

Call to Worship

Arise, shine, for your light has come and over you the glory of the Lord has dawned.

HYMN StF 137 New every morning is the love <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkPXz3tvA5M>

1. New every morning is the love
our waking and uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness safely brought,
restored to life and power and thought.

2. New mercies each returning day
around us hover while we pray,
new perils past, new sins forgiven,
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

3. If on our daily course our mind
be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still of countless price
God will provide for sacrifice.

4. The trivial round, the common task,
will furnish all we ought to ask,
room to deny ourselves, a road
to bring us daily nearer God.

5. Only, O Lord, in thy dear love,
fit us for perfect rest above,
and help us, this and every day
to live more nearly as we pray.

John Keble (1792–1866)

Prayers of Approach

Dear God

We come to you today in thanks, thanks for what we have, when it is sufficient for our needs. Help us to think like this, and to avoid that constant urge to want more, to have things we do not need; to provide for imaginary needs; or make our bad dreams worse with imagining shortages we do not actually have.

O God, we give thanks and we rejoice in your extravagant love, scattered among us, and found in the mud and thorns of life. And we praise you that your will for all your creation is plenty, not scarcity, and is for the abundance of life which fills your world, and is there for all.

We praise you for good health and daily food, for the care we have one for another, for the love and loyalty of our friends. We bless you for work honestly done, for games well-played, and for all the truth we have learned and the good we have been able to achieve.

We thank you for the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness and the salvation which has shown us, for his presence with us always and for the service to which he has called us.

Give us the strength and the wisdom to enable us to show our gratitude not just in praise, but in the lives we lead. Help us to do better, and forgive us, we pray, for all the times we have fallen short, for our sins, which we now bring to you in the silence.

Lord, you promised forgiveness to all your servants who truly repent. Forgive us now, we pray.

Amen

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever.

Amen.

Junior Church

Video with Thwaite: Camouflage <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ins1n7mpNKQ>

Junior Church introduction

HYMN StF 693 Beauty for Brokenness

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| 1 Beauty for brokenness,
hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world
this is our prayer.
Bread for the children,
justice, joy, peace,
sunrise to sunset,
your kingdom increase ! | 3 Refuge from cruel wars,
havens from fear,
cities for sanctuary,
freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields,
scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness,
his cross for the pain. |
| 2 Shelter for fragile lives,
cures for their ills,
work for all people,
trade for their skills ;
land for the dispossessed,
rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause
of those who can't speak. | 4 Rest for the ravaged earth,
oceans and streams
plundered and poisoned —
our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness,
carelessness, greed ;
make us content with
the things that we need. |
- God of the poor,
friend of the weak,
give us compassion we pray :
melt our cold hearts,
let tears fall like rain ;
come, change our love
from a spark to a flame.*
- Refrain*
- | | |
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| | 5 Lighten our darkness,
breathe on this flame
until your justice burns
brightly again ;
until the nations
learn of your ways,
seek your salvation
and bring you their praise. |
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Refrain

Graham Kendrick

Junior Church leave us for their own activities

Commissioning of Pastoral Group Leaders

Minister: Sisters and brothers, do you believe that you are called by God through the Church to the work of pastoral care?

Response: Yes, I do so believe.

Minister: Relying on God's grace, will you endeavour to fulfil this ministry?

Response: With God's help, I will.

Minister: Let us pray.
We thank you, gracious God, that you have sent Jesus Christ, your Son to be our Shepherd and Saviour. Give to these your servants the power of the Holy Spirit for this work and ministry; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All stand

Minister: Members of the Body of Christ, will you encourage these Pastoral Group Leaders in their ministry and support them with your prayers?
All: **With God's help, we will.**

Readings

1 Samuel 3:1-20 The Lord calls Samuel

¹ The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

² One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

⁶ Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸ A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"

Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

¹¹ And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. ¹² At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. ¹³ For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them.

¹⁴ Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

¹⁵ Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, ¹⁶ but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son."

Samuel answered, "Here I am."

¹⁷ "What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes."

¹⁹ The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground.

²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD.

