



**Call:** Come to God and be ready to listen. Come to God and be willing to hear. Come to God and be ready to answer. Bring your gifts and talents. Bring your hearts and minds. Come and be ready to serve.

**Let us pray:** Generous God, we thank you for the gifts we receive from you, for skills and abilities, and for opportunities to serve. We ask for the gift of discernment, that we may know our own gifts and recognise the potential in others. AMEN

**Hymn:** Ye servants of God STF 340 Watch on YouTube [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptLLr\\_WjCz8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptLLr_WjCz8)

Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,  
And publish abroad his wonderful name;  
The name all-victorious of Jesus extol;  
His kingdom is glorious, and rules over all.

Salvation to God who sits on the throne!  
Let all cry aloud, and honour the Son;  
The praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,  
Fall down on their faces, and worship the Lamb.

God ruleth on high, almighty to save;  
And still he is nigh, his presence we have;  
The great congregation his triumph shall sing,  
Ascribing salvation to Jesus our king.

Then let us adore, and give him his right:  
All glory and power, all wisdom and might,  
All honour and blessing, with angels above,  
And thanks never-ceasing, and infinite love.

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**Prayer of Adoration:** God most high over all the earth, the name above all names, whose kingdom is sovereign over all others. To you be all praise forever! God who gave us eternal life in your Son, through whom we receive salvation, Jesus our King! To you be all praise forever! God of power and truth and grace, of wisdom and might. To you be all praise forever! We bring you our thanks never-ending and our love never failing, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. **AMEN**

**Hymn:** Father we love you STF 6 Watch on YouTube [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPVN3NjbJ\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPVN3NjbJ_U)

Father, we love You,  
we worship and adore You:  
glorify Your name  
in all the earth.

Glorify Your name,  
glorify Your name,  
glorify Your name,  
in all the earth.

Glorify Your name,  
glorify Your name,  
glorify Your name,  
in all the earth.

Spirit, we love You,  
we worship and adore You:  
glorify Your name  
in all the earth.

Jesus, we love You,  
we worship and adore You:  
glorify Your name  
in all the earth.

Glorify Your name,  
glorify Your name,  
glorify Your name,  
in all the earth.

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**Reading:** Acts 1: 15-17, 21-26

**Talk 1** “How do we choose?”

Have you ever been to an Arabic Souk or market? It is a veritable feast on the senses with spices of every colour, texture, taste and smell. Each one brings its own flavour to the food it's used in. Every different spice has its uses, but unless you are familiar with each one it's hard to choose which one to use.

Peter was faced with a similar dilemma, how to choose a replacement for Judas to make up the twelve disciples. You might ask why the need to find a replacement? Perhaps it was to make up the important number 12, as the twelve tribes of Israel – so important throughout the Old Testament and for the Jewish people.

Peter does three things. He prepares, he prays, and he waits.

His preparation involves coming up with criteria for a replacement. It has to be someone who has been part of the group of followers of Jesus from the very start of his ministry at his baptism, right up until the time of resurrection and ascension, someone with first-hand knowledge of all Jesus has said and done, a firm witness to Jesus' work here on earth. And Peter receives confirmation of the need for replacement from the scripture, from the book of Psalms.

What preparation do we make when looking for replacements in the church, or in any walk of life? Do we replace like for like? Is this an opportunity for change? What are the tasks that need fulfilling? What is the "job description" and "person spec" for the role? Do we use the Bible as the basis for the work we do in the church, as Peter did?

These are all important questions to consider, and too often we can get it wrong.

When I was at work, we had to replace a member of staff and having put out the job advert and received several applications it came to making a shortlist and then interview. The previous member of staff had been in place for many years and we felt a change of personality would be good. However, we had to admit that we did not make the correct decision and soon we were once again looking for a replacement.

Careful, considered preparation is required, but most importantly prayer is needed.

Peter brings a shortlist of two, and rather than have lengthy discussions about the various merits of the two candidates, Peter brings their names to God. "Lord, you know everyone's heart." – You know what each of us is thinking, you know our individual agendas, you know what our assumptions and prejudices are. "Show us which of these two you have chosen."

Peter prays for wisdom and guidance to make the correct decision.

After praying they cast lots, as was the normal practice at that time.

It is always good practice to wait and to reflect before making important decisions. How often are we impatient, and possibly impulsive in our decision making?

Matthias is chosen. I wonder what happened to Joseph or Justus? We don't know, but it reminds us of the Covenant Prayer we use each year, where we ask God to use us, or set us aside. The important thing is that it is God who knows our gifts and graces, and He who chooses when and where to use us.

Going back to the spices, sometimes we know exactly what spice we need to flavour a dish, but other times it requires tasting and experimenting. It's always good to have an alternative, a comparison, as it (usually) helps confirm that the spice you choose is the right one for the job.

So, when we are given the responsibility of choosing, let us base our decisions on what the Bible teaches us. Let us bring it before God in prayer for it is He who has a plan and a name, it is He who gives us the wisdom and guidance to make the right choice if we are prepared to wait and to listen.

**Hymn:** There is no moment of my life STF 482 Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXjKYuOqxVA>

There is no moment of my life,  
No place where I may go,  
No action which God does not see,  
No thought he does not know.

If I should close my eyes to him,  
then I am given sight;  
If I should go where all is dark,  
my darkness is made light.

