

## Act of Worship at Home for Sunday 23 January

### An invitation to worship for the Third Sunday of Epiphany

Let us give praise to our Lord for the joy of our creation, for our redemption in Christ and for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. We are not alone - we are part of God's family wherever we find ourselves in this time of worship.

### Let us pray

Gracious God, fill our hearts with your love and our lives with your glory as we come before you in worship and prayer. We praise you because you know each one of us; the worries that nag us, the achievements we are proud of, our hopes and expectations. We praise you for what we know of you: the ways in which you have welcomed and met us; your quiet, constant, presence in our lives; and we praise you for what we do not yet know: the mysteries of your creation, the questions that baffle us, the wonders of discovery awaiting us. Unknown God, may we be open to meet with you in unexpected ways; discerning your presence in what is strange to us and seeing the familiar with newly opened eyes. Kind and generous God, we come to you, bringing everything we are, all our gifts and talents, all that we do well and for good. We also bring our weakness and our sorrow and all the things that we do or do not do that cause us to fail you. You know our faults and yet you still love us; as we ask, you forgive us. How amazing is your grace! Thank you, God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

### Reading

I have chosen to read the first 11 verses from Luke chapter 5: *One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch". Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.*

### Reflection

I wonder if you can remember some time in your life when you had to stand and be chosen to do something. I remember my games lessons at school when two girls (yes, I was at a "girls only" school!) would be asked to pick teams to play a game of netball or hockey. The teacher would start by lining us all up in height order and I remember I was always third from the bottom! Then came the wait for your name to be called. Sometimes it got down to the last two of us so we knew neither captain really wanted us. Humiliating; and that is probably why I can still remember it after well over 50 years. The irony is that I was quite useful in a team and had pretty reasonable ball skills – I was even captain of the school netball team for a time. On what basis were we chosen? It usually depended on who was friends with whom on a particular day or who was feeling spiteful. It might depend on whether you could join in the chat about a cool television programme the night before; I always did badly on that one as my parents were very strict about what I could watch! Teenage girls can be very fickle – best friends with you one day and arch enemies the next.

Matthew and Mark describe Jesus picking the first disciples in much the same way. Matthew recalls: 'As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come,

follow me," Jesus said'. Mark's version is much the same: 'As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said ... When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.' It seems clear why he went for fishermen because he wanted disciples who would fish for people to save them; but why did he go for those particular fishermen? Luke fills in detail omitted in Matthew and Mark. The decision to follow Christ was based on more than casual contact. He must have made his decision to pick Simon Peter as he got into his boat and then they went out fishing – a fruitless night became a catch so big that they needed other boats to help them draw all the fish in. Simon Peter immediately recognised the power of Jesus and what he saw as his inadequacy. Yet Jesus picked him. He was just what Jesus wanted as were Andrew, James and John.

However inadequate we may feel or unworthy of the label "Christian", we need to remember that God has picked us, each one of us, to further his kingdom. The wonderful thing, too, is that each one of us is just what he wants. In the words of another preacher: "God does not call the qualified, He qualifies the called". God works miracles with anyone willing to trust him and that includes you and me! Thanks be to God. Amen.

**Our hymn** is number 495 in Singing the Faith: Dear Lord and Father of Mankind, forgive our foolish ways:

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
Forgive our foolish ways!  
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,  
In purer lives Thy service find,  
In deeper reverence, praise.

With that deep hush subduing all  
Our words and works that drown  
The tender whisper of Thy call,  
As noiseless let Thy blessing fall  
As fell Thy manna down.

In simple trust like theirs who heard  
Beside the Syrian sea  
The gracious calling of the Lord,  
Let us, like them, without a word  
Rise up and follow Thee.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
Till all our strivings cease;  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
And let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of Thy peace.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!  
O calm of hills above,  
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee  
The silence of eternity  
Interpreted by love!

Breathe through the heats of our desire  
Thy coolness and Thy balm;  
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
O still, small voice of calm!

**And now our prayers of intercession:**

You came, Lord Jesus Christ, to teach us the way of life which God requires. Make us receptive to your word and help us to obey, whatever it may cost. As we pray for the strength to follow you, we also pray for those known to us who are in special need of your loving, healing touch. In a moment of silence, we bring our own prayers... We pray for those who are ill, or worried about someone they love; we pray for those facing decisions and new challenges; we pray for those who have lost heart and hope. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers and touch all the situations that we have brought before you with your grace and love. Amen

**Finally, a blessing:** Go in peace to serve the Lord and may the blessing of God be upon you today and always. Amen