

CIRCUIT SERVICE FOR 14 AUGUST 2022

Rev. David Jenkins

Call to Worship-Approach this act of worship with openness to the possibility that the Living God may communicate with you through it.

God cares about your life-about who you are -where you have come from and what you can yet be.

May the God of all life speak to you and may you be attentive, aware and responsive to what you will hear.

Hymn 666 Singing the Faith (535 Hymns and Psalms) "Master speak"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raPJHiezEhw>

Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,
Waiting for Thy gracious word,
Longing for Thy voice that cheereth
Master, let it now be heard.
I am listening, Lord, for Thee;
What hast Thou to say to me?

Speak to me by name, O Master,
Let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,
Where the Shepherd leads the flock
In the shadow of the Rock!

Master, speak! though least and lowest,
Let me not unheard depart;
Master, speak! for oh, Thou knowest
All the yearning of my heart.
Knowest all its truest need;
Speak! and make me blest indeed.

Master, speak! and make me ready,
When Thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady,
Still to follow every word
I am listening, Lord, for Thee:
Master, speak, oh, speak to me!

(Frances Ridley Havergal 1836-1879)

Prayer

We approach you in anticipation, Living God.

Deepen our awareness and attention that we may be alive to whatever you wish us to do and to be.

Thank you that you care so much for us that you desire to increase our understanding and that you call us to follow you.

You discern where we are most needed; help us to see that too.

We are grateful for all the times in life when what we have done or said has helped someone else, just as we are grateful for how other people's words and actions have helped to shape and guide the people we have been becoming.

Forgive us for all the times we are impervious to your communication-when we either do not hear or do not want to hear.

Help us today to make sure we are hearing, and give us the courage to respond.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

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.

All-Age Talk

I had a cat once and I called him Beans.

I don't why I called him that-perhaps because he was full of energy or perhaps I thought he was a little half-baked!

We were living in a flat in Leicester near to a main road, so he could easily be in danger. Also he liked to explore and often got into trouble by knocking over the next door neighbour's flowerpots. So whenever he wandered off and we were not sure what mischief he was getting into we would wander into the streets shouting his name. Can you imagine grown people going into the streets and shouting "Beans! Beans!?" People must have thought we were selling them! We were not calling him to stop his fun, but because we were concerned for him -that he might be in danger or annoying people. We called him because we cared about him.

Sometimes people talk about God calling us. God calls us by name, and hopefully our names are more sensible names than Beans! God calls us because of God's care for us. It might be to save us from harm, or it might be to give our lives direction -to help us become the people we have it in us to become-to realise our potential. God can see, much more clearly than we can, where we might have something vital to offer, and what we need to learn to get us there. The important thing is that when God does communicate with us we take notice and respond. Beans took his time in responding when we called his name, though he did eventually turn up when it suited him. Perhaps we need to learn that, when God calls us by name, it's helpful to respond in God's time rather than when it suits us!

Hymn 546 Singing the Faith (788 Hymns and Psalms) "Behold the servant of the Lord"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJfJdDEzo4>

Behold the servant of the lord!
I wait thy guiding eye to feel,
to hear and keep thy every word,
to prove and do thy perfect will,
joyful from my own works to cease,
glad to fulfil all righteousness.

My every weak, though good, design,
o'errule, or change, as seems thee meet;
Jesus, let all my work be thine!
Thy work, O Lord, is all complete,
and pleasing in thy Father's sight;
thou only hast done all things right.

Me if thy grace vouchsafe to use,
meanest of all thy creatures, me,
the deed, the time, the manner choose,
let all my fruit be found of thee;
let all my works in thee be wrought,
by thee to full perfection brought.

Here then to thee thy own i leave;
mould as thou wilt thy passive clay;
but let me all thy stamp receive,
but let me all thy words obey,
serve with a single heart and eye,
and to thy glory live and die.

(Charles Wesley 1707-1788)

Reader-Jeremiah 1: 4-10

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

⁵ 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'

⁶ Then I said, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.'

⁷ But the LORD said to me,

'Do not say, "I am only a boy";
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

⁸ Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
says the LORD.'

⁹ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,

'Now I have put my words in your mouth.

¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.'

Hymn 556 Singing the Faith (697 Hymns and Psalms) "Just as I am"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxA0TFe3-Uo>

Just as I am, without one plea
But that you died to set me free,
and at your bidding, "Come to me!"
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am-your love unknown
has broken every barrier down-
now to be yours, yes, yours alone,
O Lamb of God I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt
Fightings and fears within without
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, of that free love
the breadth, length, depth and height to prove,
here for a time and then above,
O Lamb of God I come.