Before I speak, my words are known,  
And all that I decide,  
To come or go: God knows my choice,  
And makes himself my guide.

God knew my days before all days,  
Before I came to be;  
He keeps me, loves me, in my ways:  
through all eternity.

**Prayer of Confession:** Forgive us gracious Lord when we mess up, we ask that you do not reject us, when we should have the confidence to know that despite our many great failings, you never turn away from us. Forgive us merciful Father when we make assumptions and hold onto prejudices about others, forgive us when we make hasty decisions without first seeking your discernment for us. Help us to put you first, to make prayer the bedrock of our decision making. Help us to recognise the gifts you have given us, and others, and may our words, our thoughts and our actions reflect your kingdom work. Thank you that you have given us eternal life through your precious Son, Jesus. Thank you for the assurance of new life through Him, and that when we come to you, you make us whole again. AMEN

**Hymn:** I will offer up my life STF 446 Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQkzHwz2eLE>

I will offer up my life

In spirit and truth,

Pouring out the oil of love

As my worship to You.

In surrender I must give my every part;

Lord, receive the sacrifice

Of a broken heart.

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring*

*To so faithful a friend, to so loving a King?*

*Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung*

*As a praise of Your name*

*For the things You have done?*

*Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part,*

*Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart.*

You deserve my every breath

For You've paid the great cost;

Giving up Your life to death,

Even death on a cross.

You took all my shame away,

There defeated my sin,

Opened up the gates of heaven,

And have beckoned me in.

*Refrain*

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**Reading:** John 17: 6-19

**Talk 2:** "Our protection"

Having thought about the importance of prayer in our decision making, it is further confirmed in the prayer that Jesus offers to God, specifically for his disciples.

Jesus is sharing his last meal with his chosen 12 friends. He has washed their feet, and his thoughts have turned to what lays ahead. He prays, briefly, for himself that he might bring glory to God and himself. His main prayer is for his 12 disciples, and this prayer is for their protection, for their unity, for their sanctification and their joy.

Imagine as a parent, going on holiday and leaving your young child "home alone." (Hopefully not something you would actually do.) However, now imagine going on holiday and leaving your child in the care of grandparents who know them well and love them dearly, and who you trust completely. (Something I have done.)

Jesus is preparing to leave his disciples, and is entrusting them to the care of his loving Father who loves and cares for them as a devoted parent. After all the disciples have lived and grown with Jesus, and so know God intimately. "I have revealed you to those you gave me."

Jesus prays for their protection. Protection from what? Jesus knows that following him is not always easy, and there are those who will try to distract and destroy that relationship between his disciples and God.

So, we can know that protection of God. Unlike those things that we might put around ourselves as protection, masks that become waterlogged, helmets that fracture over time, sunblock that has a limited lifespan and reflective clothing that disintegrates, the protection of God never fails, never fractures, never disintegrates or disappears. It is everlasting.

This does not mean we will not face difficulties or problems. It does not mean we will never suffer pain or persecution. Jesus does not pray that the disciples are taken from the world, or separated for the world, rather that they are to stay and live and work in the world. We can face our problems and God will help us find solutions, not in our own strength but in his.

Jesus prays for the unity of the disciples. This was probably particularly poignant, as Jesus knew Judas would betray him, no doubt causing the disciples to become unsettled. But he prays for the disciples not to just be united as one with themselves, but as one with him and with God. What an honour to have that prayed over them! Jesus sees their potential as ambassadors for the Kingdom. Does Jesus pray that for us?

Jesus prays for their sanctification- he prays that they be made separate or different from the ways of the world, made holy; that they may be set apart for the special task he has set them, to take the gospel message out into the world; and that they will be equipped and empowered to do so.

So, we are made holy by believing and following the word of God. We have God's protection and we are empowered to go out into the world to serve Him.

This prayer was for the disciples, but we can make it ours. What does it feel like to know that God is our protector, whom we can trust? What does it feel like to know that, in turn, we are entrusted to be made holy and separate to undertake God's work in the world? What does it feel like to know we are not alone, but part of a huge family of believers with Jesus, with God and the holy Spirit?

#### **Prayers of Intercession:**

Father, we want to live your way and do your will, offer you true worship, and serve one another in love.

Empower your Church to do this we pray; live in us; transform us. Father, we want our country and our world to display your love and truth, justice and mercy. We want to break down walls of prejudice and build bridges of reconciliation and trust, tolerance and peace. Empower your world, we pray; live in us; transform us.

Father, we want our children to be safely and lovingly nurtured, our elderly valued, our homes to be places of welcome and warmth. Empower your people, we pray; live in us; transform us. Father, we want healing for those whose lives are aching and weary; your comfort and reassurance for all who are imprisoned by fears and hate.

Empower these lives, we pray; live in us; transform us. Father, we want to commit our loved ones, who have died, into your safe keeping forever. Prepare us all, Father, to live with you in heaven. Merciful Father, accept these and all our prayers in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour. **AMEN**

#### **LORDS PRAYER**

**Hymn:** Have you heard God's voice STF 662 Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzJr9T5JYRU>

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

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,

though the way be rough and narrow?

*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?

*Chorus*

In you 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?

*Chorus*

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.*

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**Blessing:** Lord, help us to know ourselves better and to reflect your call on us. Give us the grace to use our gifts to honour you and to serve others. Help us to work together for the good of all. **AMEN**