



Call to Worship - (Mark 1:15) "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Hymn - STF 424 – God forgave my sin in Jesus' name Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGKhz1_C41s

God forgave my sin in Jesus' name ;
I've been born again in Jesus' name,
and in Jesus' name I come to you
to share his love as he told me to.
He said :
'Freely, freely you have received,
freely, freely give ;
go in my name and because you believe,
others will know that I live.'

All power is given in Jesus' name
in earth and heaven in Jesus' name ;
and in Jesus' name I come to you
to share his power as he told me to.
Refrain

Carol Owens (b. 1931)

Prayer

Almighty God, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, we rejoice that we can bring our prayers of adoration before you, unworthy though they be.

You are wonderful and glorious beyond our imagining, and yet your love encompasses the smallest creature. We are amazed beyond telling when we consider your creative activity - the mighty mountains, the tiniest flower; but above all we marvel that you created us in your own image and redeemed us in Christ when we fell into sin. How could we fail to offer you our praise when we think on these things?

God our Father, we thank you for all the benefits you have bestowed on us; for the things we all share - the air we breathe, the world of nature. We thank you for Jesus Christ, the sure foundation of our faith, who lived and died and rose again to bring us eternal life. We thank you for the work of your Holy Spirit, dwelling within us, enabling us to worship and serve you. Hear us, we pray, for Christ's sake. **Amen.**

Confession

O God: You call us to repent and live in Your realm, trusting and obeying You.

We say to You, "Yes!" but when we count the cost of change we say, "maybe later." You call us to follow You as messengers of Your Good News. We say to You, "Yes!" but looking at our other commitments we say, "when I can work it in."

So we squander Your precious invitations, and the clock keeps ticking. We really do want to trust You, Saviour God, and obey You, Lord. Help us!

Free us from our sinful and self-destructive dawdling; free us to repent immediately and to follow You right now, and always, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Scripture: Jonah 3: 1 - 5, 10 and Mark 1: 14 - 20

Reflection

Let's start by looking at Jonah - he was called to proclaim judgement on Ninevah because of the people's wickedness but he was expecting his prophetic efforts to fail. Jonah didn't actually expect the people to return to God and turn from their evil ways but faced with a crisis they did indeed believe and repent - & God stayed his hand. But the interesting thing to note was Jonah's reluctance to accept God's call - but obey it he eventually did. This can be contrasted against the call, by Jesus, of the first 4 disciples as we heard it in Mark's gospel.

The way Mark tells it, it's really a very dramatic story. Jesus is walking along by the Sea of Galilee, and he sees this first set of brothers, Andrew and Simon, fishermen, and he says, "Follow me, and I'll teach you to catch people," which we always say dead serious, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men," but which he must have said with a smile, I mean, it's a very clever invitation, a call with a grin, and they respond to it immediately,

dramatically, just like that, they leave everything, their day's catch, their nets, their livelihood, and they follow him.

He sees James and John next, friends of Andrew and Simon, and he calls them, too, this second set of brothers. They follow him, too, this second set of brothers, just like Andrew and Simon, they leave everything, their half-mended nets, their boat, their father, they leave everything, and follow him.

Most of us are here this morning because we've been called, too. Our stories might not be so dramatic as some other people, or as the two sets of brothers. While some of us can name the day, not just the day, but the very time of day, when we decided to follow Jesus, some of us aren't so sure when it happened exactly. While some of us can look back and say, "This is when I realised that there was no turning back, that Jesus had that kind of hold on me," others of us have realised it gradually, or are maybe just beginning to realise that this call to follow Jesus is more important than any other call or conversation or invitation that we will ever have.

And though we often talk about Jesus' call as a one-time occurrence, it's something that comes to us again and again. While this story tells us about the first time that the two sets of brothers responded to Jesus' call, it was the first time of many that they responded to his call.

We have to rethink our call, don't we? Jesus might be calling us to do something altogether different from what we think; Jesus might be calling us to grow, to stretch, to sacrifice, to change, to forgive, to love. Jesus might be calling us to a whole new level of involvement with this congregation, with his body in this place. Jesus might be calling us to leave behind our nets, something that has become comfortable, easy, in order to take on something new and difficult. Jesus might be calling us to love someone that we can barely tolerate, to form community with someone that we would rather never see again. Jesus might be calling us to be less serious about some things, and more serious about others, to forsake some of our most important priorities, and to take on some others. Jesus might be calling us to take a risk, or to settle down and be serious about what we're doing. Jesus might be calling us to find out what it is that we're good at and then to do that for him. Jesus might be calling us to quit doing what we're good at and start doing something that we're not so good at for him. Jesus might be calling us to be still, to listen, to pray. Jesus might be calling us to think, to just think. Jesus might be calling us to wait, to just wait. Jesus might be calling us to go, to just go. Jesus might be calling us to bring a friend to church, or to join a ministry team. Jesus might be calling us to do all kinds of things.

How do we know what Jesus is calling us to do? Well, sometimes we don't, and we set off, as did the two sets of brothers, with little information and no real feel for the future. But we listen, and we talk to each other, because we're not alone in this, we are part of a body here, and we pray, and we try our best to keep open hearts and minds, and then we act on what we know, we take that next step, which is really all that we can ever do, which is really all that the two sets of brothers could ever do, take that next step.

That's what happens when we've been caught, really caught by Jesus. Andrew and Simon and James and John didn't follow Jesus because they had to - No, they followed Jesus because they **wanted** to. They sensed that he would provide for them an adventure like no other, life overflowing, rich and right and full. The same life he provides for us. Jonah reacted very slowly & reluctantly but he did respond; the first 4 disciples responded immediately and fully - how do you respond?

It's a dramatic story but it's our story. Calls heard, nets thrown, boats left, lives changed, lives found. Come, let's follow him. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for the Church throughout the world. Pray that we will find ways to celebrate and share what we have in common.

Let us pray for church leaders and for all who are working to bring Christians closer together. Pray that they will always be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We pray for Christians all over the world, that we may remember that it's God's kingdom we are building, not our own.

We pray that all Christians, but especially all of us here, will let the light of Jesus shine in our hearts and our lives, so that others will be touched by it, even without us noticing.

Let us pray that here in our local area we may find ways to work together to lay down our prejudices, to value people and their strengths, so that together we may feed the hungry, and bring good news to the poor. What have you to say to the world, God of justice?

We speak to you of hunger, of war especially in Ukraine and Gaza, of corruption, of refugees, of suspicion and hatred. We pray for wisdom to show the world a better way.

Silence

What have you to say to the church, God of faith?

We speak to you of plans and visions, of doubts and mistrust, of hopes and fears. We pray for guidance to be your servants to the community.

Silence

What have you to say to those who suffer, God of love?

We speak to you of friends, neighbours and strangers who, sick in body, mind or spirit, are in need of care. We pray for healing and wholeness for them.

Silence

What have you to say to us, God of all?

We speak to you of our longings, of difficult choices, of divided loyalties and of wonderful opportunities. We pray for faith to follow the movement of your Spirit.

Silence

God who has spoken throughout history, help us to hear your voice calling to us today. **Amen**

We pray...

Our Father, who art in heaven

Hymn – STF 272 – From heaven you came, helpless babe Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4FtZ9XzZag>

From heaven you came, helpless babe,
entered our world, your glory veiled,
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.*

There in the garden of tears
my heavy load he chose to bear ;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said.

Refrain

Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

Refrain

So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him,
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving.

Refrain

Graham Kendrick (*b.* 1950)

Blessing

The blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
be with you and those you love, this day and for ever more. **Amen**

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