – often we hold back, but Simon Peter and Andrew, called as they were going about their normal work of casting a net into the sea, immediately left what they were doing. On hearing 'Follow me', they left everything and followed him. They didn't say: 'Just a moment; let us finish what we are doing and perhaps sell these fish'. They followed immediately – and if we are called we need to respond there and then, because if you hesitate then you are less likely to respond later, however much Jesus calls.

In the same way, he called James and John who were in the boat with their father mending their nets. Again, it was immediate – they left the nets – and their father – and followed Jesus. Both sets of brothers gave up their security and their homes to follow Jesus. The ministry truly began now as Jesus travelled throughout Galilee, teaching in synagogues, proclaiming the Good News, and healing people.

**A Way into prayer:** Say slowly: 'Lord, sometimes I feel that I am just waiting around for your call. I suspect that is because I am not hearing – even perhaps not listening. I know that you call me, and that you want me to use my time well.'

Then, after spending some time reflecting on what it means to be called by God, say this prayer: 'I am ready to 'come and see'. Help me to spend each day doing what you would have me do, so that, as you call me to new things, I am ready to follow all over again. Amen'

**The words to ‘Will you come and follow me’ written by John L. Bell [b.1949] and Graham Maule [b. 1958]  
Singing the Faith 673.**

1 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?

2 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?

3 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?

4 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?

5 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.

**Meditation of James: [Nick Fawcett – Amazing Man A]**

We were mending our nets: dull work, perhaps, but a necessary evil, for if they were broken we’d catch nothing though we fished all day. Each haul put food on the table and clothes on our backs – yet when Jesus called we didn’t just break off but left them behind, discarding our livelihood with barely a backward glance. Madness, some called it, but it was the best move we ever made, for it wasn’t just our nets that were broken, but our lives – our world – and he alone could put things right. I knew it from the moment I met him, his very presence tugging at my heart and touching my soul.

We were overwhelmed, all of us, feeling unworthy to respond yet unable to resist – and as we walked and talked with him in the days to come so that sense grew stronger, for he revealed our needs.....yet also answered them. He exposed our faults.....but brought forgiveness and new beginnings, inner healing as undeniable as undeserved.

We’ve no nets now, but we’re fishing nonetheless, this time for people for we want them to experience what we’ve found – to taste his joy and share his life – to know that, however broken they may be, his love can make them whole.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for those you called to follow you across the years, and for those who have had the courage to respond in faith. Help us to be ready to respond in turn, willing to commit ourselves to your service and to walk the way of the cross. When you speak your word, living Lord, **help us to say yes.**

When you ask us to venture into the unknown – to be strong, courageous, obedient and faithful – living Lord, **help us to say yes.**

When you ask us to listen to your voice – to your word that confronts, challenges, teaches and inspires – living Lord, **help us to say yes.**

When you ask us to reach out in love – to the indifferent, the hostile, the unlovely, the unacceptable – living Lord, **help us to say yes.**

When you ask us to let go of self – to share, to care, to give and to sacrifice – living Lord, **help us to say yes.** Lord Jesus Christ, as you called the Apostles at the start of your ministry, and as you have called so many others since, so your call comes to us – urging us to respond in faith and to share in the work of your kingdom. When you speak your word, living Lord, **help us to say yes for it is in your holy name that we ask it. Amen**

Sometimes, Lord, I am too entangled in the nets of my daily living to hear you call. Sometimes, I just feel too inadequate to respond. What can I bring? Help me to follow you as I am, with all that I am. May I bring my time and my skills in service; may I bring my family and friends in prayer; may I bring my responsibilities and dreams in trust, believing that you will never turn me away, but will transform me as you transformed your first disciples into your fishermen and women. **Amen**

#### **An Illustration by David Adam [Sermon Illustrations]:**

There are two stories of Socrates and his calling of disciples. Xenophon met Socrates on the road and the teacher barred his path with a stick. Socrates asked Xenophon simple questions about where certain things were made. Then he asked: 'Do you know where men are made good and virtuous?' 'Ni, I do not', answered the young man. Socrates said: 'Then follow me and learn.'

On another occasion a man called Aeschinus came to Socrates and said: 'I am a poor man. I have nothing else to offer but myself.' Socrates replied: 'Do you not see that you are giving me the most precious thing of all?'

It is in giving ourselves to God that we truly give.

#### **The words of 'In Christ alone' written by Keith Getty [b. 1974] and Stuart Townend [b.1963]. StF 351**

1 In Christ alone my hope is found! He is my light, my strength, my song;

This Cornerstone, this solid Ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm.

What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!

My Comforter, my All in all – here in the love of Christ I stand.

2 In Christ alone! Who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless babe!

This gift of love and righteousness, scorned by the ones he came to save;

Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied

For every sin on him was laid; here in the death of Christ I live.

3 There in the ground his body lay, light of the world by darkness slain;

Then bursting forth in glorious Day up from the grave he rose again!

And as he stands in victory, sin's curse has lost its grip on me,

For I am his and he is mine – bought with the precious blood of Christ.

4 No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me;

From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.

No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand;

Till he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

**Closing Prayer:** Thank you, God, for trusting us. May we have strength and inspiration in you so that we can live up to your calling to try to follow our Lord, Jesus Christ. May we repay your trust in us by aiming to trust others. Together may we build communities of trust for the good of the world for the sake of Jesus Christ. **Amen**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, and with those whom we love, now and for evermore. Amen.**