

East Durham Methodist Circuit:
On-line Service for 17th January 2021

compiled by Peter and Gwyneth Walsham and Susan Pritchard

Theme: "God calling... God calling..."

Call to worship:

We have come together into the presence of the Lord. So, let us quieten our hearts and minds, put aside our concerns and distractions. Let us open ourselves to listen for God's voice, for the Word God has for His people.

A gathering prayer:

Loving God, you speak to us in so many ways. Help us in our worship today to hear your voice and know it is you. Speak to us in the silence, through scripture and by your Spirit. Speak through others and through your creation, through images, experiences, music and encounters. Speak in ways that we can understand. So, speak Lord – and help us to listen. **Amen**

Hymn: **How great Thou art Boberg / Hine **StF 82****

1. O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

**Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!**

2. When through the woods, and forest glades I wander,
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees.
When I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur
And see the brook, and feel the gentle breeze. **Then sings my soul**

3. And when I think that God, His Son not sparing;
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin. **Then sings my soul**

4. When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation,
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart.
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration,
And then proclaim: "My God, how great Thou art!" **Then sings my soul**

Prayers of praise adoration and confession:

Loving God, we meet in Spirit to worship you today. We are unable to meet in fellowship with each other and must endure more time isolation from our family and friends, but we ask that you do not isolate yourself from us.

During these troublesome times we still want to offer you the praise and adoration of our hearts because we know you will never desert us in our times of need. During the dark

cold winter months, we thank you for the Light of Christ that comes to lead us out of the darkness and we ask that you help us to be a strong light to others, that like Christ, whom we follow, we too can help to lead others away from all that creates darkness in their lives. We thank you for your comforting Spirit, your means of communication to us and we ask that we might always be open to hear your call.

Forgive us for the times when we let you down, when we ignore your call and prefer to do things our own way and not yours. Forgive us for the times when we've been irritable and too fussy, for the times when we haven't put others needs before our own. Help us in all that we do to honour your name and give you the praise and the glory you deserve.

As we read from your word today Father, may you speak into our hearts and minds, your great truth and may we find from the written word the means by which we can receive your blessing and peace.

Come, Abba, Father, join all our hearts and minds as one as we worship you this day, may all of our worship reflect our faithful service to you and as we wait upon you, may we experience just 'How Great Thou Art'.

We ask this prayer in the name of Jesus who taught us to say:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done - on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever.**

Amen

Hymn: As the deer pants for the water Martin J Nystrom StF 544

1. As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.

**You alone are my strength, my shield, to you alone may my spirit yield,
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you**

2. I want You more than gold or silver, only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy giver and the apple of my eye. **You alone are my strength...**

3. You're my friend and you are my brother, even though you are a king.
I love you more than any other, so much more than anything. **You alone are my strength...**

Reading: Samuel 3: 1-21. The Message

Introduction: Samuel was born in a time of great change for the Israelite nation. He was the last of the Great Judges and the first Prophet to anoint the first two Kings of Israel, namely Saul and David. Samuel was the first born of Hannah, a barren woman for many years, who was tormented by her fertile sister.

God finally answered Hannah's prayer for a child and as an act of blessing, thankfulness and faithfulness to God, Hannah dedicated Samuel to the Lord, giving him up to Eli the priest to nurture and train as a priest. From being an infant until the age of

twelve, according to the first century historian Josephus, Samuel had been ministering to God in the temple, in secret.

Eli the priest had two wicked sons who defied God and slept with prostitutes, despite being priests themselves. They also abused the offerings the people made in good faith, which angered God immensely, so much so that God told Eli through an intermediary, that both his sons would not see old age and that they would both die on the same day. This prophesy came true and is told in Chapter 4.

Because Eli was unable to discipline his sons God inflicted both a physical and spiritual blindness on him resulting in Samuel being neglected by Eli but not by God, as we can now read:

¹ This was at a time when the revelation of God was rarely heard or seen. ² One night, Eli was sound asleep (his eyesight was very bad - he could hardly see). ³ It was well before dawn; the sanctuary lamp was still burning. Samuel was still in bed in the Temple of God, where the Chest of God rested.

⁴ Then God called out, "Samuel, Samuel!" ⁵ Then he ran to Eli saying, "I heard you call. Here I am." Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." And so, he did.

⁶ God called again, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, "I heard you call. Here I am." ⁷ (This all happened before Samuel knew God for himself. It was before the revelation of God had been given to him personally.)

⁸ God called again, "Samuel!" - the third time! Yet again Samuel got up and went to Eli, "Yes? I heard you call me. Here I am."

⁹ So Eli directed Samuel, "Go back and lie down. If the voice calls again, say, 'Speak, God. I'm your servant, ready to listen.'" Samuel returned to his bed.