John 1:43-51 The calling of Philip & Nathanael

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

⁴⁶ "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

⁴⁸ “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

⁵⁰ Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” ⁵¹ He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”

HYMN StF 728 O God, you search me (Psalm 139). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgW8KGEtCI>

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| <p>1. O God, you search me and you know me,
all my thoughts lie open to your gaze.
When I walk or lie down you are before me:
ever the maker and keeper of my days.</p> <p>2. You know my resting and my rising.
You discern my purpose from afar,
and with love everlasting you besiege me:
in every moment of life or death, you are.</p> <p>3. Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,
you have known it's meaning through and through.
You are with me beyond my understanding:
God of my present, my past and future too.</p> | <p>4. Although your spirit is upon me,
still I search for shelter from your light,
there is nowhere on earth I can escape you:
even the darkness is radiant in your light.</p> <p>5. For you have created me and shaped me,
gave me life within my mother's womb.
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you:
safe in your hands, all creation is made new.</p> |
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- Bernadette Farrell

Sermon

Today, we have heard the readings about how God finds us – seeks us out - and sees the person not only from outside, but also within. We heard that particularly in the hymn we have just sung, ‘*O God you search me and you know me*’, which is a version of Psalm 139. For many people, and certainly for me, that Psalm sums up miraculously well the relationship we have with God, our Creator, who has known us intimately from our earliest moment – whilst we were still within our mothers’ wombs, and who is inescapable. We cannot run away from him, because he is always there, wherever we are, in light and dark, even when we deliberately try to elude him. God knows all our thoughts, our past and our future, and he uses his power to keep us safe in his care; safe, even when disaster strikes, when everything is awful; even through death.

It’s one of those few texts in the Bible, like the Lord’s Prayer, that seems to say so much that you hardly need anything else. Yes, it is a wonderful summary. It’s also very old indeed: it is attributed to the collection of Psalms that come from King David, who reigned about a thousand years before Jesus’s time on earth.

But let us now turn to a younger, but still ancient text - the 1st Book of Samuel, from about 600 BC, and hear how God worked to call the future prophet. The Psalm tells us what God does, but this section throws some light on what it is like when God arrives in our lives.

If you remember, Hannah, who was believed to be barren, prayed for a child, and promised that if she were given a child, she would dedicate his or her life to God. The child came, and she called him Samuel. While still a small boy he was put into the Lord’s service. Think of him as a little chap in a white linen ephod, which is a sort of tabard worn by priests. His master in the Temple was Eli. He was a priest and the father of priests, but his two sons were no good; they were corrupt and exploited the privileged position they had as priests for their own benefit. They were not worthy to take over from their father, and therefore, the priestly line was about to die out, at least so far as its authenticity was concerned. Eli was already old, and his sight was failing, and so Samuel became his gofer.

Eli was asleep in bed, while Samuel was sleeping in the Temple chamber, close to the Ark of the Covenant (the holiest object in the Temple). When God calls, Samuel in his childish

innocence assumes it is Eli, his master, who is calling; he has no thought that it is God himself; we are told, “Samuel had not yet come to know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not been disclosed to him”. So he is just a child both in years and in spiritual development. But after the third occasion when he visits Eli in his bedroom and asks, “what is it?”, Eli realises what is happening, and tells Samuel to go back, and if God calls again, to answer positively and make himself available. And this is what happens.

The message within this is that we can all think of ourselves as children who may not know the sound of God’s voice. Though we are in a sense next to him, as Samuel was next to the Ark of the Covenant, it does not cross our mind that the voice in our head is that of God; in fact, we assume that it comes from some everyday source which seems more probable, even though it is more distant.

Well, we all work from past experience to future expectations, and we unthinkingly follow what the philosopher David Hume called ‘the principle of minimum astonishment’; it is more likely, according to our past experience, that Eli is calling from his bedroom than that God is addressing us individually and personally. It’s so far from our past experience, perhaps, that we just can’t credit it. The laws of physics are no help. It is a miracle, and we give it credence because of (1) our faith, and (2) the outcomes of the miracle.

Jesus makes this link time and again, and we find it in the account of the recruitment of Philip and Nathanael, which we heard this morning. The setting is very simple; three men and a fig tree, but there are some triggers in it which we need to be aware of.

Philip comes from Bethsaida, and he explains to Nathanael that he is about to meet Jesus, who comes from Nazareth. Nathanael is derisive: “can anything good come from Nazareth?” So, Nazareth was not a place you would be proud to give as your home town. It was small, ordinary and insignificant, but - in its defence – only an hour’s walk from the district capital, Sepphoris, which had a theatre built during the reign of Herod the Great. Bethsaida was a bigger and more important place, and so Nathanael is initially sniffy. Jesus’s origins don’t seem impressive.

When Jesus sees Nathanael coming, he pays him a great compliment: “an Israelite worthy of the name; there is nothing false in him”. Nathanael asks how he knows this, and Jesus relies “I saw you under the fig-tree before Philip spoke to you”.

