

**God of change and challenge,
you call me to follow you into the new creation;
help me to see your kingdom changing me
and bringing life to our community and our world.
Where your Spirit is at work, may I bless what we see.
In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Jonah 3:1-5, 10 The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

Let us pray:

Lord, just like Jonah, fear can prevent us from spreading your 'good news', or from responding to your call to do something different.

**Fear of being unpopular.
Fear of being inadequate.
Fear of having to give up possessions.
Fear of losing people we love.
Fear of losing friendships.
Fear of hard life changes.
Fear of becoming different.**

**We are sorry, Lord, for giving in to our fears.
We are sorry for allowing social or family pressures to influence our decisions.
Help us to respond to your call without hesitation.**

**Help us to lean on you. Help us to trust in you.
Help us to learn from you. Help us to follow you.
Help us to spread the good news.
We ask in your powerful name. Amen.**

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Mark 1.14-20 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Sing or read:

- 1 Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
whose trust, ever childlike, 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.
- 2 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.
- 3 Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.
- 4 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.

Jan Struther (Joyce Placzek) (1901–1953) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 526

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Sermon: Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming the “good news” of the gospel, which is that “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:15).

The emphasis of Mark’s gospel is that Jesus’ coming is the gospel, the “good news,” a term that in the first 15 verses of the gospel occurs three times.

Since last Sunday’s story is from the Gospel of John, we do not know the exact sequence of that text with this one from Mark, but the theme is the same. Today’s reading picks up again the account from last Sunday, that is, the commencing of Jesus’ ministry as he calls his original disciples. Last Sunday we heard Jesus called Philip and Nathanael. In today’s narrative he calls four fishermen at the Sea of Galilee who are Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John.

We do not know what there was about Jesus that led Simon, Andrew, James, John, and others to leave their homes and families to follow Jesus. Did they know him previously? Or was this their first dealings with him? In any case there was something extraordinarily captivating about Jesus to cause these and others to follow him into an unknown future. The amazing characteristic of the story is that they followed Jesus with no idea of where it would lead.

We know extraordinarily little of the background of any of the disciples whom Jesus calls. The four in today’s story were fishermen. Matthew was a tax collector (Matthew 9:9). What had the other 7 done before Jesus came into their lives? We just do not know.

As far as we can tell, the twelve persons Jesus called to be his companions were ordinary men. As far as we can tell, Jesus did not do background checks to determine IQ levels, financial expertise, expert abilities, or temple education. He selected people much like you and me. Additionally, his disciples were anything but perfect. Many times, they

misunderstood him. They often hesitated to follow him. Judas betrayed him, Peter denied Jesus and others doubted.

But most of these individuals would be the persons who would continue Jesus' work on earth after he left, ordinary people, like you and me. They were called.

Jesus' first disciples were "northerners," from the northern area of Galilee. The capital of Israel was Jerusalem in the former southern kingdom, the religious centre was the temple. It is no wonder that Jesus was received with such cynicism when he journeyed to Jerusalem from his home in Galilee with his Galilean supports. The religious leaders in Jerusalem unsurprisingly saw Jesus as an "outsider."

As far as we know, every one of the disciples was chosen and called individually by Jesus. We believe that God calls each one of us. God not only calls us to follow Jesus, but also calls us into the fields and careers of our lives. We often speak of "God's call" too narrowly, as if God "calls" people only into ordained ministry. God's call is not restricted to clergy. God calls every single one of us.

The Reformation removed divisions between clergy and lay by confirming that God calls everybody. The word for this call to everyone is "vocation," from Latin meaning "calling." Every job that works to build up and maintain society is a calling. We also have callings within family structures, mother, father, aunt, uncle, child, etc. We serve God in these family callings as well.

The Old Testament lesson from the book of Jonah is also a story about "calling," but with ironic twists. Jonah is called to proclaim a message to people he does not like — a message he hopes will not be accepted. After trying unsuccessfully to avoid his calling, he finally arrives in Nineveh and delivers the shortest sermon in the Bible, an eight-word threat of destruction. To his dismay the sermon is effective. The book of Jonah ends as God makes clear to Jonah that mercy is for everyone who repents.

Jonah's call included the message he was to deliver, but in today's gospel the four fishermen are called with no further instructions whatsoever. They are called to a totally uncertain future and would surely have been scared out of their wits had they known what lay in store for them.

God's call is always into an uncertain future. When we enter our callings, we have no idea how it will all end up. We choose our careers and jobs hoping that we can use the gifts and talents God has given us, but there are no guarantees.

Prayers for others:

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

We remember the parts of the world
where people are being killed, oppressed and displaced.
We pray especially for the people of Tigray in Ethiopia,
for the people of Dafur in the Sudan,
for the Uighur peoples in China.
May those in power leave behind violence and follow your call to peace.

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 all young people caught up in and trapped by gang violence,
for those who have been stabbed or shot and for their families,
for those who live in fear of being attacked,
for all those who carry weapons.
Help them to leave behind despair and to follow your call to hope.

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 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. Amen.

Loving Lord,
thank you that you meet us where we are, here in our homes,
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. Amen.

The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with
those you love and with those you ought to love this day and forever more. Amen



Pauline