

CALL TO WORSHIP

We come to you, Lord,
ready to worship, ready to learn, ready for prayer, ready for action.
May our worship here spill out into our every day.
Amen.



HYMN SF 682: *God of Grace and God of Glory*

- 1 God of grace and God of glory,
on your people pour your power ;
crown your ancient Church's story ;
bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom,
grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour.
- 2 Heal your children's warring madness ;
bend our pride to your control ;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom,
grant us courage,
lest we miss your kingdom's goal.
- 3 Lo, the hosts of evil round us
scorn your Christ, assail his ways !
Fears and doubts too long have bound us ;
free our hearts to work and praise.
Grant us wisdom,
grant us courage,
for the living of these days.

Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969)
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PRAISE

God of yesterday, tomorrow and today, we are children of the world you love and care for.
We praise you, heavenly Father,
for calling us into relationship with you.
We praise you, Lord Jesus,
for the power of your name and the protection of your prayers.
We praise you, Holy Spirit,
for your guidance and gifts that enable us to draw others to you.
For you are faithful in times of uncertainty,
strong when we are weak,
the breath of all our being,
the energy of all our doing
and the peace of all our resting.
Amen.

CONFESSION

We confess to you our selfishness and lack of love:
fill us with your Spirit.
Lord, have mercy.

We confess to you our fear and failure in sharing our faith:
fill us with your Spirit.

Christ, have mercy.

We confess to you our stubbornness and lack of trust:
fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

Silence

Lord have mercy,

Christ have mercy,

Lord have mercy.

Silence

To all and to each, where regret is real, God pronounces pardon
and grants us the right to begin again.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADORATION

Living God, we give you thanks and praise,

for you have made us and given us life,
you have redeemed us and set us free.

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise,

for you have found us and made us your own,
named us and called us 'Beloved'.

Accompanying God, we give you thanks and praise,

for you have promised to be with us always
and nothing can separate us from your love.

God, our God, we love you and adore you.

HYMN SF 67: *This, this is the God we Adore*

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| 1 This, this is the God we adore,
our faithful, unchangeable friend,
whose love is as great as his power,
and neither knows measure nor end : | 2 'Tis Jesus, the first and the last,
whose Spirit shall guide us safe home ;
we'll praise him for all that is past,
and trust him for all that's to come. |
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Joseph Hart (1712–1767)
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READING: Acts 1:15-17,21-26

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred and twenty people) and said, 'Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus — for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.'

So one of the men who have accompanied us throughout the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.' So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned

aside to go to his own place.’ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

SERMON

Have you ever had the phone ring and answer it to hear that God’s on the line to tell you exactly what he wants you to do?

I thought not.

Many things would be much more straightforward if that were how it works. It would be so much easier to know our intended path and calling in life. But it doesn’t work like that.

So how do we discern what God is calling us to do – how do we discover our vocation as Christians?

The first and most important thing is to be confident that God is calling!

Jesus said it to Galilean fishermen, he said it to tax collectors and freedom fighters, he said it then, he’s said it for 2000 year since he’s said it to me and he says it to you:

“follow me”!

The primary call to all – before any call to any specific work or ministry is the call to become followers of Christ.

Paul urged the Christians in Ephesus “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph 4:1-3)

That’s the main thing, the primary call, the ongoing call, the universal call - to become active and faithful members of the body of Christ.

At the point just after Jesus’ Ascension there were about 120 people who had answered that call and were ‘believers’ - followers. Within that number there were 11 (originally 12) who had a specific call to be Apostles.

They had the advantage that God didn’t even need their phone number; they had already followed him around the lanes of Galilee and the streets of Jerusalem and he just called them out of the group of Disciples and gave them the specific commission to be Apostles.

So we know something of what that’s about, just a quick word about those 2 words: Disciples and Apostles.

Disciples are followers; slightly more specifically, they’re people who learn from another. A good word might be apprentices.

Apostles are ones who are sent – often they’re ones who go and start something – a church or a project somewhere.

