

Sunday 21st. November 2021

Welcome & intimations

JP 63 God who made the earth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YU4ZAxSgN0>

Prayer & Lord's prayer

This morning we gather our thoughts for prayer around Jesus' words calling Peter & Andrew to be his followers (Matthew 4:19) : Come with me & I will teach you to catch men.

Father, this morning we praise you that Jesus gave such a special call to such unlikely people. We praise you that Jesus gave such a special call to such ordinary people.

We praise you also for the transformation that took place. As Peter & Andrew obeyed Jesus' command it became apparent that they were special people. Ordinary fishermen only skilled in catching fish became extraordinary fishermen skilled in catching people.

We further praise you that these words of Jesus still apply to us today.

We too are unlikely choices. We too are ordinary people.

But

we too are chosen.

We are chosen to listen, chosen to hear & chosen to obey Jesus' call.

And as we respond, we become aware that we are special, given the divine task of showing others your Kingdom of love.

Today we ask you to help us to think deeply about Jesus' call.

Jesus says, 'Come with me. Walk in my footsteps which lead the way.

Follow my path which guides you into truth.

Look around & see the world through my eyes.

Listen to hear my whisper in the singing birds, in the laughter of children, in the cry for help. Then act to bring healing & wholeness to those whose lives are broken & hurt.

That is what is meant in the call, 'Come with me.'

Father we have to admit that there are times when we are not very good at being Jesus' followers. We stray from the right path. We choose to do what is easier even when it may be wrong. Our eyes & ears are closed to your messages to us.

We are sorry, Father. We thank you that you forgive us. We thank you that you can help us to start afresh. We thank you that you send your Spirit to lead us into a deeper experience of your love in our lives.

For it is with your love in our hearts that we too are enabled to be fishers of men, just like Peter & Andrew. We

too can hear & obey Jesus' call, 'Come with me.'

And now we sum up our prayers in the words which Jesus gave to Peter & Andrew which we now say together :

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. AMEN

Young (at heart) church : Looking for God

This morning I begin with a simple request. Please look for 2 things with the colour brown in it. Have a look around & call out when you see something with brown. Perhaps you are surprised that there are more brown things than you realised. What has happened is that you have changed your way of looking. By looking for brown you see it more than you did before.

Now I am going to suggest to you that the same principle applies when we consider looking for God. If we expect God to be at work in our lives & in our world then we will look & see what God is doing. If we don't expect God to be active in our lives, then we will likely miss what God is doing.

We have this promise from Jeremiah 29:13

You will seek me and you will find me because you will seek me with all your heart. Here are some examples of finding God.

Photo 1 Autumn in Rosehaugh

Photo 2 Ducklings at Rouken Glen

Photo 3 Cemetery at Rosehall

Photo 4 Dolphin jumping

Photo 5 Soup & sweet at Avoch

Photo 6 Tea/coffee at Rosemarkie

So let us change our way of looking. Let us seek God with all our hearts.

CH4 641 Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSPE1bV_xT0

Reading : Genesis 28:10-22 read by Sandra Bell

¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and started toward Haran. ¹¹ At sunset he came to a holy place^[a] and camped there. He lay down to sleep, resting his head on a stone. ¹² He dreamed that he saw a stairway reaching from earth to heaven, with angels going up and coming down on it. ¹³ And there was the LORD standing beside him.^[b] "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham and Isaac," he said. "I will give to you and to your descendants this land on which you are lying. ¹⁴ They will be as numerous as the specks of dust on the earth. They will extend their territory in all directions, and through you and your descendants I will bless all the nations.^[c] ¹⁵ Remember, I will be with you and protect you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done all that I have promised you."

¹⁶ Jacob woke up and said, "The LORD is here! He is in this place, and I didn't know it!" ¹⁷ He was afraid and said, "What a terrifying place this is! It must be the house of God; it must be the gate that opens into heaven."

¹⁸ Jacob got up early next morning, took the stone that was under his head, and set it up as a memorial. Then he poured olive oil on it to dedicate it to God. ¹⁹ He named the place Bethel.^[d] (The town there was once known as Luz.) ²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow to the LORD: "If you will be with me and protect me on the journey I am making and give me food and clothing, ²¹ and if I return safely to my father's home, then you will be my God. ²² This memorial stone which I have set up will be the place where you are worshiped, and I will give you a tenth of everything you give me."