Just as I am, you will receive
will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve
Because your promise I believe
O Lamb of God, I come.

(Charlotte Elliott 1789-1871)

Sermon "Calling and Equipping"

I'm sometimes asked, "What made you become a Minister?"

I think I was 16 or 17 when I was on holiday with my parents in Llandudno.

There are two huge limestone cliffs there-one called the Great Orme and the other the Little Orme. Early one evening I started to climb the Little Orme. I've been there since and looked at it from the beach and have thought, "There's a proper pathway to the top-why on earth didn't i take that?" Because what I did was to start climbing this cliff from the seaward side. At first there didn't seem to be any great problem in doing that, but I got onto an extraordinarily narrow ledge and when I looked down the sea was coming in where I had walked before and the way down looked much more difficult to descend than it had been to come up. Above me was hard rock with no obvious hand holds or foot holds and it rose absolutely vertically. On this narrow ledge for the first and only time in my life my legs started to shake and my heart was beating furiously from the terror of the predicament I was in. I prayed-I remember the words well, "Whether I live or die, I belong to you." As soon as I had finished that prayer my knees stopped shaking, my heart rate slowed to its normal pace and I had a very strong urge to climb upwards. I had a plastic mac with me, which I stuck in my mouth and then climbed.

I reached the top of the Little Orme and threw myself onto the grass there in sheer relief and overwhelming gratitude for the gift of life.

Every day from then on I thank God for another day of life.

Some words from the Psalms resonate with me-for example, "I thank you, for you have delivered my soul from death, and my feet from falling, so that I may walk before God in the light of life." (Psalm 56:12-13).

The kind of thought going through my mind was something like this-"God has given you the gift of life when you in your stupidity could easily have thrown it away. What are you going to do with it? What might God want you to do with it?"

i carried on at school and eventually followed my Dad's advice to be a student teacher for a year and then to apply to a College to train to be a teacher, which, in itself, was a valuable vocation.

But in the holiday period after 2 years at Teacher's College there was a period of ten days in which on every single day there would be something I would read or hear which seemed to me to be like God speaking to me in capital letters, so that even I couldn't miss it. During that ten day period a new Minister was welcomed into our Circuit, and the character of the Ministers I had met had always impressed me. The words of his welcome service resonated with me. The ten day period included two Sundays. On one Sunday, as I was a Local Preacher I was preaching at one village chapel and another Local Preacher I knew well said to me, "David you ought to become a Minister", No one had said that before. The following Sunday, at another village chapel there was an American family whom I had never met before or since and they said the same thing. These experiences underlined what I had been reading and reflecting on, so I arranged to meet my minister and tell him that I believed I was being called to become a Minister. He said he wasn't surprised, which in itself was affirming, and he advised me to complete my training at Teacher's College and then teach for a couple of years and then candidate. I followed the wise advice he gave me.

In the candidating process and subsequent training the call of God was affirmed by the wider Church.

On the day I moved to my first appointment in Salisbury and to every appointment since that sense of calling has remained very powerful. Both my wife Paula and I felt a very strong sense of guidance regarding where we would move to and the possibilities of ministry in that situation as we moved into Caversham eight years ago. The strong sense of calling continues, so much so that, although technically retired, I would like to continue to work part-time in this Circuit for as long as I am able.

It is frequently said that whoever God calls God equips, and that has certainly been my own experience in every situation in which I have served-that the closeness of God's presence, the inspiration and energy needed is always there to be drawn upon.

So I can identify with some aspects of God's call to Jeremiah-the sense of being known and cared for and wanted for a particular role, however inadequate and apprehensive I felt about it.

Of course Jeremiah's experience was his not mine, and your experience is neither his nor mine.

But have you ever considered the wonder of being known and loved by your Creator even before you were born?

In Jeremiah's call it's even earlier in time than being formed in the womb.

Have you ever considered the extraordinary insight that God wanted you and had a purpose for you even before you were conceived?

These are mind-blowing thoughts and quite possibly more than we can fully take on board.

Even though these might seem beyond what we can come to terms with or understand, the one conviction you may want to stay with is that God has always loved us and always will.

You may want to repeat that to yourself-God has always loved me and always will.

If we allow that to sink in deeply to the core of our being, it is the best possible antidote to feeling a lack of self esteem, to feeling that your life is useless and pointless.

Mental ill health and suicidal thoughts feed on convictions of that kind-"I'm no use. I've got nothing to offer. No one loves me."

Allow yourself instead to be consoled by the life-changing affirmation of your Creator -"I love you. I have always loved you; and I always will."

