

Sunday 6th February 2022

Out of our depth?

God is calling us to come and join the story, to come and play our part. When God asks: 'Whom shall I send?' Can we say: 'Here I am, Lord, send me'?

Hymn

I will sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
How He left His home in glory
For the cross of Calvary.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
Sing it in the light of glory,
Sing it through eternity.

I was lost, but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray,
Threw His loving arms around me,
Drew me back into His way.

I was bruised, but Jesus healed me;
Faint was I from many a fall;
Sight was gone, and fears possessed me,
But He freed me from them all.

Prayer

Lord, we confess that we fear getting in too deep. When we feel you drawing us to you, calling us to leave the safe confines of life as we know it and plunge into the depths of life with you, we are

afraid. What will you ask of us, Lord? For we are ordinary people; we have no tongues to talk in clever parables, we have no miracles to perform. And, the fact is, we're quite content as we are; we're happy to serve you from the wings, we don't want the spotlight. Yet you have drawn us into your story, and you call us to be all that we can be. We confess that we are afraid of our potential; afraid to unleash your power within us. Forgive us and grant us the courage to overcome our fears and follow you.

Amen.

Reading: Luke 5.1-11

Reflection

The setting for this story is simple and commonplace: fishermen beside their boats cleaning their nets after a failed catch. They feel defeated, out of their depth, yet Jesus sees differently and draws these fishermen to new depths of life. When they trust his advice to venture into deep waters, not only do they pull in a miraculous catch, they also become caught up in the story of Jesus.

This week's readings explore being called by God and how we respond. We might have to jump in at the deep end. We might feel out of our depth. Do we have the courage to say 'Yes' anyway?

Simon Peter was a fisherman. What did Jesus, a teacher, know about it? Every fisherman knows that you don't catch fish in the heat of the day, or in the deep water. Yet here was this Jesus, mansplaining to an expert. Still, there was something about Jesus. 'If you say so.' Saying 'Yes' to God brought Simon Peter a reward beyond his expectations, a miracle. No wonder he ended up on his knees, feeling stupid and unworthy. But Jesus didn't want him to feel ashamed. And he recognised that shame comes from our fear of getting things wrong, of being found out, found lacking. So, he reassured Simon Peter, 'Don't be afraid.' Then

came the real test. Would Simon Peter leave his familiar world, step out of his comfort zone, and follow Jesus? Would he overcome his fear and let himself be caught up in God's story? Would he let go of his nets and boldly go into the deep waters?

Do some of the things God seems to ask us to do feel foolish to us? Are we prepared to take the risk, even when it means leaving our comfort zone behind? Actually, it may not be as bad as we think. Many other Bible passages show us that Simon Peter didn't have to abandon all his familiar people and things. He kept his house (John 20) and contact with his mother-in-law (Mark 1), and his wife – who appears also to have been a believer (1 Corinthians 9), and probably his boat too. Certainly there are several times when Jesus and the disciples used a boat, and it must have belonged to one of them. And what did Peter do after the Resurrection? Preach in the Temple? Heal the sick? Why, go fishing, of course (John 21)!

So, it seems that God asks us to take the familiar things of our lives – our skills and experience – and to use them to good purpose. Ordinary folk, ordinary lives, doing extraordinary things. All because we let ourselves get caught up in God's story.

We're familiar with the story of Rosa Parks, the black woman from Alabama whose refusal to give up her seat on a bus to a white man was pivotal in the civil rights movement. What she did was incredibly brave, but it was also very ordinary. She just sat. And there are many more similar moments – and many so ordinary that they will never ever hit the headlines – that we could recall.

What is God calling you to do? What do you already do, that can be used to spread the good news of God's love? Even if at times you feel out of your depth, the next time you hear God say, 'Whom shall I send?' will you say, 'Here am I; send me'?

Prayers of intercession

Father, today we pray for all who are going through difficulties that make belief hard:

for those who are suffering physical and mental illness, that they may feel the comfort of your healing touch;

for the bereaved, that they may know your presence as they walk the valley of the shadow;

for those who have been hurt, abused or betrayed by people they loved and trusted, that they will come to believe in the One who rose above all human fallibility and did not sin.