¹⁰ Then God came and stood before him exactly as before, calling out, "Samuel! Samuel!" Samuel answered, "Speak. I'm your servant, ready to listen." ¹¹ God said to Samuel, "Listen carefully. I'm getting ready to do something in Israel that is going to shake everyone up and get their attention. ¹² The time has come for me to bring down on Eli's family everything I warned him of, every last word of it. ¹³ I'm letting him know that the time's up. I'm bringing judgment on his family for good. He knew what was going on, that his sons were desecrating God's name and God's place, and he did nothing to stop them. ¹⁴ This is my sentence on the family of Eli: The evil of Eli's family can never be wiped out by sacrifice or offering."

¹⁵ Samuel stayed in bed until morning, then rose early and went about his duties, opening the doors of the sanctuary, but he dreaded having to tell the vision to Eli.

¹⁶ But then Eli summoned Samuel: "Samuel, my son!" Samuel came running: "Yes? What can I do for you?" ¹⁷ "What did he say? Tell it to me, all of it. Don't suppress or soften one word, as God is your judge! I want it all, word for word as he said it to you."

¹⁸ So Samuel told him, word for word. He held back nothing. Eli said, "He is God. Let him do whatever he thinks best."

¹⁹ Samuel grew up. God was with him, and Samuel's prophetic record was flawless.

²⁰ Everyone in Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, recognized that Samuel was the real thing - a true prophet of God. ²¹ God continued to show up at Shiloh, revealed through his word to Samuel at Shiloh.

¹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd.

⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. ⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." ⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Message:

"I am the greatest, I float like a butterfly and sting like a bee". I'm sure you know who told reporters this in 1964 after he became the new world heavyweight boxing champion, defeating Sony Liston. It was Muhammed Ali and everyone wanted to know the secret of his success, and he wasn't shy in telling them. "The fight is won or lost far away from witnesses – behind the scenes, in the gym, and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights in the ring."

Like Muhammed Ali, Samuel was training in secret, far away from witnesses. Except for the annual visit from his parents, the only other witnesses were Eli's sinful sons, Hophni and Phineas and the women they abused. Eli had become physically and spiritually blind, so no one saw Samuel's faithful years of training except for God.

Samuel couldn't get much closer to God because he slept in the Holy Place, separated from the Arc of the Covenant only by a curtain. As the world outside adopted an attitude where everyone 'did as they saw fit and cared little for what God had to say', the Lord was quietly and gradually beginning to speak to Samuel.

Vs.1 of chapter 3 declares, "This was a time when the revelation of God was rarely seen or heard," However, in contrast, 12-year-old Samuel constantly put himself in the place where God might speak. And, when he least expected it, late one night, God finally started speaking.

Of course, Samuel did not yet know God and he thought Eli was calling him. Eli on the other hand, thought Samuel was imagining things. However after the third calling by God, Eli realised it was God who was speaking to Samuel. God calling Samuel to the ministry of a mighty Prophet and the one God had chosen to anoint the first two Kings of Israel, namely Saul and then David.

And it was the same for Jesus. God's voice was heard when he was baptised by John in the river Jordan. When he met with Moses and Elijah during the Transfiguration experience, God's voice was heard. But, more often than not, Jesus would seek isolation and tranquillity in order to hear God's voice. There are many instances where we see Jesus withdrawing to a lonely place.

When God speaks, it's a personal and intimate experience. How does God speak to you? For Samuel it was during the stillness of the night. Is it the same for you? Do you feel God's presence in the still, small hours of the night, when you can't sleep? Or does God speak to you during the busyness of the day when we are more likely to be distracted?

One of our preachers in my old circuit heard God calling him to be a Local Preacher, whilst digging his garden and I've been prompted by God's spiritual voice on many occasions.

The first time was when I was in an audience of thousands of youngsters at an MAYC rally in the Royal Albert Hall in London. It has happened whilst caring for sick patients in ITU or frightened patients in the Operating Theatre or when comforting bereaved parents who've lost a child in the Accident and Emergency Department. I've been on top of a small mountain in Scotland and in a cave in Lanzarote. I've been in an underground swimming pond in Mexico and at the top of one of the world's tallest buildings in Shanghai. But I've also been quiet and still in bed or in the bath, or in the car, or watching TV.

God's voice can be felt and heard any time of day, in any circumstance. And for each one of us it's different. But I want you to think about when the last time you felt or heard God speaking to you. And, more importantly, what was your response?

Samuel's response was one of Obedience and Service. My LP friend accepted God's call to Preach.

My response depends upon the message I receive but I try my best to be obedient and positive in trying to do what God wants me to do.

But what if some people have never heard God's calling, never felt His presence in their life. They may well have been coming to church for a long time but God has seemed dormant and unattainable. How can folk like that experience the presence of God?

