

**Worship for 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)**  
**Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.**

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Welcome to all of you joining us for this service.

I am Anne Oliver, your worship leader this morning. Our Bible readings will be provided by friends from Stockton & Radford Road churches, and Graham Howe will be sharing his reflections on God's Word.

We hope that you will feel that God has spoken to you through this worship, and I thank those whose technical expertise has made it possible.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Jesus invites us to meet with each other in his name.

Lord Jesus, like your disciple Andrew, we are curious as we come to you.

We remember your promise that when we meet in this way we can know your presence.

May our hearts and minds be open to recognise your presence now in our worship.

**Amen.**

Hymn: StF 21 – Born in Song!

- 1. Born in song!**  
God's people have always been singing.  
Born in song!  
Hearts and voices raised.  
So today we worship together;  
God alone is worthy to be praised.
- 2. Praise to God!**  
For he is the one who has made us.  
Praise to God!

**We his image bear.**

**Heaven and earth are full of his glory;  
let creation praise him everywhere.**

**3. Christ is King!**

**He left all the glory of heaven.**

**Christ is King!**

**Born to share in our pain;  
crucified, for sinners atoning,  
risen, exalted, soon to come again.**

**4. Sing the song!**

**God's Spirit is poured out among us.**

**Sing the song!**

**He has made us anew.**

**Ev'ry member part of the Body;  
given his power, his will to seek and do.**

**5. Tell the world!**

**All power to Jesus is given.**

**Tell the world!**

**He is with us always.**

**Spread the word, that all may receive him;  
every tongue confess and sing his praise.**

**6. Then the end!**

**Christ Jesus shall reign in his glory.**

**Then the end**

**of all earthly days.**

**Yet above the song will continue;  
all his people still shall sing his praise.**

Brian Hoare (b. 1935)

Prayer of approach

With hearts full of hope,  
minds open to receive  
and ears tuned to hear,

we draw near, Lord God, to learn  
and to share your all-powerful, guiding truth.

**Amen.**

Prayer of adoration

O God our beloved,  
you call us and we can hardly believe what is  
happening.

Sometimes it seems as though we are talking to  
ourselves when we pray and we feel foolish.  
At other times your presence seems so close that  
it is even more like talking to ourselves and it  
feels so right.

We realise more and more that we know your  
presence within and that there is no distance  
from you.

The more we listen the clearer your invitation  
sounds.

We admit that we want to silence that inner  
voice when we are feeling selfish or when we are  
trying to be clever.

But you persist and we cannot resist.  
We have to admit that we are not so clever after  
all and we fall silent in your presence.

Please keep on disturbing us by your presence.  
In a world that confuses and disturbs may we  
know the comfort of your presence and the  
courage to keep on hoping against hope as Jesus  
calls us to follow.

**Amen**

Prayer of confession

Lord, John the Baptist was a witness.  
His role was to point to you and away from  
himself  
and he embraced it.

Many of us clamour for attention,  
when we should give you the centre stage.  
Forgive us, Lord,

and help us so that for us, as for him,  
Jesus might increase and we decrease.

John was willing to relinquish his disciples  
so that they could freely discover Jesus for  
themselves.

Forgive us for the times we control others,  
holding them back from their search for you.

Andrew and his companion  
responded to Jesus' invitation to spend time with  
him.

Forgive us, Lord, when we shrink from intimacy  
with you,  
or pay you only perfunctory attention.

Andrew could not contain himself  
from speaking about his discovery of the  
Messiah,  
and so introduced his brother Peter to Jesus.  
Forgive us, Lord, when we privatise you,  
or are reluctant or fearful to share our faith.

**Amen.**

Declaration of forgiveness

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

This is His gracious word:

"Your sins are forgiven".

