



Call to Worship

The cry of injustice calls us to follow Jesus to the pain of the cross,
as we prepare to celebrate Christ's rising from death.

Create in us a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within us.

Jesus listened to the voices of the powerless; help us to hear your word.

Together, we seek to follow your path to justice, rising to the call and demands of discipleship.

Hymn: STF 106 – *God Whose Almighty Word* (John Marriott; 1780-1825)

<https://youtu.be/3nFRUJ5ICKI>

1. God, whose almighty word,
chaos and darkness heard,
and took their flight:
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel-day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light.
2. Christ, who once came to bring
on your redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight with illusions blind:
now to all humankind
let there be light.
3. Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving, holy dove,
speed forth your flight;
move o'er the water's face,
bearing the lamp of grace
and in earth's darkest place
let there be light.
4. Holy and blessed Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might,
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride
through the earth, far and wide,
let there be light.

Opening Prayer

Loving God, we are on our spiritual journey of Lenten preparation. We come, baring our humanity, with all our worries and fears, and with our selfishness and waywardness. Bring us to repentance and restoration. Be in our discernment and enable us to choose the right voices to hear and obey. We come to seek your guidance to direct us in the ways of truth, justice, and peace for your creation and all your people. Amen.

Scripture Luke 13:31-35 – *Jesus ignores a warning of his danger*

Reflection *Rising to the Call: Who do you listen to?*

It seems that we spend our lives surrounded by contradictory messages, many spoken with great fervour. A couple of days ago, I saw a small group holding up placards complaining about the dangers of vaccination. In recent headlines, I've seen worrying demands from a group of influential MPs calling themselves the Net Zero Scrutiny group, who claim to believe the climate science but are insisting that we need to increase our commitment to burning fossil fuels. The passion and conviction of their arguments is persuasive, however flawed. It appears possible to build a following for any conspiracy theory. So, who do we, who should we listen to?

Like many short extracts from the bible, today's scripture passage makes more sense when viewed in the context of the surrounding stories. It comes towards the end of three chapters in which Jesus and the disciples are successfully establishing a healing and teaching ministry and serving the community. The number of his active followers is growing - in chapter 10 he sends out the 72. This success is accompanied by several encounters in which he is questioned and challenged.

Taken one by one, each story may just be an innocent enquiry from someone seeking to understand more of Jesus teaching, but taken together, one after another, we are presented with a constant drip feed of opposition which occasionally becomes outright confrontation. Jesus must have felt the cumulative effect. By the time we reach the passage for today's study, Jesus is given a clear warning by a group of pharisees that he should leave town or face the consequences. If this were an isolated story, we may see it as friendly advice, but surrounded as it is by growing antagonism, this is a – get out of town and don't come back – message. It's a direct threat, not a friendly warning.

Jesus responds by sending an equally confrontational message back. He is not afraid of Herod and his purpose is not to be swayed. Herod (Antipas) is notorious as a crafty and ruthless ruler. To be trusted less than a fox allowed into a hen house. As the protector of God's people, Jesus himself will gather the brood under his wing and protect them from the fox – no matter what the consequence.

Jesus is not deterred by the threats made by his growing number of enemies. When Jesus responded to the pharisees, he was doing nothing more than speaking truth to power. Our calling as disciples is to be prepared to speak truth to power wherever that power is abused. It is our calling to protect the vulnerable and marginalised. To expose and fight against ingrained injustice. The hard-won recognition that climate change is a reality that we must address with urgency, is threatened by climate deniers. The battle for equality is constantly undermined by extremist views seeking to hold onto supremacy. So, in this whirlpool of injustice – be that social, community or climate injustice, just who do we listen to? How do we separate the truth from the conspiracy? How do we see the path to real justice, when it is hidden in the noisy denials?

We need to follow the path trodden by Jesus. We need to wrestle prayerfully with the options. We need to seek the way that denies self – the way that puts the future of creation above possessions, or riches or pleasures. The way that puts compassion above commerce, mercy above money, fairness above fortune, integrity above interest, sincerity above status. We listen to those who we know speak the truth, because we see these values in what they speak, and in what they do, and in the way they do it.

Consider:

- When you are bombarded with different advice, what helps you to choose who to listen to and which advice to believe and trust?
- Who is looking to you for support in their difficult discernment?
- Whose voices speaking on climate change or other justice issues are you listening to?
- Whose quieter voices might you seek out that you would otherwise miss?

Prayers

O God of love, we hear the cry of injustice calling us to follow Jesus to the pain of the cross. A little of the light which has come into the world is snuffed out when we when we do not listen. As we take this Lenten journey, guide us towards the darkness of the cross, emboldening us to rise to the call of each new challenge placed before us, as we trust in your promises, revealing the power of transformation, and the hope of resurrection. *In silent prayer now, lift up your concerns for creation and the world ... Now we join with the Joint Public Issues Team in this prayer for Ukraine:* God of all, with alarm and concern we bring before you the military intervention in Ukraine. In a world you made for peace and flourishing, we lament the use of armed force. We mourn every casualty of this conflict, every precious life extinguished by war. We pray comfort for those who grieve and those who are fearful. Hear our longing that leaders and nations will honour the worth of all people by having the courage to resolve conflict through dialogue. May all our human failings be transformed by your wonderful grace and goodness. We ask this in the name of Christ, the author of peace and sustainer of Creation. Amen. *Our Father ...*

Hymn: STF 713 – *Show Me How to Stand for Justice* (Martin Leckebusch, © 1999, Kevin Mayhew Ltd) https://youtu.be/_5f10N6umzc

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| 1. Show me how to stand for justice:
how to work for what is right,
how to challenge false assumptions,
how to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense compassion
by the life I choose to lead. | let me seek no satisfaction
boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned
and accepted in your Son. |
| 2. Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
whether given or received
for my need has not diminished
since the day I first believed: | 3. Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
modelled on your living word,
in humility submitting
to the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your presence
every day in all I do:
by your Spirit's gracious prompting
may I learn to walk with you. |

Blessing

Go from here to follow the path trodden by Jesus, listening to the voices that are calling for justice. May God the Creator, Redeemer & Sustainer be with you now and evermore. Amen.