

SUNDAY 17<sup>th</sup> January 2021

**INTROIT TiS 769 Now to the King of heaven**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

This is the time and this is the place;  
God moves among us, calling us to follow.

**God speaks, inviting us to listen.**

Come, let us encourage one another in faith,  
listen for God's word in our midst,  
and help one another to respond to God's call.

**We come together to meet God here.**

Come and see, with openness and attentiveness,  
**for Christ meets us here.**

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION**

Jesus Christ, the one who calls us,  
we open ourselves to encounter you here.

Just as Eli helped Samuel listen for the whispers of the Spirit,  
help us listen for your word among us.

Just as Philip invited Nathanael to encounter you,  
help us to invite one another to meet you.

Come and move among us, that we might hear your call upon our own lives,  
and hear your call upon the lives of others,  
– for the first time, for the next time, for all time. Amen.

**HYMN TiS 477 Jesus calls us here to meet him**

**PSALM 139:1-6,13-18 The Inescapable God**

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

<sup>2</sup> *You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.*

<sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> *Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.*

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.*

<sup>13</sup> For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup> *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.*

<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

<sup>16</sup> *Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.*

<sup>17</sup> How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup> *I try to count them—they are more than the sand;*

*I come to the end - I am still with you.*

## **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

### **AN EARLY WORD**

**HYMN** Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? (All Together OK 413)

### **BIBLE READINGS:**

1 Samuel 3:1-10

John 1:43-51

### **REFLECTION**

We speak often and always of God in our faith, but how is it that we actually encounter this God of whom we speak? Where do we meet God/ experience God/ hear God - and where is it that God meets with us?

On occasions, I know, God meets us in the miraculous and the inexplicable: through mighty whirlwinds and earthquakes, or as a blinding light from heaven, or an audible voice, or through some incredible vision. But I dare say, they are more the exception rather than the rule.

More often, many of us have been blown away by God's presence in nature - gazing from a mountain top, or caught by the morning sun glistening on a dewy leaf, or walking along a lonely beach: being caught by surprise by God along the way.

At times we feel God close as we sing and pray together in worship and celebration - just knowing that God is with us. Each of these types of experience can be a real and vivid experience of God with us.

Yet perhaps the place where God most often, and most deeply, meets us is not so much in any of those encounters 'out there', but rather through myriad encounters 'within' - usually in times of silence and solitude, when we give ourselves enough space to hear. It is in quietness that we find God, whispering 'within us'. But, how do we know that this is God who we meet? Well, from the experience of many, his is the voice that speaks only the truth, and the voice that knows us - utterly, deeply. As the Psalm sings, "*Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You are acquainted with all my ways.*"

When he was first approached about meeting with Jesus, Nathanael wasn't particularly interested. He told Philip quite bluntly that he didn't think anyone from the back-blocks of Galilee had much to offer him. It was only later, after he had met Jesus, that Nathanael was stopped in his tracks. It seems this Jesus knew him already - knew that he was a person without deceit, and that he had spent a moment under the fig tree. Jesus knew Nathanael - deeply, intimately, fully. And it is this realisation of being known that prompted Nathanael to declare: "You are the son of God and the King of Israel!"

*"You know when I sit down and when I rise up; even from a distance you know what I am thinking. Before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely."*

This is God, who knows me intimately, better than I know myself: who declares that I am fearfully and wonderfully made, and who loves me for who I am, without all the extra baggage stacked on. But in this clanging world, how do we find that space where we can meet with God openly and honestly, and deeply enough to know that I am known? Is it prayer that allows space for this sort of encounter to happen? Perhaps so, although even the prayers

we share as we gather on Sunday mornings don't give us a lot of space to really open ourselves to truly listen for the God who so wants to meet with us.

Samuel learned – eventually – something about listening. *“Master speak, your servant is listening.”*

Two things strike me about this encounter of the young Samuel with God. The first is the setting. And here I am not talking about it being in the temple. What was important was that Samuel was quiet, and he was alone, and by the end, he was open and receptive and ready to listen.

We by contrast live in a noisy and confusing world, made even more distracting by current technology and social media and screens wherever we go.

If we choose to, we don't need to stop and listen or reflect in our world, we can just react. If we choose to, we can be entertained 24/7, and what's all this doing to our inter-personal communications? We are becoming less practiced at simply reflecting or listening, and too often, the subtle messages of the earth and God are drowned out.

If we would seek to be open to God, there needs to be a deliberate turning to stillness. I don't just mean simply the physical absence of noise and distractions, but also the need for stillness within. We need to find ways to settle the voices and thoughts and restless activity within and be still, and know that God is God.

*“Master speak, your servant is listening”.*

The second striking thing for me from the story of Samuel is how he needed to be told that the voice he was hearing was actually the voice of God.

*‘Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.’*

Samuel, we know, was still very young. He had little experience or understanding. But for all Eli's faults, Eli at least perceived that something significant was happening, and so instructed Samuel simply to listen. Sometimes we need to do that for others. Could this not be God talking with you? Be still and listen.

Are you sometimes aware of a voice – the voice of another? Not necessarily audible, but a voice within? The voice of one who addresses you, seemingly from beyond yourself, who speaks truth, who knows you and loves you. The voice of one who encourages and guides, who pulls you up and gives you a reality check. At other times this voice is simply present, alongside. Do we dare name this voice as the voice of God? Has that sort of thing ever been part of your experience? Have you ever perceived such a voice “within you?”

I hope so.

Our God is free and can meet us anywhere at any time, and especially within. As the writer of Psalm 139 also said,

*“Where could I go to escape from you? Where could I get away from your presence? If I flew away beyond the east or lived in the farthest place in the west, you would be there to lead me, you would be there to help me.”*

God is God and there is no way we can manufacture an encounter with the living God. We can't force something to happen. What we can do is become still, and allow ourselves the space to meet the God who comes to us within.

*‘Master speak, your servant is listening’.*

May you hear God's voice this day. Amen.

**HYMN TiS 597 Master, speak, thy servant heareth**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

## **OFFERING and Dedication of offering**

O God, open our ears and hearts to hear your call to follow Jesus.

Receive and bless our lives and these gifts - may they be devoted to sharing the love of Christ with all whom we meet. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

## **PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:**

God of goodness,

you desire the well-being of all your people and all of creation.

Where there is suffering, bring your presence, healing God. *(pause)*

Where there is grief, bring your comfort, loving God. *(pause)*

Where there is arrogance, bring your wisdom, humble God. *(pause)*

Where there is harshness, bring your tenderness, gentle God. *(pause)*

Break through into our world and into our living, that we may hear the struggles of your people and the groaning of your creation.

Whisper to us, that we may hear your call upon our lives,  
and see your vision of healing and wholeness for the world.

In the silence, we name before you those places and people, whose needs we hear  
and know. Move in us that we may hear how we can offer care, respond in  
compassion and participate in bringing your presence. *(Silence)*

Loving God, hear our prayers, our pain, our struggles and our hopes.

We pray in the name of Christ, the one who reconciles the world to you, and who invites  
us to pray together, saying:

*. 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.*

*Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.*

*For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.*

## **HYMN: TiS 589 Jesus calls us o'er the tumult**

### **Sending Out:**

Go and listen for God's word in every part of your week.

Be attentive to God's voice in your life and the life of others.

Respond with joy, "Here I am, send me",

and with courage live out faith and share love with all.

**May God's light be our guide,**

**Christ's call be our inspiration**

**and the Spirit's presence be our refreshment. Amen.**

## **HYMN TiS 781 Father, bless us as we go**