

**Sheffield United Reformed Churches**  
**Team Ministry worship for individuals or families on**  
**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 10:30 am**

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

**Call to Worship**

O God, you spoke your word and revealed your good news in Jesus, the Christ.  
Fill all creation with that word again, so that by proclaiming your joyful promises to all nations and singing of your glorious hope to all peoples,  
We may become one living body, your incarnate presence on the earth. Amen.

**Hymn R&S 558**

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?  
Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known,  
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave your self behind if I but call your name?  
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?  
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare.  
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

**Prayers of Approach**

Lord, Great Father Creator,  
We come to worship you and offer completely, our hearts and minds to adore you.  
It is with awe that we look at the world you have made and see it is truly wonderful.  
The mountains amaze us by their majesty while the snowflake,  
That lives sometimes only for seconds, startles us by its complexity and its beauty.  
Lord, you are truly worthy of our adoration and praise.  
May our worship be worthy of the privilege we have been given  
To offer that adoration and praise.

**Invitation to Enter Deeper into Prayer**

*This rhythm of prayer, with its traditional forms of structure, hymns and psalms and perhaps most importantly, silence, might well be an important gift from the ancient Church to the Church of today struggling with pandemics and lockdowns and more widely with some of the serious challenges that our world faces, most particularly climate change, racism and poverty. This tradition of prayer and spirituality, despite the things that hurt and separate us, invites us into shared prayer and silence together.*

*Surely a most precious gift in troubled times. Come with us in this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and enter into a place of community and blessing. Simply "be" in this place and be carried by the prayer and the reality that it is God, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, who carries us and accompanies us. Always.*

Guide us as we follow you, holding on to each other while reaching out into your beloved world.  
Amen

## Readings



**Jonah 3:1-5, 10** – God calls Jonah and sends him to preach redemption to the people of Nineveh

**Psalms 62:5-12** - for God alone my soul waits in silence

**Mark 1:14-20** - Jesus calls his first disciples, to be fishers of people

## Reflection

Jesus begins his ministry after John was arrested by King Herod. John's arrest followed, on account of his denunciation of Herod's illicit marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife. Two possible scenarios for this are: under Jewish law only men could divorce their wives and Philip had not done it so Herodias was still legally married to him, or she had divorced Philip under Roman law but that was not recognized by Jewish law. So anyway you looked at it, in John's view, the marriage was illegal.

Jesus' ministry starts with the proclamation of the good news of God, that is, the Gospel. The message was that God's kingdom was near, that is, fast approaching, almost here, and so people had to prepare for it by repenting and believing in the good news. This was their moment. The word for "time" is *kairos*, signifying an opportune time for a response.

Jesus recruits his first disciples. They will be "fishers of people." This type of fishing will mean a new life in Christ. The gospel writer leads us to understand that they dropped what they were doing and followed without hesitation. But fishing for people required different skills and they had to learn what it meant to follow Jesus. Further on in the Gospel, Mark 8:35, confirms that following Christ may mean that you may lose your life. It is costly... discipleship.

Jesus, was inviting ordinary folk to join him in his struggle to overturn the existing order of power and privilege. I would like to suggest then that the purpose of Jesus' call to discipleship is not to take people out of a hostile world, promising them a better life in God's heavenly kingdom, but to be an agent for change. Being an agent of change means once you encounter Jesus, you are changed and you begin to change those around you.

Becoming a follower of Christ does not mean a life free from suffering. Instead, his purpose is to change the world in such a way that it will cease to be the hostile place it is, so that God's reign can be established on earth. Doing this will require that we make a preferential option for the poor, the dispossessed, the marginalised, the excluded, and those who because of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or class have been rendered invisible in our society.

Our reading of the story of Jonah demonstrates that we have a role to change the world. Jonah was called to go to one City. He didn't like them and couldn't understand why God would want to save them. Jonah was called and he refused to listen and went his own way. After getting his attention God speaks to him a second time.

The same Lord who called Jonah to be a preacher of repentance, called him the second time and gave him the same message. Though we might rebel against the call of God on our lives, he never forgets and his call is still the same. He called and chose us the church with a purpose and though the church has struggled and some have walked away from his call, the call still remains. God is willing to be patient to help the church rediscover his call. The call that he never forgot and still extends to us today.

The instruction that God gives Jonah is to proclaim the message he gives him for the people of Nineveh. Very often, we are hesitant to speak to people because we don't know what to say or even how to start the conversation around God and so don't even venture in that direction. But we can be assured that if we are obedient and willing to speak on God's behalf, he will give us the words to speak. In fact in our reading of Chapter 3 in the Jonah's story, God did tell him what to say. So no worries there, about finding the words, it's sometime more about the get up and go!

God's methodology will be far more effective than our well thought through strategic plans – after all, it's his message through us – it's not our message about him. In short, it will require that we change the rose-tinted view of discipleship that we have inherited and put on the varifocal lens which show us that by addressing the socio-political realities of our world, we may do more justice to Jesus' original intent as to why he tapped us on the shoulder and said 'Come follow me'.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

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. Lord, just like Jonah, fear can prevent us from spreading your 'good news', or from responding to your call to do something different. Take away our fear and give us the courage to be obedient to your call.

We come, Lord to share with you our concerns and worries knowing that you are all-seeing and all-knowing and will guide us in ways to understand and help in the solution of our concerns.

The world is not as you planned and much of what is wrong comes from the way humanity have used the home you have given them. As we see the climate warming crisis getting worse, we pray, Lord, that world leaders can inspire their populations to change their life styles to save disaster. Help us to lead the way in our own locality in the name of Christ.

We pray for the people of the developing world who will be affected worse than anyone. As we look across the nations of the world, we see conflicts between nations and between different factions of the same. We pray especially for Somalia, Sudan, The Middle East, and at this time the USA that the new President will heal wounds and prevent violence.

In the difficult times we are living through we pray Lord that you will energise the church, its leaders and its members to speak out with your message of hope and comfort to those in distress and, by example, lead the way of kindness, love and self-sacrifice in your name.

Lord, give us strength to stand firm when fellow Christians lose their faith when they meet great difficulties. May we never forget that you are more powerful than armies, viruses, nuclear bombs or anything humanity can do and that one small act done in your name can have immense power.

We bring to you in loving concern the people close to us .....*(Please name them here)*

We ask for strength and stamina for everyone on the front line of the virus fight whatever part they are playing. We pray that men and women in the poorest countries will get vaccination and not be left unprotected because rich countries have taken too many doses. We remember, all people who have lost close friends or family and haven't been able to lay them to rest as they would wish.

Lord of Love, may we be your hands and feet, and demonstrate that you have called us, through Christ, to love one another as you have loved us. We pray, Lord, as we offer these prayers of intercession that you will show us ways in which we may fulfil our own requests. May we answer your call and let you use us however you will so we can be, 'The people of God.' Amen.

**Hymn        R&S 531**

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,  
Whose trust, ever child-like, No cares could destroy,  
Be there at our waking, And give us, we pray,  
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,  
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe  
Be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,  
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,  
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm  
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,  
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

**Closing Prayer and Blessing**

Loving Lord, thank you that you meet us where we are,  
In the middle and muddle of our daily lives.  
Help us to hear your call,  
To recognise your voice,  
And to respond to your invitation to follow you  
Whatever we might be doing.

The blessing of the Holy Trinity  
Be with you  
Now and always.

**Amen.**