

**Bath Mission Area 17<sup>th</sup> January 2021 (2 in Ordinary) Online Worship**  
**Rev Dr Jonathan Pye, Chair of Bristol Methodist District.**

**Call to Worship**

Jesus said, 'Come, and follow me...'

**Bidding Prayer**

Step softly into your weeping world,  
incarnate God;  
embrace it in your love.  
Bring light into broken lives,  
warmth into frozen hearts,  
hope to those at war.  
May your peace pervade every place.  
Help us to approach this new year  
Filled with the joy of your companionship,  
as we step out in faith with you,  
ready to face the future,  
whatever it may hold.

**HYMN:** StF 29

Jesus lead us to the Father  
by your Spirit, help us draw near.  
Jesus lead us to the Father  
by your Spirit, help us draw near.

As we come with awe and gladness,  
help us draw near.  
As we come with awe and gladness,  
help us draw near.

Alleluia, alleluia, help us draw near.  
Alleluia, alleluia, help us draw near.

Sam Hargreaves

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**Prayers of Thanksgiving and Confession**

*Lead us on our Journey*

God, our God,  
you have called us to be a people  
on the move;  
travelling light,  
dying to live,  
ready to lose ourselves for the sake of the world.  
You have called us to be a people with a purpose;  
travelling without a map,  
travelling to where we are led,  
sustained by your Spirit,  
committed to the gospel for the hope of the world.  
You have called us, your people, to be the Church.  
But we are a church with problems:  
too strong for the weak,  
too staid for the young,  
too respectable for the poor,  
too divided for mission,  
too unsure of our message to speak to the world.

Move us on in our journey  
from where we are to where you want us to go.  
Open our eyes on the way to all the people around us  
who can enrich our lives.

Take us on our journey  
from where we are to what you want us to be;  
so that we become a community  
where all are welcomed and no-one is excluded,  
all are valued and no-one is made to feel inadequate,  
all are forgiven and no-one is ashamed to belong,  
all are encouraged and no-one is too hurt to come among us.

Lead us on our journey  
from who we are to who you want us to be;  
so that patience is built into us,  
kindness is assumed in us, gentleness is part of us,  
compassion flows from us,  
and the commitment to love is at the heart of who we are.

Let us journey in the peace and the power of the Spirit and in the hope of Christ. **Amen.**

(Ruth Harvey (adapted) *Eggs and Ashes*)

### **Lord's Prayer**

Reading: Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18

HYMN: StF 250

Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult  
of our life's wild restless sea,  
day by day his voice is sounding,  
saying: 'Christian, follow me.'

As of old apostles heard it  
by the Galilean lake,  
turned from home and toil and kindred,  
leaving all for his dear sake.

Jesus calls us from the worship  
of the vain world's golden store,  
from each idol that would keep us,  
saying: 'Christian, love me more.'

Sermon *'Called to be disciples'*

In our joys and in our sorrows,  
days of toil and hours of ease,  
still he calls, in cares and pleasures:  
'Christian, love me more than these.'

Jesus calls us! By your mercies,  
Saviour, may we hear your call,  
give our hearts to your obedience,  
serve and love you best of all.

Cecil Frances Alexander (1818–1895)

The current pandemic has posed a number of significant challenges to Christian discipleship as people have struggled with lockdown, increased isolation – especially from family and friends with its significant impact on mental health and well-being. Some have had the challenge of physical illness, whether underlying conditions or the experience of Covid-19, perhaps including a period in hospital intensive care. Others have had to face the trauma and distress of the death of a loved one, perhaps even being unable to be with them at the point of death. The increase in the incidence of those experiencing domestic violence is truly shocking. These are the stories I have heard from people from across the District over the past over the past eleven months. Some have asked the age-old question, so often asked at times of suffering and loss, 'how can a good and loving God allow such things to happen?'