Ease open all hurting eyes and hearts, Lord.

Push aside all barriers to belief.

Shine your light in our darkness, so that faith may flourish even in the midst of sorrow.

Amen.

A sending out prayer

Lord of the deep,

be with us when we feel out of our depth.

Lord of the waves,

send us where we are most needed.

Lord of the shore,

bring us safely home.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Sunday 13th February 2022

Love one another, the greatest gift.

Introduction 'God gave us this command: If we love God, we must also love each other as brothers and sisters.' 1Jn 4v22

Hymn Singing the Faith 443 Come let us sing of a wonderful love

Opening prayer

O God of love, who is love, and who gives love, we worship and adore you as the source of all love.

We do not enlist in the cult of love as the world knows it, for we are not slaves to the shallow love of light romance and fleeting fancy.

We turn our faces to the illumination of your love, as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so that we may share the true love that comes from you.

We look to your light, we marvel in your majesty, we revel in the rapture of being loved by you. **Amen.**

Reading 1 Corinthians 13v3-7, 12-13 *Passion Translation*

If I were to be so generous as to give away everything I owned to feed the poor, and to offer my body to be burned as a martyr, without the pure motive of love, I would gain nothing of value.

Love is large and incredibly patient. Love is gentle and consistently kind to all. It refuses to be jealous when blessing comes to someone else. Love does not brag about one's achievements nor inflate its own importance. Love does not traffic in shame and disrespect, nor selfishly seek its own honour. Love is not easily irritated or quick to take offense. Love joyfully celebrates honesty and finds no delight in what is wrong. Love is

a safe place of shelter, for it never stops believing the best for others. Love never takes failure as defeat, for it never gives up. For now we see but a faint reflection of riddles and mysteries as though reflected in a mirror, but one day we will see face-to-face. My understanding is incomplete now, but one day I will understand everything, just as everything about me has been fully understood. Until then, there are three things that remain: faith, hope, and love—yet love surpasses them all. So above all else, let love be the beautiful prize for which you run.

How do we, ‘Love one another’?

In a difficult time in my life I came across a book, called the **5 love languages** by Dr Gary Chapman

Discovering these *love languages* helped me us to express myself more fully and I believe it can help us all. When we look at everyone with the eyes of Jesus – see their needs and meet their needs – a balanced life will use all of these love languages.

☉ **Words of praise** - how would someone feel if always put down? How much taller do we walk when given praise?

☉ **Touch** – In my church in Lincoln, Anne always gave people hugs. If bereaved, someone may feel empty if they don't get a hug.

☉ **Gifts** - it is not how much the gift costs but the thought. My mum likes getting little gifts, writing letters, way of remembering.

☉ **Quality time** - how do you feel if everyone rushes around. Notice how children long to have someone close, no distractions.

☉ **Serving** – acts of kindness, big or small, without looking for a reward. Appreciation of a friend or carer with a kind act.

Jesus modelled various ways for us the way to love God and to love one another. We may find some of these come more easily to us than others. Valentine's day has become commercialised,

with a secular view of love, may we seek to demonstrate selfless love in all its fullness as God intended.

A prayer of confession

Father, our use of the word 'love' so often lacks meaning –
'I love chocolate!' 'I love Saturdays!'

We say it of so many things, yet we find it hard to say it to people
– except to our nearest and dearest.

Maybe we even find it difficult with them.

We are hesitant about showing it, too.

We don't want to seem over-friendly or too eager.

Or maybe we are just lazy sometimes.

Teach us of the love you give, Lord, that we might know how to share it. **Amen.**

For Further Reflection

A Nun working with lepers in India – was asked by a visiting bishop if she had learned the language of the locals – “Oh yes, your grace, I learned 5 of them: The language of smiling ; The language of weeping; The language of touching; The language of listening; And the language of loving.” this is a good reminder of the various ways of communicating and giving love as we use our gifts as part of the body of Christ and serve others.

Our passage from 1Corinthians 13 is well known but is not meant to be read in isolation. In chapter 12 Paul has criticised the Corinth church for their pride and misuse of their spiritual gifts. Paul points them to the importance of serving and leading, so that we value **everyone's** gifts and presence.

