



Call to Worship - Psalm 77:11-12 I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds.'

Hymn – STF 663 - I, the Lord of sea and sky

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
 I have heard my people cry.
 All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.
 I who made the stars of night,
 I will make their darkness bright.
 Who will bear my light to them?
 Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord.

Is it I, Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord, if you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
 I have borne my people's pain.

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UA2fMeXEKLA>

I have wept for love of them. They turn away.
 I will break their hearts of stone,
 give them hearts for love alone.
 I will speak my word to them.
 Whom shall I send?
Chorus

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
 I will tend the poor and lame.
 I will set a feast for them.
 My hand will save.
 Finest bread I will provide
 till their hearts be satisfied.
 I will give my life to them.
 Whom shall I send?
Chorus

Daniel L. Schutte (born 1947) © 1981 Daniel L. Schutte & New Dawn Music

Prayer : God of the past and God of the future, You have done extraordinary things and we praise you. We sin as our ancestors sinned, But you love us and care for us. Thank you for your great and generous love, For your long-suffering toleration of our ways. Thank you that you have broken into our lives, transforming and renewing, And shown us how to commit ourselves to you. Your ways are wholly yours, We cannot better them or change them. We love you; we adore you and we worship you, God who is almighty. We confess our sins afresh, Repent again of what we have done, And have not done, When we plough our own furrow. Grant us the assurance of our pardon, Help us understand that, Though we know not what we do, We are forgiven when we turn to Jesus. We worship together and we worship alone, Whatever our circumstances now, may this service be to our blessing, May it be a time filled with your Spirit, And a time of grace. Amen.

Lord's Prayer : Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Introduction to theme - Wonderful deeds : Today's readings contain the drama of Elijah's extraordinary removal from earth at the end of his life and foresee the challenges of Jesus's final journey towards his death. The point we are dwelling on in the sermon is whether we accept that God's power can and does pass on to those he calls, set against the temptation to avoid risk in taking up our calling.

Hymn - STF674 - Would I have answered when you called

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqxQVzqODAU>

Would I have answered when you called,
 'Come follow, follow me!'
 Would I at once have left behind
 both work and family?
 Or would the old, familiar round
 have held me by its claim
 and kept the spark within my heart
 from bursting into flame?

Would I have followed where you led
 through ancient Galilee,
 on roads unknown, by ways untried,
 beyond security?
 Or would I soon have hurried back
 where home and comfort drew,
 where truth you taught would not disturb
 the ordered world I knew?

Would I have matched my step with yours
when crowds cried, 'Crucify!',
when on a rocky hill I saw a cross
against the sky?
Or would I too have slipped away
and left you there alone,
a dying king with crown of thorns
upon a terrible throne?

O Christ, I cannot search my heart
through all its tangled ways,
nor can I with a certain mind
my steadfastness appraise.
I only pray that when you call,
'Come follow, follow me!',
you'll give me strength beyond my own
to follow faithfully.

Hermann G Stempfle (1923–2007) GIA Publications Inc., Chicago

Readings - 2 Kings 2:1-2,6-14 and Luke 9:51-62

Hymn - STF162 - The prophets' voice comes down the years Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gb8GhvNkH1Y>

The Prophets' Voice Comes Down the Years
to teach and to inspire,
to show the nature of our God
in words and deeds of fire;
not to disclose some rigid plan
that God has set in stone,
but to renew the promises
the saints have always known.

The prophets' voice speaks of the past —
the actions that reveal
the way God used the people then
this broken world to heal;

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Sermon - Picking up the mantle

(Luke 9:62) *'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'*

Nostalgia and the Deeds of the Lord The Psalmist wrote: I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds.' *Psalm 77:11-12*

We all like a moment of looking back. The happy memories of past successes can be encouraging. There is a fine line to be drawn between dwelling in the past or revelling in it with nostalgia so strong that it forms a cocoon.

There is another way of seeing past events, and that is as an inspiration or an encouragement. If we are able to do that, the deeds of the Lord, and recollections become not so much a comfort blanket as a springboard to bounce us forward into new endeavours for God according to our own calling.

Ploughing and Elisha's call When I was old enough to drive a tractor, safely if not legally, I was taught that whenever you needed to strike out across a field for the first time, whether with a plough or any other implement behind, the key to going straight was fixing your eye on a point in the far distance and driving at it.

A story was told of an old farmworker who, one day, struck out for such an object. The problem was that the landmark he chose was the fishmonger's van making door to door calls at a row of houses but somehow the land worker failed to notice the small moves of the van. His work had a fine curve in it, or so the story went. Whether true or not it made for a powerful lesson.

Elisha was ploughing with a team of oxen when he met Elijah. The ensuing challenge led to Elisha burning his plough and sacrificing the oxen as part of his call. Ploughing with a team of oxen was much more difficult than using a tractor as it involved steering the plough with one hand and goading the oxen with the other. That skill enabled Elisha to see why looking back was no good and if he was to be Elijah's understudy, he needed to commit to it. Jesus used the same illustration.

