



Call to Worship

Jesus came as the Messiah. A suffering Messiah, not a conquering Messiah.

We are called to follow Jesus. But following Jesus isn't easy.

No; it will demand our dedication and our energy. It will change our whole lives.

Come, all of you, come and learn of the Lord Jesus. Lord, we come, seeking your wisdom and your guidance.

Hymn: StF 317 *Caroline Maria Noel (1817- 1877)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OI2rKRCWmOU>

1. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.
2. Humbled for a season, to receive a name
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious when from death he passed.
3. Bore it up triumphant with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures to the central height;
4. In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true;
crown him as your captain in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you in its light and power.
5. For this same Lord Jesus shall return again,
with his Father's glory, with his angel train;
all the wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him King of Glory now.

Opening Prayer *(John Birch)*

Loving God, you call us to turn away from our own selfish interests, to take up our cross, and to follow you. As we come before you today, give us open hearts and open hands. Make us eager to hear your voice and seek your guidance. Forgive us when you call us to take up your cross and we carry nothing; when you call us to be your voices in this world and we stay silent; when you call us to be your hands in this world and we keep them hidden. Open our minds to your ever-present spirit that is always moving within and around us. Open our spirits to your nudging and open our lives to your love. Amen.

Scripture Mark 8:27-38

Reflection

Jesus' first disciples were fishermen, and when Jesus called them to come and follow him, he told them that he would show them how to fish for people. Of course, they used nets on their boats, not rods with hooks, but the symbol of ourselves as fish on the end of God's hook has become one that is used in modern day Christianity. So, what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus and to be fishers of men ourselves, but to also be the ones that are on God's hook? Nowadays, we use the phrase 'on the hook' as an idiom that means that we are in a tight spot. What positions will we find ourselves in while we are on God's hook?

In today's scripture the disciples find themselves put on the spot, as Jesus asks them, "**Who do people say I am?**" Peter is brave enough to attempt an answer. 'I think you're the Messiah, the Promised One, the one who is going to liberate us and deliver us from the Romans.' Jesus goes on to tell them what being the Messiah is going to mean. That he is going to suffer. Peter has the right title, but Peter has the wrong understanding of that title, of what is going to happen, and Peter doesn't want to hear about a suffering Messiah. *Are we ready to hear that message?*

Then Jesus goes into even more detail. Being on the hook is not going to be easy. Jesus said that if you want to follow him, then you have **deny yourself and pick up your cross**. Self-denial here does not mean merely abstaining from the "pleasures" of life. It means continuing to make the decision that we will not be the masters of our own existence. Instead, Jesus and his mission will drive everything we do. Followers of Jesus will walk intentionally into dangerous places despite personal risk to themselves to ensure that the work of God's kingdom is declared and embodied. John Wesley distinguished between "bearing a cross" and "taking up a cross." We "bear a cross" when suffering is laid on us that we did not choose. But in "taking up a cross" we choose to suffer what we might have

avoided. Taking up the cross is accepting the call to act with God's love in the world, whatever the cost. Being on the hook puts us in a pretty tight spot, well out of our comfort zones.

We take up the cross each time we take a stand for social justice for the last and the lost and the least. When the Taliban took Afghanistan back over at the end of August, the connexion immediately put out a list of possible actions for people in the pew to stand up and help the lost and least. This included writing to our MP with key points to raise about refugees and how to offer help to Afghanistan's resettling in the UK. We have just launched a new Climate Action initiative for the Circuit (<https://methodistic.org.uk/climate-action/>). We have lots of resources about **learning, speaking, acting** and **inspiring hope**. Some of these things are easy to do and others will take courage.

When the disciples left their boats to follow Jesus, they did not think they had signed up to a mission of suffering and cross carrying. Like the first disciples, sometimes our faith is shaken, and we are led in a direction that we did not expect to go. Ultimately, we know Peter was right, Jesus was the Messiah, but not a conquering Messiah overcoming the Romans with force. Jesus taught us another way, a way of sacrificial love that leads to peace and to the Kingdom of God. Picking up the cross means that we put Christ's mission first and sometimes that it is not an easy choice to make. Yet, as we do so, we discover the good news that a deep joy that comes from making the loving choice. We find that true life and fulfilment comes through taking up the cross.

Consider:

- What does it mean to you that Jesus is the Messiah?
- What is the cross that you are picking up?

Climate Prayer for the Week

Pray for urgent action and understanding of the need to move to a net zero carbon economy, with a political resolve to drive the necessary policies, backed by clear information and encouragement.

Prayers *(Christian Aid)*

Lord Jesus, You are a Lord who walks beside your people, so we pray for people who walk for justice. You are a Lord who raises up those who are bent low, so we pray for those held down by the grindings of life and the indifference of the world. You are a Lord who feeds the hungry, so we pray for all who long for bread and the means to provide it. You are a Lord who celebrates the small and the insignificant, so we pray for the children and for those who are never noticed. You are a Lord who says 'Follow me', so we pray for courage and faith in our hearts that we may take up the cross and find it leads to life. *We lift up now the concerns for others that we have on our hearts. ... Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray: Our Father ...*

Hymn: StF 673 *John Bell & Graham Maule*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYiwApKKz14>

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| 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? | Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me? | 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? |
| 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? | 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? | 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. |
| | 4. Will you love the "you" you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside | |

Blessing

Go now to take up your cross and follow Jesus. Go and share the good news of our suffering Messiah and invite others to follow him. And may God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer be with us all, now and always. Amen.