

FORTH VALLEY METHODIST CIRCUIT WEEKLY SERVICE

SUNDAY 17TH JANUARY 2021



Preparation:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting. [Psalm 139: 23, 24]

Please sit in silence for a minute.

Prayer:

God of all,
From the beginning to the end,
in every scrap of time,
You let your love loose,
to work wonders in and amongst us.
The universe reveals your love in life
and Christ offers a future and a hope to everyone.
In every breath; in the faintest breeze; and in the mightiest storm
Holy Spirit, you are present to whisper
God's love to our souls.

Open all our senses and open each heart
to Your ever-present unearned love for each one,
that those who are disillusioned may hope in you,
that those who are fearful may rely on you,
that those who despair may celebrate once more in you,
that all seeking may find you,
and welcome your love for them,
and all your creation reveal the wonder of Your glory.

Amen.

[Hymn: Let us build a house \(StF 409\)](#)

1. Let us build a house where love can
dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

Refrain:
All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

2. Let us build a house where prophets
speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:
Refrain

3. Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees
us: **Refrain**

4. Let us build a house where hands will
reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:
Refrain

5. Let us build a house where all are
named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and
claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to
rafter: **Refrain**

Marty Haugen (b.1950) Words and music © 1994 GIA Publications Inc., 7404 S. Mason Avenue, Chicago, IL 60638, USA www.giamusic.com. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Prayer:

Loving God,
You come to us as light,
as brilliance,
as glory.
We seem to have lost the ability to grasp true majesty.
We measure life by money, or medals, or clothes,
last-person-standing triumphs,
and exclusive, only-for-the-privileged-few accolades,
and we call these glorious,
forgetting how they tarnish after just a few moments.

We have forgotten how to recognise the splendour that lives
in the sacrifices of a mother
giving all to feed her child each day;
in the compassion of a stranger
giving of time, talent or treasure to care for desperate souls;
in the humility of a well-qualified professional
who uses their connections and skill to ensure the success

of schemes and projects that bring hope and new life to the least;
in the courage of peacemakers
standing empty-handed against violence and aggression,
choosing rather to serve and love an adversary;
in the wonder of a carpenter's son standing in our place,
to open our hearts to God's love and heaven on earth.

Forgive our preference for darkness and gloom not light;
partiality for self rather than for others;
and fondness for comfort against challenge.

Forgive us our doubts,
our fears

and our deliberate wrongs.

Grant us to stand afresh in the light of your presence,
ready, willing and open

to hear your invitation, "Come"

and to receive your love through Christ

active in living it out in the world around us,

to your glory and our peace,

through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

[Old Testament Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-20, 23,24](#)

[Psalm: Psalm 139: 1-6, 13 – 18; 23,24](#)

[Hymn: There is no moment in my life \(StF 482\)](#)

1. There is no moment of my life,
no place where I may go,
no action which God does not see,
no thought God does not know.

2. Before I speak, my words are known,
and all that I decide,
to come or go: God knows my choice,
and waits to be my guide.

3. If I should close my eyes to God,
then I am given sight;
if I should go where all is dark,
my darkness is made light.

4. God knew my days before all days,
before I came to be;
and keeps me, loves me, in my ways,
through all eternity.

Brian Foley (1919-2000) Words © 1971, Faber Music Ltd, 3 Queen Square, London, WC1N 3AU. Reprinted from New Catholic Hymnal by permission of the publishers.

[Gospel Reading: John 1:43-51](#)

Reflection: 'God at Epiphany'

"Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." - 1 Sam 3:7

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away." - Psalm 139:1,2

"Where did you get to know me?" -John 1:48

In the turmoil and change of our lives at this time, with countries and nations in turmoil and the pandemic afflicting countless numbers, individuals might feel lost amongst the billions and millions on this planet. We could easily wonder if God has time to know any individual, let alone any particular nation or people. Scripture shows us that God deals with each one of us, as we are – fame, fortune and fashion don't come into the scene.

Our readings today cover three people being known as individuals by God:

- the boy Samuel;
- the psalmist David;
- the farmer Nathanael.

Known by God even when they didn't know it themselves - and each was called to be available to God:

- The boy, Samuel, was to become God's prophet.
- The shepherd, David, was to lead God's people.
- Nathanael, was to be one of Jesus' disciples.

For each, the moment of recognising that God was involved personally in their lives, led to them having an 'epiphany.' A moment when the 'Light went on' and they recognised and responded to God:

- A child;
- A shepherd;
- A farmer.

There are other occasions of individuals having epiphany moments:

- Mary closeted with an angel.
- Joseph changed through a dream.
- Paul stood in light on the Damascus road.

Each individual can expect an epiphany at some stage of their life – perhaps not as dramatic as Mary or Paul; not as demanding as Samuel or Joseph.

Nathanael is the nearest to most people. He was a good man, without guile or deceit. He was ‘under the fig tree’ – a Jewish symbol of being comfortable and secure, in a good place. Nathanael was not expecting Jesus to enter his life. When told that Jesus from Nazareth was the one all Jews were expecting, Nathanael couldn’t accept it. “Someone from Nazareth?” he questioned. He was startled that someone from a backwater should feature as the coming Messiah.