It is then Paul begins his poem about the priority of love – it's not about who can be loudest or who can put on the best show.

Spiritual gifts are worth nothing without love. Love is patient, love is to be kind, love should be enduring; it is not envious, selfish or

resentful. Love knows no boundaries; love is eternal and reaches completion in God.

The Greek word used here, for love is - *Agape*, is used to refer to a distinctively Christian love. This kind of love is not self-seeking but extends out to everyone – even our enemies. It is sacrificial, accepting, enduring – and so much more! When we remember God is love, that he has made us in love, and seeks to restore us through the love of Christ – it should change our attitudes to others to reach out with that same agape love.

Prayers for others

Take time to pray for others – praying for God’s love to be with them through his people in their time of need.

Lord’s prayer: we say together the prayer Jesus taught us.

Hymn Singing the Faith 503 Love divine all loves excelling

Closing Prayer

Christ has no other hands but our hands to do His work today.
No other feet but your feet to guide folk on His way.
No other lips but our lips to tell them why He died.
No other love but our love to win them to His side.

Sunday 20th February 2022

Call to worship

Father, we thank you that we are loved by you; no matter what. You call us to let your love flow through us to other people – including those who may have hurt us. Give us the grace and compassion to do this, and give us understanding as we explore this today.

Amen.

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
his love and power controlling all I do or say.

Prayer

God of righteousness, we adore you for the depth of your wisdom. You see the light in us and in others that we fail to recognise, for you are the source of that light, and you seek to nurture it, no matter what we have done.

God of love and light, we adore you.

Amen.

Father, we confess that we nurture enmity and hold grudges against those we think of as enemies. They are usually in the wrong, and we are probably in the right. But we confess, Lord, that sometimes we are equally to blame, or at least not entirely innocent. No matter who started it, or how it began, perhaps a swift word of reconciliation, or a genuine attempt to understand, to sort things out, would have nipped matters in the bud. Sometimes we know that life is not so simple; help us to know what to do, how to respond. For sometimes we should turn the other cheek, sometimes we should keep things in check, sometimes we should simply turn and walk away for our own good. We confess that the complexities of life confuse us; please help us understand

what you would have us do.

Amen.

Lord, no matter what we have done, you forgive us; and no matter what 'they' have done, and whoever 'they' are, you forgive them too. You forgive our enemies even when we don't, and you forgive us even when we don't deserve it. Thanks be to you, all-forgiving God.

Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Reading: Luke 6:27-38

Reflection Carolyn Hothersall

When I was at Primary school our head-teacher read to us Charles Kingsley's 'The Water Babies.' I remember nothing about the story except the two characters 'Do-as-you-would-be-done-by' and 'Be-done-to-as-you-did.' Those two choices had a big impact on my life growing up and I always tried, and inevitably failed, to be like the first. In our reading today, Jesus challenged his hearers to behave differently from how they had been brought up. Loving our neighbours as ourselves was, in the Old Testament, aimed only at fellow Israelites, but Jesus encourages those who heard him to include everyone, even our enemies.

This sounds like a very simple principle to live by. Why, then, does it seem in practice to be so challenging? Assuming that we would like to be treated kindly and with love, what gets in the way of us showing kindness and love to others? Jesus says that we should love our enemies, not just those who do good to us. We all have been wounded by someone. Do we try to seek revenge? Often, we can feel our response to our enemies is justified. So, when Jesus tells us to 'love our enemies', he is

turning what we might call 'everyday worldly wisdom' upside down. Instead of hate, he instructs us to love. Instead of hitting back, he tells us to offer the other cheek. Instead of judging, he says we should forgive. These are not easy words to hear, especially if we have been deeply wounded.

The truth is, we all have hurt someone, whether by intent or accident. We may very well be someone's enemy. Our human nature causes us to mess up and to hurt and judge others. No one is innocent. Jesus challenges us to walk a different path, but this is something we cannot do on our own. We need God's help. Remember that Jesus never asked us to do something he himself had not done. Jesus was crucified by his enemies, yet, as he was dying, he cried out, 'Father, forgive them.' We are loved by God. We are forgiven by God. We are not judged by God (thanks to Jesus). And, as difficult as this may be to hear – God loves our enemies too. God wants us to live a life free from bitterness, anger and a desire to seek revenge. This is not easy. Only God can give us the strength to do it.

