

East Durham Methodist Circuit:
Online Service for 6th February 2022

Prepared by Alison McLeod

Theme: Whom shall I send?

Call to worship: from Psalm 138, our lectionary Psalm for today

In your holy presence, Lord, we acknowledge your love and faithfulness to us, opening our hearts before you.

Lord God, you have answered our prayers and you have given us strength.
We come to hear your words to us, to sing of your wonderful ways and to see your glory.

We come to seek your purpose, for we know you have not finished your work of love in us. We give you thanks and praise. **Amen**

Hymn: **Lord I come to You** Geoff Bullock **StF 471**

1. Lord I come to You
Let my heart be changed, renewed
Flowing from the grace
That I found in You.
And Lord I've come to know
The weaknesses I see in me
Will be stripped away
By the power of Your love.

Hold me close
Let Your love surround me
Bring me near
Draw me to Your side.
And as I wait
I'll rise up like the eagle

And I will soar with You
Your Spirit leads me on
In the power of Your love.

2. Lord unveil my eyes
Let me see You face to face
The knowledge of Your love
As You live in me.
Lord renew my mind
As Your will unfolds in my life
In living every day
By the power of Your love.

Hold me close...

Prayers of praise and confession:

Sovereign God, great and wonderful, almighty and powerful in grateful praise we bring You our worship. We praise You that You are greater than our minds can grasp.

We praise You that You are the source of all that is and has been, that You are at work in our world and in our lives, always seeking to fulfil Your purposes, never resting until Your will is accomplished.

We praise You that You came to our world in Christ, and that through Him, You come to us again, revealing Your love, renewing our faith, calling us to Your service, giving us life.

Forgive us that we have not appreciated all You have done. We have not kept our first sense of wonder at Your greatness, we have not given You the praise that is rightfully Yours; we have presumed to limit You to our own expectations; we have been closed to Your Holy Spirit's prompting; we have kept Christ at arm's length when His challenge has disturbed us. Yet You show mercy to us, constantly reaching out to cleanse and renew.

Come to us now as we worship, and through Your loving mercy give us guidance for the days ahead. Help us to grow stronger in faith, more committed in discipleship, more faithful in the service of Christ.

In mercy You hear us, in grace You respond, with joy You receive us, with love You forgive. **Amen**

Hymn: **We turn to God** Deitrich Bonhoeffer **StF 640** (tune: Abide with Me)

1. We turn to God when we are sorely pressed;
we pray for help, and ask for peace and bread;
we seek release from illness, guilt, and death:
all people do, in faith or unbelief.

3. God turns to us when we are sorely pressed,
and feeds our souls and bodies with his bread;
for one and all Christ gives himself in death:
through his forgiveness sin will find relief.

2. We turn to God when he is sorely pressed,
and find him poor, scorned, without roof and bread,
bowed under weight of weakness, sin, and death:
faith stands by God in his dark hour of grief.

Reading: **Isaiah 6: 1-8** **Isaiah's commission** New International Version

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵ 'Woe to me!' I cried 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.'

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'

Reading: Luke 5: 1-11 Jesus calls his first disciples New International Version

¹ One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding round him and listening to the word of God. ² He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.' ⁵ 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.'

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signalled to 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.

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ 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.' ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Message:

The reading from Isaiah takes us to a time over 700 years before Jesus was born. All of this takes place, Isaiah tells us, "in the year that King Uzziah died." And I thought that that piece of information wouldn't be there if it wasn't important! So I investigated.

King Uzziah became the King of Judah after his father was assassinated, and he reigned for 52 years. But then this happened as told in **2 Chronicles 26:**

¹⁶ But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. ¹⁷ Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the Lord followed him in. ¹⁸ They confronted King Uzziah and said, 'It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honoured by the Lord God.'

¹⁹ Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the Lord's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. ²⁰ When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave because the Lord had afflicted him.

²¹ King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house – leprous and excluded from the temple of the Lord.

So his pride led him to enter the Temple without proper humility before God. And for that, he was stricken with leprosy until he died. His illness, the consequence of his pride, would lead to anxiety and uncertainty for everyone throughout Judah. Their king

was sick, ritually unclean, and unable to fulfil his public duties. And to make matters worse, the country of Assyria was becoming very powerful and was threatening to conquer them.

So, we find Isaiah at this point, in the midst of all this uncertainty and anxiety. And what did the prophet Isaiah do? Well, perhaps what any one of us would do in difficult times, he went to the Temple to pray, to bring all these problems to God and to worship God. Because we all know that He is ever present and we can turn to him anytime – and in difficult times especially.