Samaritan hostility towards pilgrim Jews It is well known that Samaritans were often hostile towards Jewish pilgrims making their way towards Jerusalem for religious festivals. The journey through Samaritan country could take three days and yet often overnight shelter was denied to travellers. To avoid this, Jewish travellers often crossed to the East side of the Jordan, as we may avoid a difficult road. This is the backdrop to Jesus starting to talk about the cost of discipleship and that following means not being held back. A man said he wanted first to bury his father while others wanted to say their goodbyes. Jewish funerals happen very quickly so the thought is that the father of the man in question was not even dead yet. There are always reasons to put off commitment and Jesus uses the illustration of the ploughman at work to good effect.

Big Shoes Succession is a strange thing. It is daunting to take on a role from someone, even if they cannot do it anymore, if they have been successful, accomplished or well liked. We say that 'those are big shoes to fill' which does nothing for the confidence of the successor. There were tumbling emotions for the disciples who, at the stage when Jesus was beginning to predict his death, were reluctant to go near those 'big shoes' and yet God does not always see our sense of inadequacy in the way that we see it.

Going back to my anecdote about the curved furrow, the truth is that if we are fixed on God as our guiding light, he may gently move the position he is leading us towards, and the trajectory of our life's story will curve. That is, in fact, about development and not failure. Indeed, the course of a constantly renewing church cannot be a determinedly fixed, straight line because needs, understandings and circumstances change over time. A child of God, walking in big shoes, walks towards God.

Distractions One of the things that impresses me about human nature is that there are people who are prepared to support their nearest and dearest in things which do not interest them. People say that family are entirely supportive of their Christian life while not sharing it. There is a part of me that thinks these are not the subject of the criticism implicit in Jesus's teaching. I am inclined to think that the greater challenge is to those of us who use busy lives and family commitments as an excuse for not launching fully into the calling to which we have been called.

Jesus was fixed on making it to Jerusalem; everything else was a distraction. Elijah needed to complete his journey to beyond the Jordan; everything else was a distraction. Elisha learned that there is a time to stop ploughing. His greatest lesson about focus was to come, however.

Passing the Mantle There is an idiom in common use that is rooted in this particular event. To pick up the mantle is to assume a position of authority, leadership or responsibility especially in the context of carrying on from a previous leader. That describes the transition of the prophetic role from Elijah to Elisha which was dependent on the latter seeing the departure of the former. Elisha focused, he saw, and the power was his.

Summary God has done wonderful things in the past but looking at them is not the solution to being effective now. Present service is dependent on being focused on where God is calling us today in the world as it is. We are our own greatest distraction and quite often it is our own attitudes that hold us back; nothing else. It may not be appropriate to burn your plough, but it is appropriate to constantly focus on the living, breathing Spirit of God, wherever and whatever the calling is, for you. Thus, will wonderful deeds continue, to the glory of God. Amen.

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

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

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
though the way be rough and narrow?

Refrain (except the last time)

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?

In your 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?

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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Dedication of Offering : We bring gifts, We live lives, We seek to serve. Take all we are and have and use it. May your Kingdom flourish in this place for Jesus Christ's sake Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

This suggested structure for your prayers of intercession is offered by the Church of Scotland:

1. The Church of Christ
2. Creation, human society, the Sovereign and those in authority
3. The local community
4. Those who suffer
5. The communion of saints

This prayer is called *A prayer of joy* and is by the URC Minister, The Reverend Neil Thorogood

What a wonder you are working, God of all the glorious things! You give the delightful possibilities of time,
When time is spent well In the ways that bring me joy: A hot drink and a good book, Favourite music, Fresh air and a gentle breeze beneath the sun, A conversation, Friendship, Love.

You give the gifts each day can carry, When I let myself slow down enough to notice them with joy: the formation of clouds and the sunlight's shine, the petals on the stem and the leaf's lustre, the water from the tap and the street's surprise. With you joy is lurking, lingering, Longing to be found. What a wonder you are working. Amen.

Hymn - STF664 - Lord, you call us to your service Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtsubiBA78s>

Lord, you call us to your service,
each in our own way.
Some to caring, loving, healing;
some to preach, or pray;
some to work with quiet learning,
truth discerning,
day by day.

Life for us is always changing
in the work we share.
Christian love adds new dimensions
to the way we care.
For we know that you could lead us,
as you need us,
anywhere.

Life for us is always changing
as your work we share.
Christian love adds new dimensions
to the way we care.

For we know that you could lead us,
as you need us,
anywhere.

Seeing life from your perspective
makes your challenge plain,
as your heart is grieving over
those who live in pain.
Teach us how, by our compassion,
we may fashion
hope again.

Lord, we set our human limits
on the work we do.
Send us your directing Spirit,
pour your power through,
that we may be free in living
and in giving
all for you.

Marjorie Dobson (born 1940) © 1999 Stainer & Bell Ltd.

Benediction : God into the world and fix on God, Walk towards him, Do not look back, Be thankful and full of praise. May the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you now and for evermore. Amen.