Who is your enemy? Who has hurt you? Do you have the courage to turn the questions back on yourself and ask: Who have I hurt? Who do I judge? It truly is not an easy path – but Jesus will walk with us on our journey.

Prayer

Let us pray, for the world and its people, for places of famine and epidemic, for war zones and disaster areas...

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For politicians and journalists, for all who work in the media, and those who have no one to speak for them...

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the unemployed, for those who use local food banks and those who run them...

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For those who are ill, for the very old and very young and those who care for them...

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the leaders of all our faith communities, for those who lead your church, and for those who worship and pray anywhere...

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer and reveal your glory.
Amen.**

May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus as I onward go.

Blessing

Lord, thank you that we are loved and forgiven by you.

We know it is hard to love those who have hurt us.

Give us your strength.

Help us to love our enemies.

Help us to do good to those who hate and hurt us.

And help us to know when we have hurt others,

and to repent, and to seek only to do good,

in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Sunday 27th February 2022

Hymn: STF 20 Be still for the presence of the Lord

Call to worship

Arise, shine out for the Lord is with you. Greet each other as people of peace and welcome the stranger, help those in need and be the people of hope and love. Grant us the grace to be faithful disciples and to be people filled with compassion, love and joy.

Amen.

Prayer

God the Father, who protects and watches over us

We praise and adore your holy name

Christ the Son who calls by our own name

We praise and adore your holy name

Holy Spirit who fills us with joy

We praise and adore your holy name

Amen.

God of all power, we glorify and magnify Your Name because of who You are. We thank You for the divine confirmation of Your Son whilst he was here on earth and became the radiant glory. Your Son became transfigured before His followers; His face shone like the sun and His garments became as white as light! Lord, Your power was evident in this transfiguration and for that we thank You for being who You say You are.

Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Reading: 2 Corinthians 3: 12-4.2

Reading: Luke 9:28-43 The Transfiguration

Hymn STF 471: Lord let me come to you.....

Reflection Simon Skidmore

Our passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthians comes as part of a section running through several chapters in which he reflects upon the ministry to which he is called, and not least on his own frailty and fallibility in that ministry. Paul sees himself and others being transformed so that our unveiled faces reflect the glory of God

Knowing who and how we are, it's a wonder that any of us respond to God's call at all – but of course that's just it: it is a wonder. God chooses to work in and through such as us, perhaps because this is the wonder of his grace fully known. We are to seek the lower place and, after the pattern of our Lord, to be the ones who serve. We also see that even the life of our Lord was a jar made in clay.

Clay jars were commonly used to carry lights. And some commentators have suggested that it is the poorer quality jars through which light may the more easily shine. The light is seen more through the thin and flawed jar than it is through that which is better made and highly decorated. In weakness is found strength; woundedness becomes the ground of healing; despair is turned to hope, and death is the seed of life. The expected ways of the world are turned on their heads.

And so we clay jars go on and do not lose heart - our flaws clearly visible, the glaze becoming chipped, the colour fading. Flawed and fallible we go on and do not lose heart, because we know that God has called and chosen us. And God has gifted us with

treasure to place within our jars – it is by God’s mercy that we do what we do, it is God’s Spirit who is at work in us.

In the last two years we will have learned things, discovered new truths about ourselves, the world and God. We have this treasure in clay jars. Amen

Prayer

We think about the many opportunities that you give us Lord to serve you each day. We remember the Bible story when the disciples gathered to see you in your glory and the impact it had on them. We pray that in listening and responding to your word we are inspired to be new holy people, reenergised and people of joy. We pray for those who may forgotten and abandoned and those seeking you out. Bless our hands as we seek to serve. In Jesus name we pray.

Amen.

Blessing

Lord as we go about our lives in the week ahead, may you bless us and fill us with your love, spirit and hope. May we be encouraged and not to lose faith and be witnesses to your Good news. May we be transformed and in turn transform the lives of others whom we meet through our words and actions. **Amen.**

Hymn: STF 59 Lord the light of your love is shining