

BASINGSTOKE AND READING CIRCUIT

Following Jesus is both important and urgent

Welcome and Introduction:

Whether you are alone or sharing with others, a warm welcome to this time of worship. Today, our readings invite us to urgently respond to God's call to follow Jesus and ask for our total commitment.

Call to Worship and Gathering Prayer:

Hear these words from Galatians 5:1, 13

Stand fast therefore in the liberty
by which Christ has made us free,
and do not be entangled again
with a yoke of bondage.
For we have been called to freedom;
to serve one another through love.

Let us pray:

LORD GOD, We gather in the power of your Spirit.
Give us wisdom to follow your leading,
that our lives may reflect your grace.
Make us people of love, joy and peace;
make us generous and kind;
and help us to shape our lives with gentleness,
faithfulness and self-control;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

We sing together our Opening Hymn: StF 673: Will you come and follow me, John L. Bell (b.1949) and Graham Maule (b.1958). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cv7InTcuvcU>

<p>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?</p> <p>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?</p> <p>Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name? Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?</p>	<p>Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen, and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?</p> <p>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?</p> <p>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.</p>
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A Prayer of Approach and Adoration:

Some words from Psalm 16:11

You will show me the path of life;
in your presence *is* fullness of joy;
at your right hand *are* pleasures
forevermore.

Let us pray:

LOVING GOD, you are always ready to save,
Lord, Jesus, you willingly laid down your life for us,
Holy Spirit, source of new life,
you fill our lives with your grace.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
you reached out to us in love
and called us to follow you.

**For all this and so much more
We/I worship and adore you. Amen**

A Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

*Good Jesus,
who bore the cross for me,
what cross is it you will
that I should bear for you?
You know, Lord, that I am all weakness;
teach me to bear my cross:
bear it for me, bear it for me.*

Edward Pusey (1800-1882)

LORD, JESUS,
you call us to follow you,
but you do not guarantee an easy life.
There are challenges and obstacles
and our human nature constantly fights
with your Holy Spirit within us.
We are sorry for the times we have failed
to heed the urgency of your call
or did not fully set our hearts on you.

Forgive us, GRACIOUS LORD.
Help us to centre our lives on you,
and to heed the urgency of your call:

Assurance of forgiveness

Jesus paid the price for our freedom from sin.
We are forgiven.
Let us live in the freedom
with which Christ has made us free.
Amen. Thanks be to God!

A Reflective Illustration: *Discipleship (Brent Mitchel) Growth and Transition*

From time to time, lobsters have to leave their shells in order to grow. They need the shell to protect them from being torn apart, yet when they grow, the old shell must be abandoned. If they did not abandon it, the old shell would soon become their prison—and finally their casket.

The tricky part for the lobster is the brief period of time between when the old shell is discarded and the new one is formed. During that terribly vulnerable period, the transition must be scary for the lobster: Hungry schools of fish are ready to make them a part of their food chain, as the currents gleefully cartwheel them from coral to kelp. For awhile, at least, that old shell must feel pretty safe.

We are not so different from lobsters. To change and grow, we must sometimes shed our shells – a structure, a framework – we have depended on. Discipleship means being so committed to Christ that when he bids us to follow, we will change, risk, grow, and leave our “shells” behind.

Readings:

- Old Testament - 1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21-
- Gospel - Luke 9:51-62

*We sing together our **Second Hymn: StF 272: From heaven you came, helpless babe, Graham Kendrick (b. 1950) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nOrQij4Ttk>***

<p>From heaven you came, helpless babe, entered our world, your glory veiled, not to be served but to serve, and give your life that we might live.</p> <p><i>This is our God, The Servant King He calls us now to follow Him To bring our lives as a daily offering Of worship to The Servant King</i></p> <p>There in the garden of tears My heavy load he chose to bear His heart with sorrow was torn "Yet not My will but Yours", He said</p>	<p>Come see His hands and His feet The scars that speak of sacrifice Hands that flung stars into space To cruel nails surrendered</p> <p>So let us learn how to serve And in our lives enthrone Him Each other's needs to prefer For it is Christ we're serving</p>
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Homily: *Following Jesus is both important and urgent!*

I am sure most of us have a “to-do list.” What are some of the excuses that prevent us from getting really important things done on our ‘to-do list? Some of our more familiar excuses are:

“I don’t have time; I am not qualified; I don’t have the right equipment; I am too tired; I am too old; etc., etc.,...”