There may be other features of Jeremiah's call with which we might identify.

He feels he is being called to something far bigger than he can cope with. He is being called to be a prophet and he claims that he doesn't know how to speak. He is conscious of his lack of experience, of training, of ability. For that reason alone what he is being asked to do seems utterly overwhelming.

Have you ever felt that there are some challenges in your life that seem way beyond you?

What is given to Jeremiah is the assurance of God's continuing presence and of God giving him what he needs when he needs it.

Perhaps you can identify with that to some extent?

Something has been asked of you at work and your initial response is "No way. I can't do that". The people who have asked you feel that you could do it. With considerable application, a lot of time, anxiety and perspiration on your part, looking back you might realise, "I actually achieved that and I never thought I would." Other people's belief in you and their encouragement would have helped too; and in some instances it might not be only what you as an individual achieved, but what you as a member of a team managed to complete.

There may have been other serious challenges relating to your health, your relationships, the devastating emptiness of bereavement where you may have felt "I'm sinking here. I'm never going to be able to cope. This is just too big". And again maybe you discovered a greater depth of inner resources than you thought you had-perhaps resources which were under-developed until the time you really needed them.

The initial reluctance and sense of inadequacy Jeremiah felt was shared by many others including Moses and Gideon-and no doubt many more including each of us at different times.

God is one who sees our potential and helps us to realise it. God can overcome our natural fearfulness, negativity and limited vision of our own capabilities. God enables us to become and to do so much more than we would ever have dreamed possible.

God does not only call people into one area of work-a prophet, a minister, a missionary, a preacher. Surely there can be a sense of vocation in other jobs? Can't there also be a strong sense of committed vocation to the primary people in your life? Vocation in parenting, grand-parenting, as a spouse or partner? There may be roles we wouldn't have envisaged -like being a carer to a family member, but whether we expected or wanted to do that, the same reassuring promise and strength of God alongside and within us is for us in those circumstances too. There can be a sense of vocation in volunteering, offering tried and tested skills and trying unfamiliar ones. You may feel a strong sense of connectedness to the place in which you live. Supporting the Church where you worship, relating to your neighbours, standing alongside your friends, following through the work or responsibilities that have been asked of you-all this can become our vocation, our calling, the areas of life to which we give a resounding "Yes".

And if you ever struggle in those areas and feel what is expected of you is beyond you, that the challenges seem too much then you may well find that you are equipped, enabled and empowered to a remarkable degree.

Jeremiah looks apprehensively at what he is being called to as many of us have at different times and in different situations, but God's promises of continuing divine presence helping us to meet the needs before us is a reality in human experience through all the ages.

What Jeremiah's calling spells out for us is that-

God has given us life.

God has known us even before we were born.

God has a purpose for each of us, and, if that sounds too grandiose or forbidding for us to envisage, in the extraordinary providence of God's interweaving and working in human life, there is a distinctive contribution for each of us to make.

God calls and equips us, enables us, gives us gifts, sustains, encourages and affirms us.

God challenges us to explore and develop the gifts we have.

God sees more in us and in our potential than we ever see.

God sees how we can be interlinked in purposeful ways with others to a greater extent than we will ever realise.

Our natural fears and apprehensiveness of challenges, of people, of new situations can all be overcome in the strength God gives.

So let us allow ourselves to be open to the future God may want to develop in and among us for the enrichment of the people with whom we share our lives.

Prayers-In the silence let us make our own response to what we have heard.....

We commit ourselves afresh to praying for other people and to finding ways of following up those prayers ourselves.

We remember people known to us who are facing major challenges in their lives -in pain, or illness, in bereavement or other problems.....

We pray for people in terrible circumstances of suffering who may feel fortunate if they have one meal a day, who live in the midst of violence or war; in situations of deep oppression and injustice; those who are afraid to say what they feel and think because of the strength of polarised opinions..

We remember those in positions of responsibility and leadership-may they serve with humble authority, gentle strength and integrity of life.

We remember all those working to preserve our planet and to establish peace and we place ourselves among them.

We offer our prayers through Jesus our Lord, Amen.

Hymn 564 Singing the Faith (745 Hymns and Psalms) "O Thou who camest from above"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3UYybc7Xa0>

1. O thou who camest from above
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart!

3. Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work, and speak, and think for thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up the gift in me.

2. There let it for thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its source return
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

4. Ready for all thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat;
Till death thy endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.

(Charles Wesley 1707-1788)

Benediction - Sensitive to the call of God our Creator, Jesus our Saviour, and the Spirit our enabler, we ask for your blessing upon all you call us to this day. Amen.