**Morning Praise @ Home 11th June 2023**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading Luke 5: 1 – 11

**Reflection from John**

IMAGINE for a moment, that I do not exist and that someone other than me had applied to be vicar of Burton and Shotwick back in July last year.

When this other person was called to interview, a panel from the Diocese and both parishes was there and everything the candidate said was authentic, though somewhat different to what the interview panel might have expected. He was loving and respectful but made no bones that he would only come if there was a willingness to embrace change in order to grow and be healthy.

‘Oh yes,’ said the panel nervously. ‘We are scared, but yes of course. That’s what we need.’

When he arrived, this enigmatic candidate had no expectation of the congregations being reluctant. When he asked them to step out into roles which would pursue God’s best, using their gifts to seek God’s future, there was no question in his mind that they would refuse. Surely they were on an adventure to discover God’s different future for them and His Church.

This new vicar taught them that what *God* wants is what matters. Preferences and established ways must be recognised as secondary.

What caused real consternation to the congregations was that the new vicar hinted that, in pursuit of God’s best, new wine wouldn’t work in old wine skins. What could that mean?

God’s best, he said, meant that old ways might be fine … *or* simply block the way to something better. People just doing things as well as they could, would *not* necessarily lead to health, growth and God’s blessing. In fact, there was the possibility that God had little room for those things that they considered important.

Rumours swirled that one day, in his former parish, this vicar had come to a traditionally cherished event … and closed it down! He had cleared the decks, turned over tables and asked people to leave.

Time went by. In this vicar’s church, rather than having committees and long reports, everyone had a role as they tried, together, to discover God’s best future. They became organised, yet not stifled. They were learning to listen out for God’s ways, which was challenging but also life-giving.

Rather than registering conventional sermons, people learned to be alert to God’s ways in small action groups. They learned to follow the Lord on the hoof. They tackled things in ways they had never thought of before.

Some grew and loved the new approach. New people became Christians. However others began to complain, usually those who had been around a long time. Previously *their* voice had counted for something, without all this talk about ‘what God wants’.

There was ‘trouble at Mill’. The bishop was called in. Some of the louder voices wanted the new vicar to move on and leave them to their old ways….

That new vicar shares my initials but, compared to me, he is a billion times more capable and beautiful. Yet *he* wasn’t welcome. His name was Jesus of Nazareth.

Read Mark 1:16 -20.

Jesus was utterly immersed in the love of God. As he called people to follow him as his disciples, whilst some did gladly, others took their time and lots walked away.

* But what is a disciple?
* What does Jesus want of his followers?
* And if the Lord Jesus himself is let loose - what damage might he inflict on our Church? …

Today, as we begin a new sermon series, we are looking into what Church is and what being a follower of Jesus means today.

The central fact is that *all* Christians are called by Jesus.

People may come to know Jesus is very different ways and over different timescales. But make no mistake: the outcome is the same – to know Jesus and follow him is life changing. If it isn’t, you are not *following* him. You have missed the boat. As Jesus warned those listening to him:

**Not everyone who says ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.** Ouch …

Perhaps it’s best if we look afresh at what Jesus has in mind for his body, the Church. Because our idea of being a follower may be a pale shadow of what Jesus anticipated. You see, we really need to be clear about what it means for us to individually and collectively be called by Jesus. He is in charge.

The Greek term for ‘disciple’ in the New Testament is *mathetes*, which means more than just a student or learner. A disciple is a ‘follower’, better still an ‘apprentice’. In other words, everything disciples see in Jesus and learn from Him as they follow Him, they then strive to imitate and live out in their own lives.

Following Jesus, all His teachings, and then living them out in our own life – this is the definition of a disciple. And the plural of Disciple = Church.

We tend to think of disciples being special people, but make no mistake - not many are called into prominent roles. In our modern-day culture, being a disciple *starts where we are at this very moment*. We need a world full of disciples in our everyday life, in our neighbourhoods, in the schools, in our marriages, with our children, through social media platforms – in every interaction we make.

Many of us search for our calling and purpose, spending years trying to figure out our big mission here on earth. Yet it starts with choosing to be His disciples *today*, in the current season of our very own life.

**We are all called to be disciples, and that is the most defining call shaping our lives. Its impact should define our lives. And the good news is *all* are welcome to embrace this call.**

A modern-day disciple is called regardless of past hurts, past mistakes, past sin, and from any background. Jesus didn’t choose the wealthy, the most liked or the honourable. Quite the opposite. He chose to walk with fishermen, outcasts from society such as the bleeding woman, the blind, those with leprosy, and yes – the sinful.

He came to lift the unwanted, unliked and unloved out of their shame, to lift them to a place of honour, to partner with them as His disciples. He still does the same with us in our modern-day culture.

This is the sort of church I want to belong to. It’s the sort of church I believe I am called to lead. Let’s go there together?

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by Philip**

Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning asking for your blessing on us, as individuals and as a collective group that we call ‘The church’.

We thank you for the beauty of our church buildings, for the hundreds of years of worship that have been held in them to honour and praise you, but we are reminded that the real church is **us**.

Help us Lord to recognise the part we need to play as individuals to make the church strong and resilient. A place where people gather to worship, but mostly that we become people who are committed to serving you in whatever way you challenge us, as your disciples.

We ask Father that you will help us to recognise that the church needs to be built again in every generation. Not as a building renovation, but as a group of people who seek to understand you better and who are prepared to ask ourselves what we can do to become better disciples of you.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Father we pray for those who may never attend services in a church. Help us to find appropriate ways to reach out to them, to share with them your good news and our friendship and fellowship. May they know that you are a very real presence and that your presence is not confined to the walls of a church.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Lord of the harvest, we thank you for the warmth and sunshine that has warmed the soil, we thank you for the rain that ensures abundant growth. We also thank you for the hard work of our local farmers to produce our crops and all those who care for our natural environment.

We thank you for all those who are involved in local businesses in this area – for their labour, for their investment, for providing employment. We remember those who provide their labour, who care for their families, young and old.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

We think of all who are affected by the current cost of living crisis. We thank you for the work of local foodbanks and ask that they might help more people navigate the current financial and energy crisis.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

We pray for any we might know who are sick or in need of prayer and support at the moment. We pause as we bring them before you now.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**