Sermon : Finding God

Lord, open your Word to our hearts & our hearts to your Word. Amen.

In our reading from Genesis, Jacob is surprised when God comes to him in a dream. Jacob has left home under a cloud. He has deceived his father & cheated his brother. Also at that time, it was thought that each god had its own territory where it was active & exerted power. As Jacob had left home, he probably thought that he had also left God behind.

He finds he is wrong on both counts. While Jacob has sinned, God has not abandoned him. God is faithful even when we are not. And also Jacob discovered that God was not limited to some particular area. He was God of the whole world. And, like earlier as we considered brown, Jacob changed his way of looking. As he declares, 'The Lord is here! He is in this place & I didn't know it.'

And suddenly his future is much more hopeful.

Jim White came to faith in a very traumatic way. This happened when he was a 19 year old student. One weekend he had been invited to a party at another university. His friend, Phil, was going & he encouraged him to come along.

Jim wanted to go but things just didn't work out for him. So Phil left on the Friday afternoon with 3 others to go to the party. They were returning from the party 2 days later. As they were travelling along, a car coming in the opposite direction crossed lanes & crashed headfirst into their car. All 4 were killed instantly.

Jim heard the news on the Sunday night. He left his room & climbed over a locked gate to sit alone in the athletics stadium. He grieved for his friend, considered the brevity of life & thought about how close he had come to being killed.

He remembers crying out to God to help him sort it all out. He asked God to help him make sense of what had happened. He wanted God to say something ... anything .. but there was only silence.

Yet Jim felt it was the deepest conversation he had had with God. He felt that God was moving within him, communing & communicating with him on levels that he had never opened to God before.

That night was the first of many such conversations. And a few months later Jim became a Christian. He later reflected that God was doing something within him before God could do anything with him.

Jim's observations & experience cause me to revise what I said a few weeks ago about traffic lights & prayer. The answers are not just 'No', 'Wait' & 'Yes'. Sometimes God's silence is saying, 'Come closer.' And that can be the most profound & challenging of God's answers to our prayers.

It was for Jacob & it was for Jim.

CH4 268 O God of Bethel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvk8ZcDts3o>

Reading : Mark 14:3-9 read by Sandra Bell

³ Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon, a man who had suffered from a dreaded skin disease. While Jesus was eating, a woman came in with an alabaster jar full of a very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on Jesus' head. ⁴ Some of the people there became angry and said to one another, "What was the use of wasting the perfume? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than three hundred silver coins^[a] and the money given to the poor!" And they criticized her harshly.

⁶ But Jesus said, "Leave her alone! Why are you bothering her? She has done a fine and beautiful thing for me. ⁷ You will always have poor people with you, and any time you want to, you can help them. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could; she poured perfume on my body to prepare it ahead of time for burial. ⁹ Now, I assure you that wherever the gospel is preached all over the world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

Sermon : Finding God in others

In this part I would like to share an inspiring example of experiencing God's love. It comes from the late Henri Nouwen & his time in L'Arche community.

Shortly before Henri was about to begin worship, Janet (who had special needs) came to him to ask for a blessing. Henri responded by tracing the sign of the cross on her forehead & saying a simple word of blessing.

Janet did not feel blessed. 'No, that doesn't work! I want a real blessing!'

'Oh, I am sorry,' said Henri, 'let me give you a real blessing in the worship service.'

She nodded with a smile & seemed willing to wait.

For the service there was a group of about 30 people sitting in a circle. As they came towards the end of the service, Henri was still not sure what 'a special blessing' would look like for Janet.

So Henri said, 'Janet feels that she needs a special blessing. And she feels that she needs that now.' Janet stood up & walked towards Henri.

When she reached him, she put her arms around him & laid her head upon his chest. Henri instinctively wrapped his arms around Janet.

Then he said, 'Janet, I want you to know that you are God's beloved daughter. You are precious in God's eyes. Your beautiful smile, your kindness to the people you live with & all the good things you do, show us what a beautiful human being you are. I know that you are feeling a little low & there is some sadness in your heart, but I want you to remember who you are. You are a very special person, deeply loved by God & by all the people gathered here.'

