

Call to worship

Come and hear the words of Jesus:
some are hard,
some are for us as individuals,
some are for us as a community;
some are challenging, some are reassuring,
some are difficult to understand,
some we would rather not hear.

But come as you are and be bold,
for Jesus wants to speak to you today words of truth,
words of direction, words of love.

Praise: Love divine, all loves excelling

Love Divine, all loves excelling
Joy of heaven to earth come down
Fix in us thy humble dwelling
All thy faithful mercies crown
Jesus, thou art all compassion
Pure unbounded love thou art
Visit us with thy salvation
Enter every trembling heart.

Come, Almighty to deliver,
Let us all thy life receive;
Suddenly return and never,
Never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve thee as thy hosts above,
Pray and praise thee without ceasing,
Glory in thy perfect love.

Finish, then, thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Opposites Video Quiz

All Age Story

We know that when we follow Jesus, life isn't always going to be easy. There are going to be good times, as well as bad and difficult times. As we live our lives, there are going to be the inevitable life of opposites. As we experience those ups and downs in life as Christians we know that Jesus is with us to help us through. Some may remember the Footprints poem many years ago...

One night I dreamed a dream.
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.

For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,
there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.
"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,
You'd walk with me all the way.
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life,
there was only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.
When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you."

Praise: One more step along the world
One more step along the world I go,
One more step along the world I go;
From the old things to the new
Keep me traveling along with you
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me traveling along with you.

Round the corners of the world I turn,
More and more about the world I learn;
And the new things that I see
You'll be looking at along with me
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me traveling along with you.

As I travel through the bad and good,
Keep me traveling the way I should;
Where I see no way to go
You'll be telling me the way, I know
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me traveling along with you.

Give me courage when the world is rough,
Keep me loving though the world is tough;
Leap and sing in all I do,
Keep me traveling along with you
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me traveling along with you.

You are older than the world can be,
You are younger than the life in me;
Ever old and ever new,
Keep me traveling along with you

And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me traveling along with you.

Prayer / Lord's Prayer

We follow in your footsteps, Lord Jesus:
you who knew what it was to be betrayed and misunderstood;
you who had to bear the knowledge that you were to suffer;
you who had to walk alone.

Strengthen us, that we might strengthen one another,
and go before us as we seek to live lives
that reflect your compassion and love.

How easy it is for a rock to become a stumbling block,
for encouragement to become criticism,
for friends to become strangers.

Forgive us, gracious God, when we hinder instead of help,
when we put down instead of lift up,
when we let go instead of holding on.

Forgive us, we pray,
in the name of Jesus, who took up the cross.
We thank you, gracious God, for Jesus:
for his confidence that beyond his suffering would be glory
and beyond his death would be new life.

Keep us firm in our hope that he is both Saviour and Redeemer,
and that your kingdom is both here among us and yet to come.
Help us to let go of our fear of the costliness of following his way, and to trust that although, like
Peter, we get so much wrong, you will not give up on us.

Amen.

Reading: Matthew 16: 21 - 28

Sermon: Follow me!

It was the beginning of new life for Peter and Andrew on that day, by the Sea of Galilee, when Jesus tapped them on the shoulder and said, "Come, follow me." Twelve of them eventually said, "Yes." But there were others who heard the call and said, "No." Some appeared to have reasonable excuses, others thought their wealth far too important.

This passage follows on neatly from Peter's confession of Christ, and it focuses the attention of the hearer on yet another important issue – if Christ is Lord of my life, what exactly does he expect me to do about it?

Midst the general excitement and furore of the Lord's presence in those days, it may have seemed fairly easy to be varied along by the emotion and perhaps make one of those emotional decisions. Some in fact did, and their lives were changed as a result.

However, as Jesus' earthly life was coming to its end – as he could see the rejection, the persecution and the death that awaited him in Jerusalem – he felt the need to put the question to them again. Were they still willing to follow him?

He said, "If any want to be my followers, let them deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow me." They had to decide all over again: "Is this really what I want? Am I willing to pay the price of discipleship?"

1. His reminder presented the stark reality of what it meant to be a follower - if you want to be my disciple, you must deny yourself. Deny yourself – that doesn't mean to put yourself down, devalue yourself, deny yourself all pleasures and all good experiences in life. No, not that. Jesus said that he came to give us life, not to take it away.

When Jesus says, "Deny yourself," he was saying, "Do not put yourself at the centre of life. That's where God belongs." He was saying, "Take yourself off the throne of life, and allow God to take His rightful place there."

Now living the fast-paced life that we live these days, many will say that unless you look after yourself and put your own needs right at the top of the list, the chances of getting anywhere in life must surely be quite slim.