Kings would come and go. Threats to nations, and our world do too. But God is constant; He is faithful. He is there for all his people. Then, now, and always. And, seeing this amazing, evocative image of God we observe Isaiah's response to the incredible vision before him. Overwhelmed he cries out "**Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.**" Confessing before God that he is not worthy, just not good enough to be in the presence of God... or to receive this vision. He is a sinner – unclean and, no doubt, a little afraid.

Perhaps you have felt the same. Not good enough? Not worthy to be in the presence of the Lord, to be loved and forgiven by Him?

But Isaiah's vision doesn't end there. After he confesses his sin, his unworthiness, God forgives him and makes him aware that he is valued and important. Just as God forgives our sin as we pray our prayers of confession within our act of worship. God made him aware that he was a decent man and **then, and only then**, does God ask the question that, in one way or another, God asks of us all: "**Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?**"

That is God's question to all of us. Because this world really does need our help. It is far from perfect. It needs people who love God to go out and work for Him to make it a better place, the place he would wish.

And with God's help, and by his grace and power, we can do that. Because God does have a mission for us. And I believe it is our privilege, our blessing and our purpose, to do what we are called to do.

Because, just like Isaiah, we want to be worthy! To be worthy of a God who loves us and sacrificed so much for us. We all like to think that we matter. Matter to our friends, our family, our church and our God. We like to have purpose and meaning in our lives; in what we do; the difference we can make. And too often we are guilty of focussing on other things rather than the deeper questions of meaning and significance in our lives.

So, at this point, I would like to mention Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A German pastor and theologian involved in the resistance movement against Hitler and the Nazis, he was arrested and imprisoned in April 1943.

From prison thirteen months later he wrote a letter to his close friends speaking of his sadness, knowing he would not be able to attend the baptism of their new baby son: From that letter:

"You know that I shall be with you in spirit. It's painful to me, to be sure, that the improbable has happened, and that I shall not be able to celebrate the day with you; but I've quite reconciled myself to it. I believe that nothing that happens to me is meaningless, and that it is good for us all that it should be so, even if it runs counter to our own wishes. **As I see it, I'm here for some purpose, and I only**

hope I may fulfil it. In the light of the great purpose - all our privations and disappointments are trivial”

(Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. Eberhard Bethge, Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing 1972, p289, letter dated May 9th 1944).

So, from prison, he thought "there is a reason this is happening to me!"

Eleven months after he wrote those words, on April 9th 1945, Bonhoeffer was executed at the age of thirty-nine in Flossenburg Prison Camp. But his words from prison will never be forgotten: **“I believe that nothing that happens to me is meaningless ... As I see it, I am here for some purpose, and I only hope I may fulfil it.”** And they were Bonhoeffer's words in our hymn earlier: **We turn to God when we are sorely pressed; we pray for help and ask for peace.**

At a difficult time in his life he knows where to turn, just as Isaiah did in the turmoil following the Kings death. And he truly believes that in **every aspect** of his life God had a meaning and a purpose, even in the bad bits! And he wished to use his life and his experiences - all of his experiences - for God and so he shares his experiences in his writings, so that we can all learn.

In the midst of the horror of the holocaust many people would have asked ‘Where is God in all of this?’ Bonhoeffer truly believed he knew where God was. As the hymn said, he was suffering and grieving as he witnessed the death and the needless slaughter.

When the Lord asked **‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ Who will be my voice in the world?** Dietrich stood up to be counted. He resisted the Nazi regime and paid the ultimate price. He had a purpose. He had a calling.

Which leads me to the inevitable question. What about us? What’s your calling? To what tasks does God call you?

Turning to our Gospel reading, it is often said that Jesus, whenever He met people He seemed to be able to show them who they really were. When they thought they were rubbish and of no use He made them realise they had merit and were important. Others, who had high opinions of themselves, suddenly realised they lived mean and selfish lives and knew they need to change.

Simon, he was still Simon at this point, had been fishing all night without success. He was a hugely experienced fisherman who would have known what to do, when and where to fish, and when to give up and mend his nets. He would have known all the tricks of the trade.

And along comes Jesus, a carpenter who had been using Simon's boat as a platform to speak from. I must confess, I wonder what it was that Jesus said which echoed with Simon and which made him trust enough to go out and fish again when he thought his work, albeit unsuccessful, was done for the day.

Whatever Jesus said, Simon was willing to give it another try so imagine his surprise, or it may have been shame or embarrassment, when the huge haul was landed.

Like Isaiah’s, Simon's reaction was to fall to his knees and say how unworthy and sinful he was. Not good enough. For all his experience, he was not expecting what happened

when he put out to sea again – he was wholly unprepared for the miracle Jesus performed.