Giving an excuse can be great, but receiving an excuse seldom feels good. We may enjoy putting things off, but it is never a good feeling when other people delay doing what we want to be done...now.

Elijah is at a very low point in his life and ministry after his dramatic contest at Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal. King Ahab, Jezebel’s husband, informed her of Elijah’s killing of the prophets of Baal, and so Jezebel swore by her own life that by this time tomorrow, Elijah would be a dead man. Elijah became very much afraid of Jezebel’s death threats, and ran away to Mount Horeb. Elijah is now doubting his own effectiveness in God’s service, and perhaps even God’s commitment to him. Alone at Horeb, Elijah is utterly spent — almost defeated and just wants to die. He feels that he is the only one left who serves God.

It is in this place of desperation and despair that Elijah had an incredible encounter with God, as God comes to him in ‘*a sound of sheer silence*’ — but importantly, Elijah knows that it is God who has come to him. And what does God do? God gives a worn-out and depressed Elijah a ‘*to-do list*’. How ironic is that! But, it’s exactly what Elijah needs. One of the things God asked Elijah to do was to anoint Elisha as his successor. Elijah had been mistaken in his conclusion that he alone had remained faithful to God. But God assured Elijah that there are “*many whose knees have not bowed...and whose mouths have not kissed Baal*” — there are many who have remained faithful to God. Have you ever felt like Elijah?

Elijah gathered his strength and carried on with his God-given ‘*to-do list*’. Elijah found Elisha at work ploughing in the field. Elijah threw his cloak around Elisha, selecting Elisha as his successor. Elisha responded by returning home and burning his ploughing equipment as a sign that he had broken completely with his vocation and had left everything behind: first, to be Elijah’s servant and disciple, and later to be Elijah’s successor.

In our gospel reading, we meet three would-be followers of Jesus. The first and the third volunteered to follow Jesus, and Jesus invited the second to follow him.

The first individual volunteered to follow Jesus wherever he goes. Straight away, Jesus told him the implications of following Him: “*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*” Jesus let him know in advance that he needs to ‘carefully count the cost because to follow Jesus is a way of hardship and self-denial.’ Following Jesus does not guarantee fame or fortune. Jesus wants us to be fully aware of the high demands of following him. To follow Christ completely is not an easy option — and Elisha understood this very well when he left everything behind to answer God’s call.

Jesus’ words to the second man were rather harsh “*Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God*”. Jesus invited this man to follow him, but he said to Jesus, “*Lord, first let me go and bury my father.*” This man sounds a bit like St Augustine of Hippo who said, ‘Lord, make me a saint, but not yet. In all likelihood the man’s father was not dead, and may not even have been close to death. Perhaps, this man simply wanted to stay at home until the death of his father, and then fulfil the duties of burial as the law required. In other words, he put off following Jesus until a more convenient time. But Jesus implies, that there is a crucial moment for us all, and if that moment is missed, we may not get another opportunity.

This man had desired in his heart to follow Jesus, but his family ties and obligations prevented him.

Jesus' words to the third man were very hard indeed. Like the first man, he also volunteered to follow Jesus. The man wanted first to say goodbye to those at home. But Jesus says to him "No one *who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in God's kingdom.*" No wonder Elisha burnt his ploughing equipment as a sign that he had broken completely with his old life and is now totally committed to succeeding Elijah. Jesus knows that there are many things that can hinder us from responding wholeheartedly to Jesus, and that includes loved ones. To follow Jesus is a call for us to act now — today!

The second and third men in our gospel reading had perfectly valid excuses as to why they cannot follow Jesus today. Perhaps tomorrow, but not today. But Jesus says following Him should be our first priority. It is too important to be put off. It must be at the top of our 'to-do list'. Jesus consistently challenged his listeners to look forward to the future, to the kingdom that is to come rather than looking back to what is behind. As a ploughman, Elisha understood this fully. The person who is ploughing in the field needs to give their total attention to looking frontwards, because looking back would result in bent and twisted rows. Jesus' call requires our immediate focused attention and commitment.

