

## Service at Home for Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2021

### Prayer of Preparation:

Today, Dear Lord, with this sheet of words in front of me, I choose to spend some time, proper time, in your company. I am on my own, yet not alone, for I know there are other people, some I know and some I have never met, using these words just as I am. So, Dear Lord, help me to sense that you are here with me in my home - and there with them in theirs.

Today, Dear Lord, I am going to spend time with a familiar Gospel story. Help me not to rush ahead because I know what will happen next. Help me to picture the scene, to think about the people, and notice how you responded to their needs, discerning their deepest thoughts.

Today, Dear Lord, help me to respond to what you have to say to me. If this passage, or the way it's presented doesn't resonate with where I am, help me to accept that it may be deeply meaningful for someone else. Help me to engage in this opportunity, so that this time may be truly blessed. Amen

### Read, sing along, or reflect hymn StF 13

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LKznaBsXZk>

1 Sing of a God in majestic divinity,  
seeding the heavens with numberless stars,  
forming our dust and our dreams of infinity,  
God of our lives and the judge of our wars.

2 Sing of a child who was cradled so tenderly,  
sing of a boyhood by Galilee's lake;  
sing of a cross and a Saviour who wondrously  
suffered and died for humanity's sake.

3 Sing of a Spirit who daily addresses us,  
lives in our sciences, nature, and arts;  
moving through all of creation and blessing us  
guiding our minds and engaging our hearts.

4 Sing of this God who in glory and mystery  
chooses to lie in humanity's womb,  
enters the prison and pain of our history,  
rises triumphant and opens the tomb .

Herbert O'Driscoll born 1928

### Prayer of Praise and Confession

Great God,  
We praise you  
the One who made the world so beautiful;  
We come in reverence before you,  
the One who inspired the Prophets and good  
people throughout history.  
We adore you,  
the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;  
We worship you,  
the One who gives us moments of insight and  
wonder;  
Thank you, Loving God,  
for all the people and all the experiences that  
renew our faith in You.

Yet, Loving God,  
we admit that in spite of all your goodness,  
all the evidence of your love,  
we still wrestle with doubt;  
when times are hard we struggle to hold on to  
faith;  
we lose sight of your presence,  
we are content to be less than You intend us  
to be.  
So now we ask for your forgiveness.

We seek your renewing power.  
Set us free from the past,  
and help us to grow closer to Jesus.  
Help us to trust on his promise of forgiveness,  
and to respond to his challenge to walk more  
closely with Him. Amen

### Some verses from Psalm 139

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.  
<sup>2</sup>You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.  
<sup>3</sup>You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
<sup>4</sup>Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.  
<sup>5</sup>You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
<sup>6</sup>Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.  
<sup>23</sup>Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.  
<sup>24</sup>See if there is any wicked way in me  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

## **Gospel: John 1 43-51**

### **Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael**

<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." <sup>44</sup>Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." <sup>46</sup>Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." <sup>47</sup>When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" <sup>48</sup>Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." <sup>49</sup>Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" <sup>50</sup>Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." <sup>51</sup>And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, <sup>[m]</sup> you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

**Today's Gospel reading, the last part of John Chapter 1 could easily be overlooked.** It could easily be seen as an afterthought at the end of such a full chapter, the powerful opening chapter of John's Gospel. But it warrants closer study; put it in context, dig deep, and there's food for thought for us today. **Reflecting on this short passage we can find two challenges and a promise.**

When we think about Jesus calling his disciples, we tend to think of fishermen challenged to leave their nets and Matthew challenged to leave his tax office.

**John Chapter One presents a different perspective.** After the powerful words of the Prologue, inviting us to reflect slowly, John launches into the narrative at breakneck speed.

**Here's a quick summary of what happened before today's story.** We are introduced to John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness,

and to the people who challenge him as to who he is. John responds, **declaring "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord"**

**The next day** John sees Jesus and declares **"Here is the Lamb of God"**. He goes on to declare that he has seen the Spirit descend on Jesus like a dove.

**The very next day** he sees Jesus again and again points him out as "The Lamb of God". Two of John's disciples hear and follow after Jesus, spending a long time in conversation with him. One of them is named as Andrew, and **Andrew's immediate reaction is to tell his brother** that he has found the Messiah and he brings his brother Simon to Jesus.

**And the next day ...** do you get the urgency? each event following rapidly..

We come to the passage read earlier: **the very next day Jesus goes to find Phillip**, and calls him to follow. This suggests to me that Philip was probably Andrew's unnamed companion earlier in the story, especially as the writer points out that Philip and Andrew come from the same home town. Just like Andrew, **Philip wants to share the good news that they have found the Messiah and he tells Nathaniel.**

Now this is where I find the story takes an unexpected turn. Nathaniel is sceptical. "The carpenter from Nazareth? Don't you believe it, nothing good ever came from that dump!" It seems there was rivalry, even a degree of contempt, between the people of Nathaniel's home town, Cana, and the people of Nazareth.

**But Philip responds wisely.** He doesn't jump in, guns blazing, to justify himself nor does he withdraw embarrassed and undermined. He simply says, "Come and see, judge for yourself." The friendship between the two men is such that Nathaniel agrees.

