

Order of Worship for Sunday 24th January

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Welcome

Welcome to worship on this 3rd week of Epiphany, yet another week in lockdown. Today we hear again the story of Jesus calling first disciples to join and follow him and we think about what that might mean for us in our current situation. We can't be together, but I pray that we can feel a sense of community as we come together in worship now.

Call to Worship

Loving Lord, thank you that you meet us where we are, in the middle and muddle of our daily tasks.

Help us to hear your call, to recognise your voice, and to respond to your invitation to be with you now.

Amen.

Hymn Jesus calls us o'er the tumult

Prayers

Creator God, thank you for a faith that is more of an adventure than a declaration, more of a journey than an arrival, more of a question than an answer.

May we live within the dynamism of belief that takes us and shares with us experiences yet unknown, that opens our eyes to what is yet to be, that stirs our souls with longing and intent

Thank you for a faith that is open to renewal, willing to journey, that dares to believe that not all things stay the same and that you, O God, are in the changing. **Amen**

Forgiving God, hear us as we bring all that we are and all we have been. We celebrate when we have shared our lives justly, and confess when we have not.

We celebrate when we have given of ourselves to others, and confess when we have not.

We celebrate when we have spoken kindly and with love, and confess when we have not.

We celebrate that you have heard us confess and now renew us, redeem us, and reawaken us to your loving forgiveness.

Amen

Reading Mark 1: 14-20

Reflection

I've always thought of my job as my vocation. For as long as I can remember I wanted to be a teacher. I wasn't entirely sure what I wanted to teach when I was younger, it came down to a toss up between maths and music and it was a combination of things that ultimately made me choose maths. The major influence was that I could see many more opportunities for maths teachers. I have now been teaching for 33 years, longer than many of my colleagues have been alive! But I feel like a I have learned a huge amount in the last year. I've been forced to do things in very different ways. During the first lockdown, when this had all come as a bit of a shock to us I had to learn how to make videos to record my lessons and post them online for students to work through, they could then message me when they had problems and I could e-mail them back with solutions. Now, during this lockdown, I have had to learn how to deliver lessons live over Zoom or Teams. The challenge with that has been more developing ways to assess what the students have learned and to work out what they understand – things I can normally pick up very quickly whether through a puzzled look on the face to by looking at the written work in their books. Online quizzing apps and interactive whiteboards have been become my new best friends.

What does all this have to do with our reading today? Well it seems to me that when these poor unsuspecting fishermen were called by Jesus to become "fishers of people" a very similar thing happened. They were, all of sudden, asked to something very different to what they had been doing before. No doubt their sense of calling to their profession was as strong as mine, maybe they knew no different, it was the family tradition, that's just what you do. Now all of a sudden their calling has been challenged and they need to adjust. Except they didn't take time to adjust. Mark tells us that Andrew and Peter left straight away and James and John even left their Dad in the boat to follow immediately!

Maybe we are all feeling a little lost at the moment, maybe we feel like we've lost our sense of calling. You may feel that you have lost your way because you are ill, or stuck at home, or knocked sideways by grief, or too overwhelmed to do a good job. The question becomes: What is the will of



God for us here and now? It may involve being kind to yourself, and looking after those around you. This may be a moment for humility, as grand ideas about mission come crashing down. Life may be reduced to the challenge of taking the next breath. We simply offer all that we are to God.

Lockdown may bring us face to face with aspects of ourselves we can safely ignore when we are busy and active and in a routine. Abba Moses, one of the 4th Century Desert Fathers says 'Sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything'. He was someone else whose life took a major turn around when he gave up his criminal ways to become a Christian. A temptation for those early hermits, as for us, was to think that they could serve God better elsewhere. Rowan Williams comments on those insights: 'To stay in the cell is most fundamentally to stay in touch with the reality of who I am as a limited creature, as someone who is not in control of everything, whether inner or outer, as an *unfinished* being in the hands of the maker'

We are not in control of everything and we can't do all the things we would like to do at the moment and maybe, just maybe some good things can come out of our time at the moment.

Many of us have learned to appreciate things that before we may have taken for granted. We've all had more time to think about what's important and what it is that God is calling us to do NOW. Not what we might do 'when things get better' but right now in the present circumstances.

When God calls us to do things, he doesn't ask us to do things we won't be able to do, after all he will be there with us as we do it.

What's important is that we spend time listening to him, finding out what he wants of us and responding to that.

Peter, Andrew, James and John had their lives turned upside down as they went to follow him, our lives have been turned upside down in other ways but God is still there with us and will challenge us, but also support us to achieve what he wants, if we will listen and follow. **Amen**

Hymn God's spirit is deep in my heart

Prayers

God of the past and of the future,
we bring to you in prayer those people and places on our hearts today:

Lord Jesus, you called fisherman as they worked,
so we pray for fisherman today as they struggle to make a living.
We pray for all those who work to bring food to our table

as they struggle with the complexities of legislation and the challenges of extreme weather.

And may those who exploit or abuse leave behind cruelty and follow your call to compassion.

We pray for the people of America as Joe Biden begins his term as President,

and for Kamala Harris and all those entrusted with the responsibility of re-shaping and re-uniting the states that make up that vast nation, so divided by race and politics and so ravaged by Covid.

Help them to leave behind ambition and to follow your call to serve.

We pray also for those in power in our own country, that they may make decisions that are truly for the benefit of all.

We pray for one another,

for our church families, our communities, and our loved ones,

for those who feel overwhelmed by the challenges of each day,

for those adapting to new ways of living,

for those who are ill,

for those close to death,

for those who are grieving.

Help us all to leave behind all that separates us from you and from one another

and to follow your call to trust and to love –

in Jesus' name who taught us to pray saying.

Lord's Prayer

Offering Prayer

Loving God as we are called to follow you in all that we do, we ask that these gifts we offer here will be used for the work of your kingdom and your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Hymn O Jesus I have promised

Blessing

Loving Lord, thank you that you meet us where we are,
in the middle and muddle of our daily tasks.

Help us to hear your call, to recognise your voice,
and to respond to your invitation to be with you now.

Amen.