From both of our readings, it is clear that authentic encounters with God will always have tangible consequences that are both challenging and demanding, and which cannot be achieved in our own strength. Like Elijah, how often do we become utterly spent and doubt our own effectiveness in our walk with God? Alone at Horeb and afraid, the old Elijah still had a keen awareness of God's Spirit. Even in his desperation and despair, Elijah could discern the Spirit of God in *a sound of sheer silence.*

The Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:16 invites us to 'live by the Spirit'. When we live by the Spirit, we are empowered to be faithful disciples who follow Jesus 'today' as a priority with no excuses.

Let us Offer our lives and gifts to God:

SERVANT KING,
We offer to you our lives,
and all that you have blessed us with.
Receive our lives and our gifts
as a symbol of our commitment to follow you;
to the glory of your name. **Amen**

We sing together our Third Hymn StF 661 Give me the faith which can remove, Charles Wesley <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Juya3B08xp8>

<p>1 Give me the faith which can remove and sink the mountain to a plain ; give me the childlike praying love, which longs to build thy house again ; thy love, let it my heart o'erpower, and all my simple soul devour.</p> <p>2 I would the precious time redeem, and longer live for this alone : to spend, and to be spent, for them who have not yet my Saviour known ; fully on these my mission prove, and only breathe, to breathe thy love.</p>	<p>3 My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord, into thy blessèd hands receive ; and let me live to preach thy word, and let me to thy glory live ; my every sacred moment spend in publishing the sinners' friend.</p> <p>4 Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart with boundless charity divine : so shall I all my strength exert, and love them with a zeal like thine ; and lead them to thy open side, the sheep for whom their Shepherd died.</p> <p>Charles Wesley (1707–1788)</p>
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A Prayer of Praise and Thanks:

SERVANT GOD,
our hearts are full of thanks and praise,
for your salvation freely given to us,
for all who played their part in leading us to faith
and nurturing us in our walk with you.
Thank you Holy Spirit for your power, strength and wisdom,
and for stirring in our hearts a desire to follow Christ.
We are so grateful for the privilege we have to follow Jesus,
and to learn how to be truly human.
SERVANT KING, to you we give our thanks and praise. **Amen**

Prayers of intercession: *Roots Magazine (adapted)*

Response:

Loving God, help them,
and help us/me.

Following Jesus cost everything; but Lord, we trust in you.

LOVING GOD,
we pray for those who have difficult decisions to make today:
at home, at school, at work, in the community, in government...
Loving God, help them,
and help us/me.

We pray for those suffering the consequences of unwise choices:
those in prison, those burdened with guilt, those consumed by
regret...
Loving God, help them,
and help us/me.

We pray for those whose decisions are made for them:
the unwell, the elderly, those in places of oppression...
Loving God, help them,
and help us/me.

We pray for those who are finding it difficult to make a decision:
those who feel stressed, the fearful, those whose circumstances
Keep changing...
Loving God, help them,
and help us/me.

We pray for those who, at this moment, are making desperate
choices:
whether to flee their homes, the next step in life, where or who
to turn to for help...
Loving God, help them,
and help us/me.

We give thanks for the life of those who have died:
may your hope be made known amongst the tears
of grieving loved ones.
We commend us all to your undying love; and may we
in our turn, with them, come into your everlasting joy.
Loving God, help them,
and help us/me.

LORD JESUS, your way may be costly
but to whom else do we turn?
For you alone have the words of life eternal!
We wholeheartedly offer ourselves to you,
to the praise of your name. **Amen**

We conclude our prayers by saying together **'The Lord's Prayer:**

We sing together our **Closing Hymn: StF 415/H 804: The Church of Christ, in every age,**
Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STH3kquNdOs>

<p>The church of Christ, in every age, beset by change but Spiritled, must claim and test its heritage and keep on rising from the dead.</p> <p>Across the world, across the street, the victims of injustice cry for shelter and for bread to eat, and never live until they die.</p> <p>Then let the servant church arise, a caring church that longs to be a partner in Christ's sacrifice, and clothed in Christ's humanity.</p>	<p>For he alone, whose blood was shed, can cure the fever in our blood, and teach us how to share our bread and feed the starving multitude.</p> <p>We have no mission but to serve in full obedience to our Lord, to care for all, without reserve, and spread his liberating Word</p>
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A Sending our Prayer:

GOD grant *us/me* the knowledge
to know what is important
and the wisdom to act, to do what is urgent.
GOD help *us/me* to follow Jesus better each day
and give *us/me* the courage to remain faithful and true
to the cause of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen**

The Blessing

...and the blessing of God,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
abide with *us/me* now and always. **Amen**