



Opening Prayer for Ordinary Time

God of adventure and growth,
open our hearts, ready our minds
and fire our imaginations,
so that as we gather together before you,
and ponder the life-giving stories of Jesus,
we might discover more of your goodness,
and be swept up by the Holy Spirit
as she nurtures, disturbs and inspires us
on our journey into fullness of life.

Amen

'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

Think of a time when you have given up something in order to follow Jesus. What happened, and how did this impact you?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise

You are invited to bring your thanks and praises to God, and to use the following prayer to conclude:

God of glory and goodness,
you pour out blessings upon us,
and call us, as ordinary people, to follow your Son.

We bring our thanks and praises. Amen

Psalm of the Week – Psalm 27:1, 4 – 9

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
**The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?**

One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.

**For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.**

Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;

**I will sing and make melody to the Lord. Hear, O Lord,
when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!**

'Come,' my heart says, 'seek his face!'

Your face, Lord, do I seek.

Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.

**Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.

Amen

Prayers of Renewal

God of overflowing love,
who calls us to follow you and fish for people,
we bring to you that in need of your renewal and restoration,
in our lives, in the world, and in your Church:

We bring to you those things for which we are sorry:
restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the times we've failed to love one another:
restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the burdens we carry and sorrows we bear:
restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the injustices and oppression in our world:
restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the failings and disunity of your Church:
restore us and heal us.

Silence is kept for a few moments...

God of transformation and hope,
you set us free from the past, to flourish in the future.
Thank you that you forgive us, restore us,
and call us on.

Amen

Readings Isaiah 9:1 – 4
 Matthew 4:12 – 23

Sermon

I've lived in eleven different properties, since I left home at eighteen. Moving has always been for a purpose, but has very much been my own decision on each occasion. Either I've moved to a new area for studies or work, or I have been searching for better accommodation within one of the three cities where I've been a student. The reading we have just heard from Matthew's Gospel represents the third time Jesus had settled in a different hometown; yet, these moves weren't about human choice, but the purposes of God. When threatened by

Herod, Jesus' family fled to safety in Egypt, and following his death, they settled in Nazareth. Years later, after John the Baptist's arrest, the adult Jesus moved to the bustling fishing village of Capernaum, on the edge of the Sea of Galilee. In all three instances, Matthew is clear that the moves represented the fulfilment of Hebrew prophecy.

I know from my own experience that moving into a new area can be something of a mixed blessing. It means leaving behind our friends, familiar places and landmarks, and starting from scratch, which has proven easier in some contexts than others. Sometimes, it has been a difficult thing to do because it takes time to forge new connections. Yet, on other occasions, it has been exciting to have the opportunity to encounter a different mix of people and to make a fresh start in a new place. I wonder how Jesus felt about making this move, a move that once again was influenced by having to respond to a dangerous situation? John's arrest was the catalyst for him beginning his public ministry, having come through a testing period of temptations in the wilderness, which prepared him to face the dangers and challenges ahead. He began where his cousin left off, by preaching exactly the same message of repenting for the kingdom of God had come near, but now within a mixed area of Jews and Gentiles. Hence, while this latest move clearly heralded a new 'phase' of Jesus's ministry, there was also a degree of continuity with what had come beforehand.

Once Jesus had begun, he certainly didn't waste any precious time. Everywhere he went, he brought together words and deeds through teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom breaking in through his person, and curing all disease and sickness. This was light for those dwelling in darkness – the darkness of death in an area historically beset by occupation, and conflict. Sometimes, we might question Matthew's use of quotes from the Old Testament, but choosing today's reading from Isaiah seems very apt. In actions and words, Jesus was indeed bringing the Kingdom of God – which is fundamentally about wholeness for not just all of humanity but for

creation in its entirety – nearer to hand. Yet, even at this early stage, it seems Jesus recognised that he couldn't shine God's light alone.

When I've moved into new areas, I have taken different approaches to making friends. At university, I joined some student societies and got to know people that way; in other settings, I've investigated new hobbies or made friends through work. I can honestly say, however, that I've never employed Jesus's strategy of approaching folks who are going about their daily work and calling them to come and follow me. I suspect that if I did try this, I'd inevitably scare off more people than I'd attract! Reflecting on this reality makes me wonder what the people close to Peter and Andrew, James and John, thought of their decisions to drop everything and follow Jesus. Some commentators suggest that there must've been time for them to sit down, and chat, and perhaps eat together, before making decisions. It appears Luke was just as troubled by Matthew's account as some modern readers have been, because he elaborates on this with a story about a huge catch of fish, which is remarkably like the post-resurrection meal on the beach, from John's Gospel. However, what is clear is that these ordinary lads, unimportant in worldly terms, did take a risk on Jesus.

When somebody first becomes a disciple, they make a commitment to be a friend of, and learner from, Jesus. In doing this, they respond to the same calling that those first disciples received upon the shore of the Sea of Galilee, to follow him and to fish for people, by sharing God's love, and proclaiming in word and deeds that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Like John and James and Andrew and Simon Peter, they are ordinary people, but that is exactly who God works through – everyday people like you and me. Given this background, I believe there is something rather reassuring about knowing what happened to the fishermen later on – how they made mistakes, and got it really wrong on occasion, even to the point of running away from or simply denying they'd known Jesus following his arrest. They were far from perfect. Yet, through them, God was able to do extraordinary things.

The same is true for us today; we are the light of the world, and God will use us to shine light in the darkness, if we take a risk on Jesus.

So, as you continue your journey of discipleship, and fish for people, I pray that God will continue to equip you – and indeed all of us – to be people who shine out the light of God's love into the world's dark places, so that all may know in their hearts that the Kingdom of God has truly come near. Amen

Recommended Resource of the Week

Logan and Ridley's 2016 work *The Discipleship Difference* takes an honest look at what it means to follow Jesus, and to grow as we fish for people.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord's Prayer

Blessing