



Opening Prayer

Jesus is here among us now as we worship God together. We pray that through the power of the Holy Spirit we hear afresh God's word to us, calling us to take the good news to all the world.

Hymn: STF 407 Hear the call of the kingdom <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjRmIEhkHnw>

Hear the call of the kingdom,
lift your eyes to the King;
let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.

Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ may shine through us.

*King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
salvation in Jesus' name.*

Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,
and a hope yet to come:
let the nations put their trust in him.

King of heaven, we will answer the call ...

Keith Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

Let us pray together.

Creator God

Who gives us sunshine and showers to enable plants to grow, we praise you for the gift of nature? Just as the rain falls on the soil and produces green shoots, we praise you that your spirit constantly inspires and nurtures us. When we fail to produce our best for you and shrink from our tasks, forgive our apathy, and refresh our hearts with your love.

For all the times we turn away from you

For all the wrongs that separate us from you,

Forgive and restore us.

The Lord hears our prayer and pours out his mercy upon us. Amen

Today's Gospel Reading: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Reflection:

Throughout my lifetime, I have met some amazing people, one of my favourite pastimes is to sit with people and hear their stories, sadly in my line of work I tend to only hear the full story when a person has died, and I sit with their families hearing about all that they have achieved. I can honestly say, without getting in the least bit morbid that I have conducted funeral services for some truly amazing people! Over the last few weeks while I have been on sabbatical, I have caught up with people I haven't seen for a few years, and it has been good catching up with their stories and telling them something about the shape of our lives over the period since we last met.

I love stories, perhaps it is because I'm quite nosey, maybe it comes with the job. I love to read biographies and autobiographies, I like to know about people, what motivates them, challenges them, excites them, makes them happy or sad. I love fiction and have taken to both reading and writing stories. I thank God for the gift of audio books, and I listen as I drive around Suffolk, taking in the delights of the countryside, laughing and at times being moved by the ebb and flow of the story. I love to use stories in my sermons to illustrate points and find them as a useful vehicle to share the message.

It isn't as though I have uncovered a new model of preaching, I love the way that Jesus walks around, teaching his disciples, we only need to hear the words "A man was once walking from Jerusalem to Jericho" and most of us will recall the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus appeared to love telling stories and maybe that is why, around forty years later when those stories were first written down in what we now know as the "gospels" the people who had heard them, not only remembered the stories, but remembered the context of the message Jesus was teaching.

Stories feature throughout the Bible from some of the brilliant stories from the Old Testament through to the ministry of Paul, his journeys, and his challenges.

It was a revelation to me during my recent sabbatical, as I sat in congregations listening to preachers, instead of always being the one at the front. One memorable Sunday was a parade service when instead of the Bible story being read, it was illustrated by way of a video, there were possibly thirty or forty children present, the service was chaotic and noisy (as it should be with children present) yet, as soon as the video started, every child sat quietly and watched, taking in what was happening. It seemed to me that some of the parents weren't regular Church attenders, yet they were captured by the story.

Some questions to reflect upon:

- What is your story? What events in your life have made you the person you are today? If you were to publish your autobiography, what would you include? What would you exclude, and why?
- Which are your favourite Bible stories? When did you first learn them? Have they shaped your life? How?
- How interested are you in the stories of other people? Who inspires you? Who irritates you? Why?

A time of prayer

We pray for God's guidance and inspiration for all church leaders and communities, for a strengthening of faith and a more effective sharing of the good news with others.

Compassionate Christ,

You wept over Jerusalem; with how many tears must you view the troubles and conflicts in your world. We pray for peaceful resolution of wars, for comfort for the sick, shelter for the homeless and refugees, for food for the hungry and tenderness for the young and old in need.

Loving God,

We pray for those who are grieving, those who feel lost, those who are without faith. May they all feel the touch of your hand upon their lives, healing, blessing, and making them whole in your love.

We pray for our own concerns, placing our anxieties at the foot of the cross and looking upwards in thankfulness to share our joys with you.

Accept these prayers and the prayers of our hearts for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer Our Father

Hymn: StF 410 Lord, your church on earth is seeking <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnYUfhtz11Q>

Lord, your Church on earth is seeking
your renewal from above;
teach us all the art of speaking
with the accent of your love.

We would heed your great commission:
sending us to every place --
preach, baptise, fulfil my mission,
serve with love and share my grace.

In the streets of every city
where the bruised and lonely dwell,
let us show the Saviour's pity,
let us of his mercy tell.

In all lands and with all races
let us serve, and seek to bring
all the world to render praises,
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.

Freedom give to those in bondage,
lift the burdens caused by sin.
Give new hope, new strength and courage,
grant release from fears within:
light for darkness; joy for sorrow;
love for hatred; peace for strife.
These and countless blessings follow
as the Spirit gives new life.

Hugh Sherlock (1905-1998)

A prayer of blessing

May you find an opportunity every day to share the love of Jesus with a stranger, a friend or a neighbour, so that the kingdom of God on earth might increase more and more through the power of the Spirit.

And the blessing of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit be with you and those whom you love, today and always. Amen.