Now of course Jesus wasn't saying that we should be like doormats to the world either. He wasn't saying, "Love your neighbour instead of yourself." He said, "Love your neighbour as you love yourself." Psychologists agree that we cannot love others in healthy ways unless we first love ourselves in healthy ways. So, the problem is not self love. The problem is self-centeredness.

God is to be at the centre of life; God is to be the anchor that holds everything else in its proper place.

2. The second thing Jesus said about being his disciple is that we must take up our cross. That's the disturbing thing about the cross – Jesus is not the only one who gets one.

Perhaps you've used the words having gone through a crisis or when you're right in the middle of one – "oh that's just my cross to bear". However, we don't only bear the cross of Christ in times of crisis. Surrendering my life to the will of God was what taking up the cross is all about.

So, the cross we are called to bear is the same as the cross Jesus was called to bear. The cross is the cross of obedience....the willingness and the ability to pray, "Not my will, but Thine be done." And that's really difficult.

Again and again I have had people tell me that the single most difficult thing about being a disciple is giving up control.

We want to decide what commandments we will obey and which we will not. We want to decide whom we will love and under what circumstances we will serve. We want a God we can veto when the going gets tough or when the price gets too high.

Well, we are right back at the beginning, aren't we? We have just taken God off the throne and put ourselves back on. When we refuse to take up the cross of obedience, we are also refusing to deny ourselves first place. I'm in charge!

3. However, I don't know of any more important decision in life than the decision about whom to follow. Because, the destination we reach is determined by the road we take. Certainly we want a guide who knows the way!

Jesus called his first century disciples and he calls us, saying, "Come, follow me." Why should I? Why should you? Toward the end of Jesus' life, he became aware that most people had rejected him. Thousands had heard him teach, and most of them said, "No."

All he wanted to do was to give them life at its best, and to help them make the world a better place for all God's children. But, most of them listened, and then walked away.

So, Jesus asked his disciples, "Will you also go away?" I love what Peter said in response. He said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!"

That's what I have decided as well. Of all the choices available to me in life, I have decided that the best choice is to follow Jesus. I don't know of a better picture of God than the one I see in Jesus.

I don't know of a better way for us to live with one another than the compassionate, serving, self-giving life modelled by Jesus.

There is nothing that takes hold of me in the deep places of my life, challenges me, and gets the best out of me!

It's true! In the company of Jesus I am challenged to do life-giving things I have never done before. I become more than I have ever been before. Where else can I go? Jesus has the words of eternal life, and he is the way. I'm sure of it. So, I have decided to follow him.

Of course, it's not always easy. Following Jesus does lead to a cross, you know.

Remember the man who said to Jesus, "Lord, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus cautioned him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds have their nests, but I don't even have a place to lay my head." Are you sure? No, he did not say it would be easy.

But he did promise to be with us. He did promise to give us everything we need for the journey. And he promised that following him will lead to abundant life, eternal life.

To follow Jesus - to live a life that looks and sounds like Jesus - it's not easy. But it's the hope of the world. And it's the best hope of your life and mine.

Praise: King of kings, majesty
King of kings, Majesty
God of Heaven living in me
Gentle Saviour, closest friend
Strong Deliverer, beginning and end
All within me falls at Your throne

Your Majesty, I can but bow
I lay my all before You now
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve Your Majesty

Earth and Heaven worship You
Love eternal, Faithful and True
Who bought the nations, ransomed souls
Brought this sinner near to Your throne
All within me cries out in praise.

Your majesty, I can but bow
I lay my all before You now
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve Your Majesty

Your majesty, I can but bow
I lay my all before You now
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve Your Majesty

Intercession

Lord God,
you reproached Peter because he had only human concerns;
but Peter just wanted to protect the one he loved.
We pray for people the world over
who find themselves in difficult situations.
We pray that they would all have someone
to care for them and lift them before you.

We pray for all who are persecuted for their faith:
for all who are misunderstood,
for asylum seekers who flee real danger in their homeland.
We pray for those who work tirelessly to address wrongs.

We pray for people whose lives don't always work out right,
through their fault, or through no fault of their own.

We pray for the people in our lives
who need your protection, Lord,
that we will always be faithful in prayer for them.

We also pray for our young people and all children, parents and staff
As they return to school this week. We pray that this process would go
As smoothly as possible, and that the protections put in place to avoid
the spread of this virus would work effectively.

Benediction

Lord God, you knew what was going to happen to you.
You didn't flinch, or back away.
You calmly told the disciples – and us – what to expect.
As we go now, remind us constantly to look to you in the good and the tough times.
Guide us as we go in your name. **Amen.**

Praise: In Christ alone

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died,

The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.