So, Disciples are called to come and Apostles are called to go.

In some way everyone is called to come and go. Come with Jesus and go in his name to do his work in a more specific calling.

Today’s reading is, just after Jesus’ Ascension and the gathering of Disciples are conscious that the number of Apostles is 1 short.

The significance of Jesus calling 12 to be Apostles was not lost on them and they felt the need to make their number back up to 12 – the number of the tribes of Israel - so that there continued to be a representation of them as the new people of God.

Matthias and Joseph Justus were identified as having the necessary gifts and experience. They had been among the followers of Jesus along with the 12 throughout Jesus’ ministry. The way they identified which of them would be called to be an Apostle probably seems a bit odd to us now. They did it by drawing lots. Whether that was a short straw, or they tossed a coin we don’t know and it doesn’t matter.

The point is that drawing lots ensured that it was left entirely to God.

Nowadays we’d probably be only too pleased to have two people with the necessary gifts and experience and willingness to serve that we’d probably appoint both. But 13 Apostles wouldn’t have the same neat symmetry and significance as representing the new people of God.

So how does that kind of call work for us now?

How do we become aware of a burning conviction that we are supposed to be doing something special and distinct for God?

In order to build up the body of Christ on earth, God does call some people to a variety of ministries for which they have to be selected and trained. In the Methodist Church these include ministries we call Presbyteral or Diaconal; it might also be the ministry of a Local Preacher or ministries such as Mission work in this country or overseas, counsellors or youth workers or Pioneer Ministers.

A call to such ministry often involves thoughts and desires that just won't go away, and also encouragement from other people who can sometimes see our potential more clearly than we can ourselves.

I first became aware of a call to ministry which turned out to be ordained ministry in the Church of England while I was at university and someone told me that one of the chaplains had wondered if I might have such a call. At that point I hadn't thought of it. After it was mentioned, the idea wouldn't go away.

But it's not necessarily like that for everyone. Usually, God's call involves recognising what we love to do and what we're already good at, and looking for opportunities to use our time and talents in our homes, communities, churches and places of work. It's not all about full time (or even part time) specific Christian ministry. The call to go may not be to go anywhere other than places you go to already.

If, for instance, I am a good listener, perhaps I could use my talent in a pastoral ministry to visit people who are sick or housebound or help out with a reading scheme at a local school. Or I might find that I have opportunities to listen to colleagues who share their problems with me.

If I have a passion and a talent for arts and crafts, there might be a call for my skills in a Sunday school or at a community centre, or creating new works of art for my church.

If I really care about helping young people, I could volunteer my time and other resources for church or community projects that are aimed at this age group.

Where service to God is concerned, it is often the case of being able to see a need and then being willing to respond. No matter what the call, though, it will always be the case of being - and becoming - the hands and feet of Christ, seeing with his eyes and allowing his compassion to inspire and motivate all that we do. That's what's at the heart of true discipleship, and that's a call for all of us, for all of our lives.

So, what is your vocation?

What is God calling you to?

We've seen that the primary call is to follow Jesus; to become more like him, shaped by the life ministry death and resurrection of Jesus. God calls us to change: to become more Christ-like. That process began in our baptism, but it continues through the means of Grace: prayer, reading the Bible, receiving Holy Communion. They are ways in which we encounter and respond to God in Christ and so through a life shaped by prayer, scripture and worship we become more Christ-like.

The change that we're called to is actually to become more deeply ourselves. God never calls us to be something or someone we're not and God always calls us to what we are capable of becoming. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, 'Those whom he calls he also equips.'

There may be talents or aspects of our character that are underdeveloped or which rarely see the light of day and need to be allowed to flourish so we can be our true selves. It may be that we have hidden gifts which need to be discovered or it may be that there is something that we have secretly always wanted to do but have not had the courage or the time to try. Whatever it may be we need to find an outlet which will allow us to feel more excited about life or indeed to feel more alive.

