

Have you heard God's voice?

Opening prayer:

Loving, gracious God, you know us better than we know ourselves. You know my thoughts and the motives for the things I do.

You know what I want to say even before I speak the words, and for that I am so thankful. Even when I struggle to find the words to worship you, you know what is in my heart. So, knowing your presence will surround me, and your love sustain me, may I have the assurance you will hear and accept my spoken and unspoken words, for wherever I go, you will be there. Amen

Hymn 663 StF <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zr9SMm1gII>

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them.

They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my words to them.
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord.

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will send the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord.

Let us pray together

Loving God, you are always ready to hear us.

Always wanting to show us the depths of your love and your understanding of us.

Always wanting to comfort us and celebrate with us.

Our words are not adequate to thank you for your forgiveness and for the privilege of knowing we are accepted as your children and, because we are your children, we can know your peace and joy and everlasting love.

Old Testament Lesson 1 Samuel 3: 1-20

I remember my Sunday School teacher telling the class of teenagers, that his faith had recently been challenged, I can't remember the details, but he told how one evening he prayed as hard as he could, he believed that God had deserted him, and he was doubting the very existence of God. As he prayed that evening, he felt a hand rest on his shoulder and he heard a voice say to him "I am here, I am always by your side" and in that moment his faith was restored. As a cynical teenager, I wanted to believe that he wasn't telling the truth, but more than that, I wanted the same experience for myself and over the next few years, I prayed in earnest, but never heard the audible voice of God speaking to me.

Consider:

- *What are your experiences of God speaking to you? Have you heard the voice of God in the way my Sunday School teacher did? Do you hear the voice of God through other people? Do you hear the voice of God through nagging feelings that won't go away?*
- *We understand from the Bible reading that Samuel hears the audible voice of God. Eli doesn't understand immediately, maybe he has not heard God speaking in this way himself. Does this make the faith of Samuel superior to Eli's? Do you feel that your faith can't be strong enough because you haven't heard the voice of God in the same way as other's?*
- *How might you listen to the word of God at the beginning of 2021, what it is that he wants from his Church, what it is that he is calling you to be and to do next.*

Hymn <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdRTvO8G0s>

Sadly, this hymn didn't make it into Singing the faith, I still find the words powerful and moving

Hushed was the evening hymn,
the temple courts were dark;
the lamp was burning dim
before the sacred ark;
when suddenly a voice divine
rang through the silence of the shrine.

O give me Samuel's heart,
a lowly heart, that waits
where in thy house thou art,
Or watches at thy gates;
by day and night, a heart that still
moves at the breathing of thy will.

O give me Samuel's ear,
the open ear, O Lord,
alive and quick to hear
each whisper of thy word,
like him to answer at thy call,
and to obey thee first of all.

O give me Samuel's mind,
a sweet un murmuring faith,
obedient and resigned
to thee in life and death,
that I may read with child like eyes
truths that are hidden from the wise.

A time of prayer:

God our companion, we bring to you all who feel alone:

For refugees who have left behind their country, their homes and all that is familiar.

For those, like the women in Saudi, imprisoned for protesting for human rights.

For those who have felt isolated because of the pandemic; for students, for those in nursing homes, for all those unable to see their families.

God, who rules over heaven and earth, we bring to you the USA as they prepare for a new administration.

For our government, that you will give our leaders wisdom and integrity.

For church leaders, in all denominations, that they will have a vision of your Kingdom, the courage to believe that change and transformation in the church and the world is possible, and the strength to work towards the fulfillment of your Kingdom. Amen

The Lord's Prayer:

Gospel: John 1: 43-51

There are three things I love about this story in St John's Gospel, firstly, I love the reaction of Philip, who, as soon as he meets Jesus, immediately wants to go, and share the news with his best mate, who appears to be somewhat cynical about the whole business. Secondly, I love the reaction of Jesus to Nathaniel, Jesus could have reacted in many ways, but talks in Nathaniel's language, causing Nathaniel to believe. Thirdly I love the fact that now Philip and Nathaniel have seen the unbelievable, Jesus tells them that this is nothing compared with what is to come. Sometimes our humanity and ability to reason can stand in the way of us seeing the full wonder of God

- I hope that you can remember a time in your life when something amazing happened to you, who was the first person you wanted to tell? If your experience were something unbelievable, would you be as ready to share it? particularly if you thought you would be ridiculed?
- What has your reaction been if somebody has shared with you an experience of faith they have had, a bit like my Sunday School teacher years ago. Doubt? Disbelief? Envy? Insecurity?
- *Jesus tells Philip and Nathaniel that they will see amazing things, do you truly believe that you will see the might of God's hand at work? Reflect for a few moments about the amazing things you have seen in your lifetime, have you seen it all? Or do you believe that there is even better to come?*

Hymn 662 StF

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
though the way be rough and narrow?

Refrain (except the last time)

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?*

*Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?*

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground
when the crowds are turning violent?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
will you share your faith with the faithless?

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
and believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

We will walk the path that will cost us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to us
the disciples of tomorrow.

Blessing:

May God's grace fill our lives, Christ's love overflow in our hearts and the joy and peace of the Spirit challenge and inspire us today and always. Amen