



Personal Service for 31st January 2021

Hallelujah!

Give thanks to God with your body,
your spirit and your heart.

Though we do not gather in the same place,
we know the same God;
we celebrate all he has done,
and we know God holds us together.

SF 346 Christ is the world's light:

Christ is the world's Light, Christ and none other;
born in our darkness, he became our Brother.
If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:
Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's peace, Christ and none other;
no one can serve him and despise another.
Who else unites us, one in God the Father?
Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's life, Christ and none other;
sold once for silver, murdered here, our brother-
he, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father:
Glory to God on high.

Give God the glory, God and none other;
give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;
give God the glory, God with us, my brother:
Glory to God on high.

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

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A Time of Praise and Thanksgiving

Holy Father,
in you we live,
in you we are,
and in you we become signs of your hope for creation.
As the earth proclaims her love for you,
the sky echoes her joyful songs of life.

Holy Father,
we join the choirs of praise that delight in you.

Incarnate Son,
whose redeeming grace gives hope to the world,
you have shown mercy in the face of violence

and undone the world with love.
Your free and infinite grace remains our hope
as your voice calms our restlessness
and grants us peace.

Incarnate Son,
we join the choirs of praise that delight in you.

Spirit of holiness,
your sacred energy brings blessing to the people of God.
You are the treasure of life,
the wealth our hearts crave,
and the comfort they receive.
You give voice to the praise of our lives
and offer the promise of perfection,
that we might serve our Father in spirit and in truth.

Spirit of holiness,
we join the choirs of praise that delight in you.

Eternal God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
perfect beyond imagination
and at whose feet we lay all,
we join the choirs of praise that delight in you.
Amen.

Gracious and Holy God,
we thank you
that your love has named us in the night of our birth,
made us captives of grace,
free to worship, live, work, and think for you.

We celebrate that you have not neglected us,
but instead have found us in Christ,
transformed us by your Holy Spirit
and prepare us for heaven
where we will greet you with joy and boldness
because of all you have done.

Let the music you have given us,
be the servant of our praise today.
Let the words you have left,
through the pen of our ancestors,
be a voice for our love,
a challenge to our lives,
and a place of renewal,

through your all sufficient love and grace.

Amen.

Reading 1: Psalm 111

Reading 2: Mark 1.21-28

Reflection:

Let me just recap for you what has been going on for Jesus at the beginning of the gospel of Mark. John the Baptist has begun his ministry and baptised Jesus; Jesus has been driven into the wilderness by the Spirit and there he has faced temptations; John has been arrested; Jesus has returned to share the good news and call for repentance and he has called his first disciples. Let's take a breath, shall we. All that in 20 verses, and now, now we find him in the synagogue teaching and bringing transformation to those who gather there. His ministry has begun, and he has stepped into the public realm to share the good news of God with those he encounters. What then are we to learn from this moment and from Jesus?

For my text I want to take you to Mark 1 verse 21. It might not seem like a text that contains a great word for us all, but I think it does. My text: "They went to Capernaum." Actually, it literally has the WORD I want to share with you and that I want to draw your attention to. It is the very first word, "THEY". You see, there is often a risk that in thinking of Jesus we put him alone. We become so focussed on him and his ministry that we isolate him in it from others – be they questioners, disciples, those seeking healing, the children he bids come. . .

I would suggest to you that throughout his ministry Jesus is seldom alone. Yes, he is the teacher, the healer, the one who struggles in the garden while others sleep, who hangs on a cross, but almost all the time he is not alone. He is with others and his ministry is with them as much as it is among them.

Let me illustrate this a little:

If you go back just a few verses in the gospel, to the story that Mark tells of Jesus entering the wilderness, you will notice that he does not go there alone. First, he is driven by the Spirit to enter the wilderness. Do you see?

Often, we imagine Jesus entering that place alone, but even there Jesus goes with the Spirit of God at hand. He does not face those temptations as one adrift from God, but as one led by God's very Spirit. More than that we read that the angels attended him. I am not going to divert into a conversation about what we mean by angels in this case, but it is enough to say that Mark wants us to hear that Jesus was not alone.

Then when Jesus finally begins his ministry, when he steps out in faith, he does so with calling others to share in the work and the journey. There is community when he steps out.

Do you ever get excited (or appalled) when you watch the news and hear about a great work of art selling for a ridiculous amount of money? 100-200 million on paintings of beauty, power and significance, but which in some cases then get shipped off to a safe where they will stay until they are sold again for profit. In the safe they will never be enjoyed or embraced by the eyes of others. They lose their identity and purpose. Art is to be seen, known, and explored by others – it is in the community that these pieces realise their true value.

Jesus steps out in faith with others, with the disciples, because his ministry is for others. It is to be seen, known, and explored by others.

Why say all of this? If it is not obvious, it is a reminder that Jesus did not begin his ministry and step out in faith alone. If Jesus did not, then nor should we. It is a reminder that the whole act of stepping out in faith is one we do together.

History has tried to suggest, too often, that things were down to one man or one woman, but that is simply not a helpful story to tell. Our own movement of Methodism emerged not from just one man, John Wesley – however deeply some of us may still be moved by his teaching and reflection, but by a community of people who shared in the work and reflected together.

Yes, Jesus can do so much, but he chooses to do it with his disciples close at hand. This does not diminish what Jesus says or does. I am not suggesting that at all. Jesus has an authority that outstrips that of his disciples, the teachers who came before him, and those who challenge him. He has an authority that has not been seen before, and even the demons will leave at his command. However, Jesus sees his ministry as one which is for and with others. If we are to hear the call of God to step out in faith, then how will we do so with others and not on our own? Or, I could ask, how will we make sure we don't make others feel they have to step out alone?

Now let me offer a second thought. When Jesus steps out in faith, it is often at the call or invitation of others. Have you noticed how many times in his ministry Jesus steps out thanks to the invitation of others who seek him? The woman at the well, the man with leprosy, the words of demons, the synagogue leader, the hungry crowd, the man born blind. . . I could go on and on. Jesus steps out in response to invitation – the question then for us is, where are we being invited? Where are we placing ourselves, or getting involved, in ways that open the door to prompt and invitation?

Unless we are willing to live in places, or visit the places where others are, how can we really begin to step out in faith, like Jesus did, into their world?

I leave those thoughts with you, as Jesus left it them with the disciples when he later sent them out in twos to share the gospel themselves.

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Prayerful Reflection and Intercession:

Please take time now to sit and remember people who have been instrumental in your growth in faith.

- Who were they?
 - What did they do to shape your faith?
 - Where are they now?
 - Give thanks for them whether they are alive or among the saints of heaven.
- Now take time to think about the places where you are invited, or the groups you are involved in (either in lockdown or at different times).
- How do you see these groups as a place to share your faith well?
 - What are you being called to give in those places?
 - Who does your life have an impact on? Pray specifically for that person or those people.

SF 673

Will you come and follow me:

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?

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?

Concluding Prayers:

O Christ walk with me into all places, that I may know your presence
and reflect it in the sight of others.

Let the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with me, now and
evermore, 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.

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