St Irenaeus wrote that 'the glory of God is a human being fully alive'.

As each of us become more fully ourselves and also become more fully Christ-like, by exercising our gifts and graces in the service of God, our church and our community, so the will of God is fulfilled and the glory of God is seen.

Teresa of Avila said this:

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

HYMN SF 611: *Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You*

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| 1 Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you ;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too. | 4 I will weep when you are weeping ;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you ;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through. |
| 2 We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road ;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load. | 5 When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony. |
| 3 I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear ;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear. | 6 Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you ;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too. |

Richard A. M. Gillard (b. 1953)

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PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Lord God and Father of all, over all and in all and through all: we give thanks that we are called to your service; may all your people may be attentive and obedient to your calling.

Lord of all, we give thanks that you call some to be apostles, sent out to do your work. We pray for all who respond to this calling to serve in your name: for those immersed in the world, seeking to bear witness to the gospel in word and action, for those whose service takes them to places where they face opposition and difficulty, may they be continually filled with your Spirit, and empowered to follow your calling.

Lord of all, we give thanks that you call some to be prophets. We pray for all whom you have called to speak out and proclaim the values of your kingdom: for those who challenge injustice and apathy and untruth, for those who campaign for the well-being of your people and your world may they be continually filled with your vision, and have courage in their prophetic calling.

Lord of all, we give thanks that you call some to be evangelists. We pray for all whom you have called to share the message of your love: for those who communicate the good news of Christ to others from a variety of backgrounds, for those whose enthusiasm and love conveys your truth, may they be filled with your love as they share the good news with others.

Lord of all, we give thanks that you call some to be pastors. We pray for all whom you have called to care for others through prayer and through service: for those who take care of any who are young or old, who are sick or struggling, for those whose work supports medical, social and community services, may their lives be channels of your love and grace.

We pray too for those whom we know who are sick, anxious or distressed at the moment ...

Give them courage and hope and knowledge of your healing love in and through those who care for them.

Lord of all, we give thanks that you call some to be teachers. We pray for all whom you have called to encourage adults and children to learn and grow: for those who teach informally as parents, mentors and facilitators, for workers in schools, colleges and universities, and for those who teach in our churches, may they speak your truth, and help others to grow in wisdom.

Lord of all, you have called each of us to serve you in your world and in your Church; strengthen and equip us by your Spirit to recognise your call to us, and give us grace and courage to fulfill our calling, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified: hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people, that in their vocations and ministries all may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your name; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **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.
Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

HYMN SF 418: *We have a Gospel to Proclaim*

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| <p>1 We have a gospel to proclaim,
good news for all throughout the earth ;
the gospel of a Saviour's name :
we sing his glory, tell his worth.</p> <p>2 Tell of his birth at Bethlehem —
not in a royal house or hall,
but in a stable dark and dim,
the Word made flesh, a light for all.</p> <p>3 Tell of his death at Calvary :
hated by those he came to save,
in lonely suffering on the cross,
for all he loved his life he gave.</p> | <p>4 Tell of that glorious Easter morn :
empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
that we might share his victory.</p> <p>5 Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
by all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his Church
to live for him, the Lamb who died.</p> <p>6 Now we rejoice to name him King :
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim :
we sing his glory, tell his worth.</p> |
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CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

Lord Jesus, as your disciples in the world today,
we thank you that your word of truth, your prayer of power and your heart of love,
continue to protect, inspire and unite us as we live out our faith,
build up our relationships, and hold the world before you in prayer.

Amen.

The Father, whose glory fills the heavens, cleanse us by his holiness and send us to proclaim his word.
The Son, who has ascended to the heights, pour upon us the riches of his grace.
The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, equip us and strengthen us in our ministries.
And the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among us and remain with us and those we love and all for whom we pray today and always. **Amen.**

Glory to God,
**whose power, at work among us,
can do infinitely more
than all we can ask or conceive;
to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus,
for ever and ever. Amen.**