**Amen. Thanks be to God.**

Hymn: StF 424 – God forgave my sin in Jesus'  
name

**1. God forgave my sin in Jesus' name;  
I've been born again in Jesus' name,  
and in Jesus' name I come to you  
to share his love as he told me to.**

***He said:***

***'Freely, freely you have received,***

***freely, freely give;***

***go in my name and because you believe,***

***others will know that I live.'***

**2. All power is given in Jesus' name  
in earth and heaven in Jesus' name;  
and in Jesus' name I come to you  
to share his power as he told me to.**

***He said:***

***'Freely, freely you have received,  
freely, freely give;  
go in my name and because you believe,  
others will know that I live.'***

Carol Owens (b. 1931)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

John 1:29-42(NRSVA)

*The Lamb of God*

<sup>29</sup>The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." <sup>31</sup>I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.' <sup>32</sup>And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup>I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." <sup>34</sup>And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'

*The First Disciples of Jesus*

<sup>35</sup>The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup>and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' <sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' <sup>39</sup>He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and

they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. <sup>40</sup>One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. <sup>41</sup>He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). <sup>42</sup>He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter).

Ephesians 4:1-16 (NRSVA)

*Unity in the Body of Christ*

<sup>1</sup>I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

<sup>7</sup>But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>Therefore it is said,

'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;  
he gave gifts to his people.'

<sup>9</sup>(When it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup>The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. <sup>14</sup>We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro

and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Revelation 2:1-7 (NRSVA)

*The Message to Ephesus*

<sup>1</sup>To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands:

<sup>2</sup>I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. <sup>3</sup>I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup>But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup>Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. <sup>6</sup>Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup>Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.

Sermon

Hi everyone, I don't think it's too late to say it - so "happy new year"! I'm Graham Howe and I'd like to invite you for the next 10 minutes to come on a bit of a journey with me.

We'll start before Jesus' birth, then into the time when Jesus gets known, and then during the

time of the early churches in Asia and finally onto our time today.

We started off at the beginning of Christmas with the story of the birth of John the Baptist and how he heralded the birth of Jesus. Then, as he preached, he told everyone that listened to him that the Christ was coming.

Then we hear how he preached about the signs of the coming Christ and then how he recognised Jesus as being the promised saviour.

That's the passage that we listened to in John's gospel – John saying:

*"Look the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" and "I testify that this is the son of God"*

The result was that 2 of John's disciples follow Jesus to where he was staying and spend the day with him. Andrew was one of these 2 disciples of John. He then goes and finds his brother, Peter, and persuades him to meet Jesus as well.

We are not told how all the disciples met Jesus, we know that he called some of them from their fishing boats and others may have followed him when he started to make himself known. What is really important is that John records that at least 3 of the disciples followed Jesus because John points them in his direction!!

"That's Jesus, the son of God!"

They followed him because someone (John) pointed them in the right direction.

I love the Luke account of how John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus. At the beginning of Luke chapter 3 he lists all the important rulers and governors of the time and then says: *"the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah"*

God bypasses all the important dignitaries and heads of state

God's word comes from someone who is unimportant in the world's eyes. John is also the key figure in pointing 3 of the disciples in Jesus' direction – "that's the son of God".

John's teaching to the people of his time really wasn't "rocket science". He preached simple truths to them:

- Share what you have
- Tax collectors – be honest
- Soldiers – don't abuse your positions

But most importantly, to everyone, to recognise God's coming in the person of Jesus.

God uses John. The people needed John. The 3 disciples needed John to point them in the right direction.

God uses his people to point us in the right direction.

1<sup>st</sup> question "when was the last time you recognised "God's voice". Encouraged someone to pursue, follow or continue with something"? God uses his people today to speak, encourage and to act. We need one another to (gently) push, guide, direct and show each other.

Really reminds me of my favourite OT story of Samuel and Eli. It's Eli who finally realises who is speaking to Samuel. It takes him time to realise but, he at last identifies the voice and guides Samuel's response.

So let's encourage one another and recognise God speaking.

Let's encourage one another as much as we possibly can. Help as much as we can. Give as much as we can.

So how do the passages in Ephesians and Revelation fit in with "recognising God speaking and directing"?

Well, in the early Church God uses Paul to guide and point the Ephesians in the right direction. In the passage that we heard read, it speaks 3 times about being "in love":

- Bearing with one another – in love
- Speaking the truth – in love
- Building one another up – in love

Sometimes Paul's letters seem full of complicated doctrine but underlying his letter to the Ephesians is his encouragement to be "in love".

To:

- Bear with one another **in love**
- To speak the truth **in love**
- To build one another up **in love**

John is consistent and follows Paul's advice in Revelation. In writing to the seven churches his instruction to the church in Ephesus is to return to their first love. The same love as Paul was encouraging in his letter.