As Henri finished, Janet raised her head & looked up into his eyes. Her broad smile told Henri that she had received her blessing. When she returned to her place, someone else raised her hand & said, 'I would like a special blessing too.'

She came forward & also laid her head on Henri's chest. Henri wrapped his arms around her & spoke words of blessing. Several of the other residents also came forward seeking the same blessing.

The most touching moment was when a young member of staff raised his hand. He laid his head on Henri's chest & also received his blessing. After the blessing he looked up with tears in his eyes into Henri's face & said, 'Thank you. Thank you very much.'

I find that to be a very powerful example of finding God in others. It reminded me of an incident many years ago from my time in Glasgow. I had the pattern of preparing school assemblies in conjunction with one of the classes, usually performing a drama or giving a visual presentation.

One Easter we were having a rehearsal in the church before the big event. Then one of the very lively pupils, Chris, piped up, 'We need someone to be Jesus.'

And he was right. In this drama Jesus was present but had no lines to say. Because there were no lines, he did not appear in the cast. Chris was right. We did need someone to be Jesus.

And I believe that there is a deeper truth in Chris's words. There are many situations in life where we need someone to be Jesus. Henri was Jesus for Janet & all those who needed a special blessing. I believe the woman who anointed Jesus was giving Jesus a special blessing before he endured the suffering of his passion.

Although there are different themes running through our worship this morning, hopefully you have found something which speaks to you & touches your heart.

It may be to be more alert to what God is doing all around you.

It may be finding God in a time of trauma & need.

It may be finding God in others.

Or it may be that you can positively respond when there is a need for someone to be Jesus.

Amen.

CH4 351 Jesus' hands were kind hands

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

Dedication of offering & prayer of thanksgiving & for others led by Sandra Bell

Gracious Father, there is nothing we can do, say or give that could ever thank you enough for your gift of love and life given to us in Jesus Christ. But we want to make some kind of response, to express our thanks for all you have done for us. So we have given our offering as a token of our love, a sign of our worship, and a symbol of our discipleship offered to you in joyful and grateful praise.

Today on this CrossReach and Social Care Sunday we are thankful for the work of the wider Church as it reaches out in your name to bring love and acceptance to those who are struggling and find life challenging and aren't always equipped to cope on their own.

May the staff and volunteers of CrossReach be encouraged as they see lives change and flourish through the love and care they offer. Remembering those who work among the elderly, those who support the many with alcohol or drug dependency; those who walk alongside the mentally challenged; those who ensure that children and young people in care are in a safe, supportive and homely environment and those who support prisoners and their families.

We thank you for the numerous and diverse projects of care offered in your name - drop-in centres, breakfast clubs, dementia cafes, food banks, befriending groups, sharing food sheds, all reaching out to help reduce isolation and loneliness. May all who volunteer and work in these various groups see the difference their care makes and may those who benefit from that care feel valued and loved.

As we look into our own community we pray for the residents and staff at the Fortrose Care Home and for the intergenerational outreach of care given by Fortrose Academy pupils and Black Isles carers. We pray that covid restrictions will soon be over and that these important avenues of support can resume.

Father we thank you for the innovative vision of a group of enthusiasts from (the community) Fortrose and Rosemarkie who have become involved in Cycling Without Age Scotland and for the opportunity this venture will provide for the elderly and those with limited mobility enabling them to get outdoors and engage with others. We pray your blessing on this exciting new venture as new relationships between generations are created.

Loving Father, we praise you for your constant care, protection, love and faithfulness shown to us every day. You are interested in every detail of our lives, you alone know our thoughts and how we really feel. You see our private struggles and personal pain. In the stillness may we sense your peace and healing touch.

We thank you for family and friends those you have placed in our lives who are precious and special. As we think of them and hold them before you we pray they may know your blessing and if life is difficult for them may they feel the strength and comfort of being held in your healing love and hope.

Father, you are way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, light in the darkness, our God, that is who you are! Assured

of your unfailing love and power we confidently place our hands in yours. Trusting in your presence, and resting in your care, we pray for your strength to be channels of your peace and hope, light bearers, in places of discouragement and pain. In Jesus Name and for his glory we bring these our prayers. Amen

CH4 542 Lord, speak to me that I may speak

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQK_7CNI2QY

Blessing