On the face of it, this seems like a very slight basis for a great compliment. But it is necessary to understand what standing under a fig tree might signify.

The fig tree is in itself symbolic of fruitfulness. It grows well in a dry climate, and it provides welcome shade¹. It stands for Israel, in a covenant relationship with God, which make fruitful and useful. When the covenant falls into disrepair, the leafy tree becomes barren, and the barren tree stands for a showy religion that was actually of no value. Jesus uses this motif several times². He is severe about it, and says that the useless tree which wears out the soil should be cut down, but he is persuaded to allow it to be fertilized and given a chance to recover.

So, Jesus recognizes the person of Nathanael as virtuous because he has grown up in the shade, protection and nourishment of Israel – under the fig tree. Nathanael responds with faith, acknowledging that he is known by his Lord. The recognition is the ground of his faith. A further and much greater promise is then made: that he will see heaven wide open and God’s angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

¹ Micah 4:4, Zechariah 3:10, John 1:48

² Luke 13:6-9, Matthew 21:19-21

This is what ties our two readings together; recognition of the Lord. Samuel, as a child, had to be helped and directed. Nathanael saw his calling in the person speaking to him, and just knew. As for the Psalmist, the relationship was inescapable.

HYMN 509 Safe in the shadow of the Lord

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| 1 Safe in the shadow of the Lord
beneath his hand and power,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
my fortress and my tower. | 4 His holy angels keep my feet
secure from every stone ;
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
and unafraid go on. |
| 2 My hope is set on God alone
though Satan spreads his snare ;
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
to keep me in his care. | 5 Strong in the everlasting name,
and in my Father's care,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
who hears and answers prayer. |
| 3 From fears and phantoms of the night,
from foes about my way,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
by darkness as by day. | 6 Safe in the shadow of the Lord,
possessed by love divine,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
and meet his love with mine. |

Timothy Dudley-Smith (*b.* 1926)
Based on Psalm 91

Prayers for Others

Lord, we bring before you all the millions of people around the world who are suffering in this pandemic.

We pray for those who have died, for those who suffer acute or lasting illness, and for the survivors; those who live in fear, those whose lives are burst apart, with disrupted, livelihood lost, and everything reduced to instability and bewilderment. We pray for families who desperately miss lost members, and particularly for the old and the very young. We pray also for all who are involved in government and in organising medical intervention, relief and care. Bless them all.

In this time of need, O Lord, we bring all these people, this whole situation, before you, and pray for the relief of suffering and distress.

We pray also for those parts of the world where suffering is not new, or in the news, but just continues, without an end in sight. Lord, we know what peace we have, what stability and assurance we take for granted, and we pray that others may come to have that too, in Darfur, in the Palestinian lands, in Iraq, and in Afghanistan. We pray for those who endure hardship, danger and suffering, and we pray for all who work to bring peace, stability and health in any part of your world.

And in this season of snow and ice, we bring to mind the world of nature, and all the hardship that this season brings; we think of birds which search in vain for food when the ground is frozen; of little animals, snow-bound in holes and burrows; of horses standing in the fields on a frosty night; of squirrels with their winter hoards, and the hedgehogs and badgers which sleep secure all winter long. Lord, we have the comfort of our houses and flats, we have warmth,

clothes and stores of food. We pray for all who lack these things, human and animal, that they may be in your care, and that they may come through the hard times to the spring, to the dawning of new life.

And we pray for those who have departed this life, for friends, neighbours and family who are no longer with us, for voices which have fallen silent, for the loss we feel. We entrust all such to your care, knowing that despite our sadness, they are in your care, where no torment shall touch them, where they are at peace.

Amen

HYMN Tis winter now <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09OAKpm6eyo>

1 Tis winter now; the fallen snow
has left the heavens all coldly clear;
through leafless boughs the sharp winds blow,
and all the earth lies dead and drear.

3 And though abroad the sharp winds blow,
and skies are chill, and frosts are keen,
home closer draws her circle now,
and warmer glows her light within.

2 And yet God's love is not withdrawn;
his life within the keen air breathes;
his beauty paints the crimson dawn,
and clothes each branch with glittering wreaths.

4 O God, you give the winter's cold,
as well as summer's joyous rays,
you warmly in your love enfold,
and keep us through life's wintry days.

Samuel Longfellow

Blessing

Let us go on the path of a dream that the Kingdom is near in today's world; a dream which God has planted in us, a dream which we must nurture and pass on. Let us dream that dream and live that dream, and God will be with us.

Amen

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