Perhaps we need to take a look at Samuel again. He spent his time surrounding himself in the things that brought him close to God like studying the scriptures and praying that as he slept, God would look upon him with favour. He would offer his work as a dedication to God, trying his best to be good, true and kind. Day by day he would become stronger in his faith.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew Ch.6 vs.6, Jesus instructs us to pray in private and God will bless what He sees we do in secret. And that blessing from God will be totally unexpected, just like it was for Samuel.

Like Zacchaeus the sinful tax collector, whom Jesus called from a nearby tree he had climbed to see what the commotion of Jesus passing by was all about. I don't think Zacchaeus was expecting Jesus to call him, or Matthew the other tax collector called by Jesus to be a disciple.

Then there's Simon and his brother James when Jesus called them from their fishing boat and Saul when he was called by Jesus on the Damascus road.

It's totally unexpected when God calls us into His Kingdom of Love and Service. And our response? Well God has given us FREE WILL! We can say YES or NO!

Samuel, like so many other men and women called by God have said YES. Countless others have said no but if we truly want God's blessings in our life we have to respond with a firm response, like Samuel did, "Lord here I am!"

To conclude, I want to share with you a true story told by Rev. Dr Donald English in his book "The Meaning of the Warmed Heart". In it he tells of the unlikely choice of a key worker in the London City Mission called Brian a former 'Hell's Angel' who was sent to prison for 4 years.

Whilst in prison he was visited by the Prison Chaplain and he received copies of the Methodist Recorder of all things. One day he noticed a small advertisement offering copies of the 'Living Bible' and he requested one from the Chaplain. When he received it he began reading and was quite captured by the account in John's Gospel Ch.15 where Jesus tells us He is the true vine and we need to remain attached as branches.

During his prison sentence he eventually gave his life to Jesus and subsequently has been appointed as a key worker in the London City Mission.

I can't imagine Brian ever thinking that his life would have such a turnaround. But this is what happens when we seek the Lord with all our heart and mind and strength. Jesus also says in Matthew 6:33. "Seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

So, let's make that our goal in life, to seek God's Kingdom in our life and prepare to receive God's richest blessings.

Amen

Hymn:

It is well...

Christopher M Rice

Mission Praise 757

1. When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul"

**It is well (it is well) with my soul (with my soul)
It is well, it is well with my soul**

2. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blessed assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul. **It is well...**

3. My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! **It is well...**

4. And Lord haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul. **It is well...**

Prayers of Intercession:

Let us pray, trusting in God's care for his children, we pray in the name of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We pray for those who are unwell due to the coronavirus. In your compassion, grant them strength and healing, and we pray for all who minister to the sick throughout our health service, that they may renew their strength in you and be channels of restoration and renewal for those who suffer.

We pray for those who are anxious about loved ones, friends and neighbours. Enable them to trust in you and be steadfast in hope. We remember those who feel isolated or alone, that they may experience your loving presence, and we pray that you would inspire those who are strong to care for the vulnerable and to serve them in love. **Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.**

We pray for your Church who longs to praise you throughout this strange and confusing time; through your creative Spirit fire our imaginations to proclaim your unchanging love in new ways.

We pray for all in authority who face difficult decisions that affect the lives of many; grant them wisdom and courage. We pray for all engaged in research, who have developed the coronavirus vaccine and continue to seek new remedies: grant them wisdom, understanding and effectiveness in their endeavours. **Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.**

We pray for traders and employees who are fearful of the future, that businesses may be secured, jobs protected and families supported, and for all those facing financial hardship that you would support and sustain them. We remember also those who seek to fulfil Christ's command to love one another through the work of foodbanks and charities and through acts of simple kindness.

We pray for all in education at this uncertain time: inspire those who feel bored or directionless, protect the vulnerable and give fresh hope to the dismayed.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

With sadness, we remember those who have lost their lives. Give us thankful hearts for the privilege of knowing them and strengthen our faith in your Son who died for us and rose again in glory that we might share in his victorious life. We pray for those who mourn, that they may find comfort and hope in you.

Lord of life, in this time of crisis for our families and communities, our nation and our world, we turn to you in faith, to seek your guidance and receive your blessing, knowing that nothing in all creation can separate us from your love made known to us in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn: I the Lord of Sea and Sky Daniel L Schutte

1. I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin, My hand will save.
I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them? Whom shall I send?

**Here I am Lord, Is it I, Lord? I Have heard You calling In the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me. I will hold Your people in my heart.**

2. I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them, they turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone, Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them Whom shall I send? **Here I am Lord...**

3. I, the Lord of wind and flame I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them, My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide, Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them, Whom shall I send? **Here I am Lord...**

Blessing:

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.