John is instructed to write to the angel of each of the churches. Scholars have looked at the meaning behind the seven stars and the lampstand in chapter 1 and also the "angels" of the churches to whom he is writing in chapter 2. The seven stars are taken to represent the 7 churches with Jesus as the lampstand standing among them.

The "angels" of each of the churches is less clear. However, in translation it is often used for a messenger or, more often, a human messenger of God's word. John the Baptist was called an

“angel” in the Greek in Matthew’s gospel. A human messenger of God’s word.

I love the picture that God’s word is being given to human messengers to give to His church.

So, what is the consistent word to the Ephesian church – to be “in love”, and to return to their “first love”. You could make the comparison with “falling in love.” It becomes all consuming – you want to spend time with your loved one, you find that you devote yourself to them, do everything with them, enjoy their company.

I wonder how many of you have read those words of John in his letter to the Ephesians and mentally exchanged the words love for works. Naturally assumed that he is saying to the folks at Ephesus that the “doing” is the most important thing. I confess I have often thought that I just need to “do” the things that I did when I first believed and “**the doing**” would bring an automatic freshness in my faith.

That I needed to pray more, read more, go to church more. But.....

John writes to the church through his messenger that they need to return to their first love. To be “in love” with God and enjoy the word that God has spoken to them and allow it to refresh them.

Remembering that they are called to:

'Bear with one another, speak the truth and build one another up.'

John does go on to say to do the things that they did at first. But “first love” comes first. Then as John the Baptist preached to the people – do the things which are in front of them to do. Those things that come to hand and are good. God will speak to those who are “in love”

The exciting thing for me is to see how God is using “messengers” (members of his church), to

enable us to be “in love” and “be refreshed,” today.

I hope that the 2 theme’s that I wanted to share with you this morning as we have travelled together have been helpful.

Can I encourage you to recognise God speaking through his people, from the youngest to the oldest. Speak it out when you see it, encourage God’s people and establish God’s word in your own life and His church.

When you hear God speaking or know God directing, know that he uses each one of us to minister to His church and people. He very often bypasses the high profile people and speaks to the most unlikely of us.

I, personally, am going to look again at John’s messages to the early church in the coming weeks. The messages in Revelation to the 7 churches, and listen again to what God was saying to His church. Also, I really want to listen to what God is saying to the “angels” (human messengers) of His church today.

Hymn: Mission Praise 189 – God is working his purpose out

- 1. God is working this purpose out,  
as year succeeds to year;  
God is working this purpose out,  
and the time is drawing near;  
nearer and nearer draws the time,  
the time that shall surely be:  
when the earth shall be filled with the glory  
of God  
as the waters cover the sea.**
- 2. From utmost east to utmost west,  
where human feet have trod,  
by the mouth of many messengers**

**goes forth the voice of God:**

**“Give ear to me, ye continents,  
ye isles, give ear to me,  
that the earth may be filled with the glory of  
God  
as the waters cover the sea.”**

- 3. Let us go forth in the strength of God,  
with the banner of Christ unfurled,  
that the light of the glorious gospel of truth  
may shine throughout the world.  
Let us all fight with sorrow and sin  
to set the captives free,  
that the earth may be filled with the glory of  
God  
as the waters cover the sea.**
- 4. All we can do is nothing worth  
unless God blesses the deed.  
Vainly we hope for the harvest-tide  
till God gives life to the seed.  
Yet nearer and nearer draws the time,  
the time that shall surely be,  
when the earth shall be filled with the glory  
of God  
as the waters cover the sea.**

Arthur Campbell Ainger (1841 – 1919)

#### THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

Today we read about the first followers of Jesus,  
who shared their experience in a way that  
inspired others to become disciples.

Let us thank God:

for John the Baptist – who was not afraid to  
decrease so that Jesus might increase,  
for John's witness and for how it spoke to his  
disciple friend, Andrew,  
for Andrew, who was eager to speak to his own  
brother about Jesus,  
for the people who, by example, and by words,

introduced us to Jesus and his way,  
for those who, by words and actions, prayed for  
us and loved us into the Church,  
for those who helped us discover that in Jesus,  
God declares that our sins are taken away,  
for those who shared with us what they knew  
and what they believed,  
for those who patiently nurtured us in the faith.  
Above all, we thank God for the good news that  
we are 'the children of God'.