Jesus had shown Simon that he still could learn and that he didn't know it all! He had fished all night, was defeated and tired but he did Jesus' bidding. 'Don't be afraid', he is told. And from this miraculous point, Simon is caught himself, caught up in the life and the story of Jesus.

No doubt you will recognise the echoes between the scripture; both men declaring themselves not good enough. And yet, they accept the task which was given to them. No bargaining, no further questions to find out exactly what, when, where and how – just obedience. No clue as to what they were taking on. No clue as to the sacrifices, the suffering, the rejection they would face.

What are the echoes in this story **for us** as we think back to the times in our own lives and experiences when we have been too scared to do something, to commit to something? Or when we have listened to those who would mock our faith, when we've stayed silent, when we've chosen to keep our heads down.

Both passages today beg the same question: **how do we respond to Gods call?** Like Isaiah and Simon's initial responses, do we say 'I'm not worthy so just leave me alone? I'm not good enough to speak for you Lord'. Or can we trust that God is calling someone who **is able**, who can work for Him.

Can we believe in ourselves? We put up so many barriers. Make so many excuses. I know I have and I still do! Can we believe that we do have the time, the courage, the patience, the character, the ability, the persistence, the stamina that Jesus was looking for as He called the fishermen?

They were transformed from ordinary fishermen into disciples, men who would go on to do extraordinary things. Transformed by a Master who ignored the weaknesses, forgave the imperfections. Transformed into leaders themselves, strong and brave with all they had learned from Jesus.

How is God transforming you? What is holding you back?

I would like to close with a poem **Our deepest fear** by Marianne Williamson

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness
That most frightens us.

We ask ourselves
Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?
Actually, who are you *not* to be?
You are a child of God.

Your playing small
Does not serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking
So that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine,
As children do.
We were born to make manifest
The glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us;
It's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine,
We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we're liberated from our own fear,
Our presence automatically liberates others.

Amen

Hymn: Have you heard God's voice Jacqueline G Jones

StF 662

1. Have you heard God's voice; has
your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and
serve,
though the way be rough and narrow?

**Will you walk the path that will cost
you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to
you
the disciples of tomorrow.**

2. Will you use your voice; will you not
sit down
when the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your
ground
when the crowds are turning violent?

3. In your city streets will you be God's
heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when
friendships start,
will you share your faith with the
faithless?

4. Will you watch the news with the eyes
of faith
and believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words
of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

**We will walk the path that will cost us
much
and embrace the pain and sorrow
We will trust in One who entrusts to
us
the disciples of tomorrow.**

Prayers of Intercession: based on Isaiah 6: 1-8

Lord, we pray for the all the people of the earth, that they may know Your goodness
and praise Your holy name. For You are holy: **You are the Lord.**

Lord, we pray for the earth itself. Make us good stewards, fill us with gratitude for the
gifts You shower upon us. For You are holy: **You are the Lord.**

Lord, we pray for each other.

Give us grace to understand that we are all Your children and courage to live
accordingly. For You are holy: **You are the Lord.**

Lord, we pray for all who hear Your call to ministry. Give us all the grace to answer Your
call and to serve You however we can. For You are holy: **You are the Lord.**

Lord, we pray for all those called to preach. Fill their hearts with compassion and give
their words wings. For You are holy: **You are the Lord.**

And Heavenly Father, we pray for all who are going through difficulties that make belief hard: for those who are suffering physical and mental illness, that they may feel the comfort of Your healing touch; for the bereaved, that they may know Your presence as they walk the valley of the shadow; for those who have been hurt, abused or betrayed by people they loved and trusted, we pray that they will come to believe in the One who rose above all human fallibility and did not sin.

Ease open all hurting eyes and hearts, Lord. Push aside all barriers to belief. Shine Your light in our darkness, so that faith may flourish even in the midst of sorrow. **Amen**

We ask these prayers 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:

Shine Jesus shine

Graham Kendrick

StF 59

1. Lord, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth you now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me

**Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and
mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light**

2. Lord, I come to your awesome
presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By the blood I may enter your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my
darkness
Shine on me, shine on me **Shine,
Jesus, shine...**

3. As we gaze on your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell your
story
Shine on me, shine on me **Shine,
Jesus, shine...**

Blessing:

Go with us Lord on our journey of faith. Revive us when we grow weary, direct us when we go astray and inspire us when we lose heart. Send us, Lord, into this amazing world of Yours, to share Your love and mercy with all. **Amen.**