He did not expect to encounter God, despite living in an occupied land; despite being one of a nation that considered themselves God’s children and so were mocked and rejected by other peoples; despite his land being infertile, dry and hard to cultivate. However, that fig tree remark made the reality of Jesus snap into focus. Something about it that made *who* Jesus is, clear for Nathanael.

All we know is that Nathanael changed totally in that epiphany. Afterwards he took the name Bartholomew. He was a faithful disciple of Christ, and, after much work and travel for God, was martyred.

Let us learn from David’s outpouring in Psalm 139, that individuals are so known by God, that he comes to each to invite, lead, guide, direct and steer each into His purpose for them, and these epiphanies of the Christ [personal realisation that God has come to an individual] come to different people in such drastically different ways that each one can appear incomprehensible to anyone else. Just accept that they do, and trust for yours.

Next week holds opportunity to remember the American Civil Rights leader martyred for his faith and work, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who had an epiphany as he describes in his book, *Stride Toward Freedom*:¹

“I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me, I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God. With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud.

The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. “I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I’ve come to the point where I can’t face it alone.

¹ Martin Luther King Jr, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, 1st edition (Harper & Brothers, 1958), 124–125.

At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced God before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: “Stand up for justice, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever.” Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. was changed by his epiphany, often referred to as his “vision in the kitchen.” Nathanael’s epiphany, in which he suddenly could see clearly who Jesus was, changed Nathanael, who, then, proclaimed Jesus as:

- *Rabbi*: an term of honour and respect appropriate to Jesus since he taught, debated, and gathered disciples.
- *Son of God*: a term for one with a close relationship with God. In the Hebrew Bible, “Son of God” refers to someone commissioned with a divine task.
- *King of Israel*: John uses this as a positive term that implies ruling lordship.

All three of these terms have the potential to bring transforming change:

- *Rabbis* through teaching and leading,
- The *Son of God* by bridging the gap between heaven and earth,
- the *King of Israel* by bringing just rule.

Since all God’s people are part of his plan, we too can expect an invitation to be available to accept and to follow Christ. Don’t attempt to make God’s invitation follow our expectations. Frank B. Whitney, founder of *Daily Word* magazine, offered this poem as a good guide to living so God can work through us:

“I behold the Christ in You,
Here the life of God I see;
I can see a great peace too,
I can see you whole and free.
I behold the Christ in you.
I can see this as you walk;
I see this in all you do,
I can see this as you talk.

I behold God's love expressed,
I can see you filled with power;
I can see you ever blessed,
See Christ in you hour by hour.
I behold the Christ in you,
I can see that perfect one;
Led by God in all you do,
I can see God's work is done”

We are not one of a nameless horde who populate this planet amidst all manners of experiences both personal and communal, but we are known by God; counted as His child; loved, called, and given purpose.

Let us join with David in praying:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.” [Psalm 139: 23, 24]

Prayers:

O God, whose presence and love we can sense
in the time of death, and in the time of birth,
in the time of anxiety, and in the time of reassurance,
in the hour of loss, and in the hour of receiving gifts,
in the hour of breaking, and in the hour of new beginning,
in the day of disarray, and in the day of restoration,
in the day of incapacity, and in the day when we know God’s grace
Help us to grasp your love in us and in the midst of our community.

Encourage us and all your church – in all its forms –
to pursue old and new ways to help every person
to ‘Come and See’ the Risen Christ,
and rejoice in all that brings.

Guide politicians everywhere to oversee the issues before them -
including Covid; Brexit; climate change; hunger and thirst, and more
acknowledging their place to enable each and all in their care to prosper.

Steer the new US president to lead his people with loving justice for all,
and help his nation rebuild their community,
recover their place supporting all the world,
and build a future that includes not divides.

Empower all who seek to serve those afflicted and affected by any illness, grief or trial,
especially from Covid, cancer or other life denying ailments,
notably medics; carers; teachers; and families.

Teach the world to respect all people,
no matter their ethnicity; language; ability; religion or heritage,
enabling us all to benefit from the gifts you give to each.

Take all those who have died into your eternal love,
and comfort each who mourns,
especially supporting any who did not receive the care they needed
under the pressures Covid has brought amongst us.

Stand revealed anew to us as light and hope and truth,
that whatever the future brings,
your peace may grow,
your joy inspire,
and your trust in us and in the world
be justified at last.

We ask our prayers in the name of Christ. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer:

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: Take my life and let it be \(StF 566\)](#)

1. Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

2. Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee.

3. Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King;
take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from thee.

4. Take my silver and my gold,
not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose.

5. Take my will, and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine;
take my heart – it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne.

6. Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure-store;
take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)

Benediction

Bless us Lord

with saints to tell us stories,

with angels to surprise us,

with friends along the way.

Bless us Lord with strength and joy and courage

all the length and breadth

of our nights and days.

God, be with us and speak through us;

Christ Jesus, be one with us and raise us to life eternal;

and Holy Spirit, dwell within us and make us holy.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

With thanks to Rev'd Chris Shreeve for preparing this week's order of service.

Scripture taken from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All hymn lyrics reproduced from Singing the Faith © Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes 2011, under CCLI licence number 642101. Additional copyright information provided under individual hymn lyrics.