**Amen.**

Hymn: StF 619 – Thanks for friends who keep on  
loving

- 1. Thanks for friends who keep on loving,  
finding ways to help us grow,  
celebrating our achievements,  
sharing in our pain and woe.  
God is glimpsed where love is faithful:  
mirrored here in time and space.  
Thanks to God for friends who love us:  
Christ revealed in every face.**
- 2. Other people help to shape us  
when they take the time to share  
words of wisdom, honest actions  
through our journey in God's care.  
In our faithful, honest learning  
we discover things unknown.  
Thanks to God for friends who teach us:  
seeking talent yet ungrown.**
- 3. When we find our friendships challenged  
through mistakes and different views,  
we discover deeper living  
as the love of God renews.  
For in Christ we see forgiveness;  
know a strength still to embrace.  
Thanks to God for friends who keep us:  
making real the gift of grace.**

**4. Praise to God for this great gifting  
of relationship and friend:  
imaging divine relating;  
found in heaven with no end.  
Bless us Maker, Word and Spirit  
as companions on the way.  
Thanks to God for friends who help us  
to fulfil our lives each day.**

Gary Hopkins (*b.* 1984)

Prayers of intercession

As we join together in our prayers of intercession, we think about friends who are in need of our prayer; and of the news from around the world this week, and pray that God will be with those who are suffering and in despair.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, giver of all good gifts, we pray for all people who willingly use their time and gifts in the service of others.

We pray for all who set up and work in charitable organisations:

bless them as they so freely give of their time and talents.

We pray for people who work together to bring healing,

for all who work in hospitals, homes, the community:

bless them as they bring blessing to others.

We pray for those who dedicate their lives to serving God

in religious orders and communities:

bless them in their gifts of prayer, hospitality and service.

We pray for people with the gift of words,

for teachers, writers and communicators:

bless the seeds that they sow.

We pray for those who don't feel as if they have a gift,  
or feel as if it goes unnoticed:  
bless them with the knowledge that they matter to you.

We pray for our church as a welcoming community,  
constantly being built up by our love for you.

Bless us, Lord.

**Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray together:

**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**

The Offering & prayer

Our offerings may be received by our churches in different ways at this time,

but we still offer them up to God today.

Everything in heaven and earth comes from you, O Lord,

and of your own do we give you.

**May you be praised for ever. Amen.**

THE DISMISSAL

Our final hymn is StF 563 "O Jesus I have promised to serve thee to the end"; and we will



reflect on Graham's words as we sing in verse 3  
"O let me hear you speaking in accents clear and still".

Hymn: StF 563 – O Jesus I have promised

- 1. O Jesus, I have promised  
to serve you to the end;  
Lord, be for ever near me,  
my master and my friend;  
I shall not fear the battle  
if you are by my side,  
nor wander from the pathway  
if you will be my guide.**
- 2. O let me feel you near me;  
the world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle,  
the tempting sounds I hear;  
my foes are ever near me,  
around me, and within;  
but, Jesus, now draw nearer,  
and shield my soul from sin.**
- 3. O let me hear you speaking  
in accents clear and still,  
above the storms of passion,  
the murmurs of self-will;  
O speak to reassure me,  
to hasten or control;  
Lord, speak, and make me listen,  
O guardian of my soul.**
- 4. O Jesus, you have promised  
to all who follow you,  
that where you are in glory  
your servant shall be too;  
and, Jesus, I have promised  
to serve you to the end;  
O give me grace to follow  
my master and my friend.**

John Ernest Bode (1816–1874)

Prayer & blessing

We have met with you, Lord,  
and have been blessed in your presence.  
We depart now, refreshed,  
to go where you send us,  
to stay where you want us,  
and most of all, to rejoice in your great love.

And the blessing of God,  
the Father, Son & Holy Spirit  
be among us and remain with us always.  
**Amen.**

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StF 21 – Born in Song!

Brian Hoare (b. 1935)

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StF 424 – God forgave my sin in Jesus' name

Carol Owens (b. 1931)

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Mission Praise 189 – God is working his purpose out

Arthur Campbell Ainger (1841 – 1919)

StF 563 – O Jesus I have promised

John Ernest Bode (1816–1874)

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StF 619 – Thanks for friends who keep on loving

Gary Hopkins (b. 1984)

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