For others, the time of coronavirus has led to a renewal of faith. More people than ever before are now taking part in daily prayers with others; on-line worship, whilst inevitably excluding some, has reached people who have not attended, or perhaps been able to attend church physically, for many years. Despite

the examples of people breaking the legislations or gathering in large groups that have, perhaps inevitably, predominated in the media, there are countless other stories or examples, often far less reported, of people have reached out to their neighbours and their communities in selfless acts of love and generosity, with practical acts of kindness and support. Through them, others, often with little or no contact, with the church have experienced for themselves the practical out-workings of love and faith. When Philip speaks to Nathanael about Jesus, Nathanael's response is less than enthusiastic, indeed cynical. 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' he asks. But Philip responds not with indignation or even 'clever' arguments, but rather simply with an invitation – 'Come and see...' – 'come and make your own mind up...', he is saying, 'don't rely on an easy cynicism or on prejudice' but rather, 'come and experience this for yourself'. It is true, even if the phrase is a bit cliched, that 'people meet Christ by meeting Christians', by seeing the difference God makes in their lives in ways that 'spills out' to others and faith is put into action. As people of faith reach out to their neighbours in their need, people become aware of the presence of God, alive and at work in the world. They become a 'living testimony' to others. In these challenging times, what people need are not easy answers or slick statements or arguments, but to see 'lived faith', to be invited to see what is the true nature of God – love, generosity, kindness, all the kinds of things that the New Testament describes as the 'fruits of the Spirit', which is another way of saying, 'what faith looks like as it is lived out day-to-day'. Of course, many of us share the questions and the questioning too, faith discipleship is no guarantee of being protected from life's challenges, but it offers us the framework in which these questions can be put into context; it offers us hope in dark times (Christians have been described as those who 'travel in the optimism of grace...'). Each act of love and kindness is not only an invitation to others to 'come and see', to meet Jesus for themselves but a reminder that God in Christ is present with us even in dark times and that at the heart of the Christian message is not a cold, uncaring, distant or absent God but the 'Good News' that in the dying words of John Wesley, adopted by the President and Vice-President of Conference as the 'motto' for their Presidential year: 'The best of all is God is with us...'. Whatever your present experience may be, God is with you. That is our message to the world and an invitation to others to find that which is of God in their own lives, the invitation to 'Come and see...' that changes lives and makes disciples.

Prayers of Concern (Intercessions)

*The first disciples*

Jesus says, 'Come follow me!'

People of the world, leave behind those ways of living that stop you following Christ.

Leave behind your concerns

with money, with pleasure, with escapism, with popularity, with self

and come, follow him into True Life,

where you will find

riches in poverty, joy in suffering, peace in facing up to reality,

acceptance in facing up to weakness,

love through self-giving.

Lord, we pray that the people of the world may follow you.

Governments of the world, leave behind those ways of governing that stop you following Christ.

Leave behind your weapons

of oppression, of exploitation, of injustice, of persecution, of conflict

And come, follow him into the Kingdom of God

where you will find

true liberty, human dignity, justice, equality, peace.

Lord, we pray that he governments of the world may follow you.

Church of Christ, leave behind those narrow concerns that stop you following Christ.

Leave behind

self-righteousness, respectability, exclusiveness, dogmatism, fear of the world.

Come, follow him in the power of the Spirit:

    forgiven and thankful, humble and confident, valued and loving,

    a pilgrim people of courage and hope, travelling together, united in God's love.

Lord, we pray that all Christians may follow you.

Lord, we pray for all those whose lives are difficult at the moment and for those who see no way out of the suffering in their lives – the sick, the anxious, the lonely, the bereaved (We pray for those whom we know who are finding life hard and difficult today...). We ask that they, reassured by your presence and uplifted by our care and concern, may find freedom and hope.

We make our prayers in the name of him who calls us to follow, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**

**HYMN:**                   StF 673

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 yourself 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?

Will you let the blinded see  
if I but call your name?  
Will you set the prisoners free  
and never be the same?  
Will you kiss the leper clean,  
and do such as this unseen,  
and admit to what I mean  
in you and you in me?

### **Collect**

Almighty God,  
by whose grace alone we are accepted  
and called to your service,  
strengthen us by your Spirit,  
and make us worthy of our calling;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Will you love the 'you' you hide  
if I but call your name?  
Will you quell the fear inside  
and never be the same?  
Will you use the faith you've found  
to reshape the world around,  
through my sight and touch and sound  
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true  
when you but call my name.  
Let me turn and follow you  
and never be the same.  
In your company I'll go  
where your love and footsteps show.  
Thus I'll move and live and grow  
in you and you in me.

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

### **Blessing**

As you continue on your way,  
may you know that God is there.  
By the strength of his Spirit,  
share your faith with the uncertain;  
share your love with the unloved;  
share your presence with the lonely  
and share God with everyone,  
just as God has shared all with you,  
in the unfading blessing of Jesus Christ.