Now the story becomes puzzling to us in a way that would not have been puzzling to those who first heard it. In spite of Nathaniel's initial negative response to Philip, Jesus welcomes Nathaniel, declaring him to be 'a true Israelite,

without guile'. When Nathaniel asks how he knows this, Jesus replies that he had seen him earlier 'under his fig tree'. In Jewish thought a fig tree was a symbol of a settled place. It took time to grow a fig tree. It also offered shade and might well be a good place to settle down to meditate or to pray. So perhaps Jesus had seen Nathaniel at his prayers and had recognised something genuine in him.

Nathaniel is amazed at Jesus' perception and declares for himself, "Rabbi you are the King of Israel". Jesus takes the conversation a step further. "Do you believe just because I saw you earlier, saw to the heart of you? You will see greater things, angels ascending and ascending on the Son of Man." Now that is a reference to **the story of Jacob**.

Jacob had been guilty of cruel deceit, tricking his blind father into promising him the inheritance that was his brother's by right and had to flee for his life from his brother's anger. It was at the point when Jacob lay down to rest exhausted and dispirited that he had a vision of angels ascending and descending a ladder from heaven and heard the promise that God would be with him always.

Now Jesus is saying that his life will show more of heaven, give a greater assurance of God's care for his people. This is what his followers can experience.

**So what has this story to say to us in our situation today?**

We can learn from Philip. He was enthusiastic enough about meeting Jesus to want to share the good news with his friend.

The nature of their conversation suggests to me that they had shared at a serious level already. When his friend reacted sharply, he responded wisely. Most of us don't find it easy to talk about the things of faith with our friends. It's all too easy to clam up if there's a negative response or to go to the other extreme and feel we must make our point, defending ourselves.

So here's the first challenge: **to think about how and when it's appropriate to speak of the faith that we hold dear.**

Then we hear Jesus' welcome - not put off by the sharp words he was no doubt aware of, but seeing the good beneath the prickly impression.

**Are we ready to ignore the harsh remark, see the good in those we meet, and respond appreciatively?**

Finally, the promise. Just as God made himself known to Jacob at his lowest point, so we have the possibility of discovering the upholding presence of God in our dark times. **Through Jesus we can be assured that God has not turned his back on our suffering world, but his goodness is there to be discovered, even in the loneliness of lockdown.**

I've been looking at the material prepared for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity on the theme of '**Abiding in Christ**'. It can be downloaded from the Churches Together in Britain website. A key theme is the reminder that even when we are unable to meet together to worship and pray, **as we pray and worship alone, we are uniting with Christians throughout the world, and God's Spirit is with us. Amen**

**Now we turn to prayer, for our communities, for the wider world and ourselves.**

Let us pray for people in the front line services: for those who work in hospitals, care homes, vaccination centres and the ambulance service:

Loving God, help them to keep going graciously in spite of tiredness and fear for their own safety.

Let us pray for others who cannot stay at home, but work in the community: police; teachers in schools supporting both children at risk and children of keyworkers; binmen, delivery drivers, and shop assistants. Loving God, help them to feel valued in tasks often taken for granted.

Looking wider, let us each bring before God one item from the news headlines that troubles us . . .

Loving God we pray for wisdom for those who have responsibility in the areas we have thought about.

Coming closer to home - let us bring before God those who are preparing worship for next Sunday: those who prepare the services; those who operate the technology to enable on-line worship. May they have a real sense of God's presence and sensitivity to one another.

Loving God, we hear Jesus' challenge, and we rejoice in the promise of his presence. Let us each offer the week ahead to God, the people we will talk to on the phone, the things we have to do, the long, lonely times of enforced idleness, any pain or sadness we may be carrying, any hopes and anxieties that come into our minds.

Loving God, may we live this week in your presence. If you call us to serve you in a particular way, help us to hear the call and have the courage to obey it graciously. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Read, reflect or sing along to the hymn  
StF:248**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUVCpF8-VuE>

- 1 I heard the voice of Jesus say:  
'Come unto me and rest;  
Lay down, O weary one, lay down  
Your head upon my breast.'  
I came to Jesus as I was,  
Weary and worn and sad,  
I found in him a resting-place,  
And he has made me glad.
- 2 I heard the voice of Jesus say:  
'Behold, I freely give  
The living water; thirsty one,  
Stoop down and drink and live.'  
I came to Jesus, and I drank  
Of that life-giving stream;  
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
And now I live in him.

- 3 I heard the voice of Jesus say:  
'I am this dark world's Light;  
Look unto me, your morn shall rise,  
And all your day be bright.'  
I looked to Jesus, and I found  
In him my star, my sun;  
And in that light of life I'll walk,  
Till travelling days are done.

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

**Join in words of trust, based on Psalm 62,**

In our weakness, You are our strength.  
Amidst our fear, You are our courage.  
Despite our despair, You are our hope,  
Rock and Refuge, Song and Salvation,  
You alone, O God,  
are worthy of our trust.  
You alone.  
Amen

**Join in the words of the grace, holding in  
mind your church community.**

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of  
God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be  
with us all evermore . Amen

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Prepared by Pat Fry

Preparation Prayer adapted from Ian Fosten,  
URC Prayer Handbook, January 2021.

Words of Trust Carla Groesch-Miller URC  
Prayer Handbook January 2018

Hymns copied under CCLI 30794