

**Prayer** Jesus said: I am the way the truth and the life.

Lord as we come to you to know the truth, to find the way and your gift of life, we pray you will come to us now. **Amen**

**Song:** Will you come and follow Me © John L Bell & Graham Maule

*Will you come & follow me if I but call your name? Lord your summons echoes true when you but call my name*  
*Will you go where you don't know, & never be the same? Let me turn and follow you and never be the same*  
*Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known In your company I'll go where your love & footsteps show*  
*Will you let my life be grown in you, and you in me? Thus I'll move & live & grow in you, & you in me*

**Confession**

O Lord our God in our sin we have avoided your call.

Lord have mercy **Lord have mercy**

Our love for you is like the morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early.

Christ have mercy **Christ have mercy**

Deliver us from judgment; bind up our wounds and revive us in Jesus our Lord.

Lord have mercy **Lord have mercy**

May Almighty God who sent his Son into the world to save sinners, bring you pardon and peace, now and for ever

**Amen**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading** is from Joshua 24: 1-2; 14 -15

*Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God.*

*2 And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.*

*14 "Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!*

*15 "And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." This is the Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God***

**Reflection**

Most journeys have crossroads and boundaries - places of decision. .... And so does the journey of life It was like that for Joshua: On his map were rivers. 4x the phrase *the other side of the River* occurs.

Rivers are things that divide, that call for a decision. They challenge us to ask: which side are we on?

In life, and the journey of faith, we have rivers to cross and crossroads when we have to choose where we're going.

To make an informed decision Joshua called the people of God to: think about the past (what God had done); to think about the future (what God had promised) and then make a choice!

v15 says *Choose today* - this side or that; the side of other gods or the Lord's side; are we with him or against Him

Joshua said *As for me, my house we will serve the Lord*

Our faith is not essentially about regulations; about knowing right from wrong; about doing good and not bad! Though It involves that Its core is about a relationship with the Lord

That's what Jesus called for, from his first call by the sea *Come, follow me* to his last on the mountain of ascension: *Do all that I command you and I will be with you*

We often think of Jesus as the peacemaker, the unifier. But He also divided people by choices/ hard words/ even offensive things (you vipers, foxes, blind leaders ...)

Here in John 6 he talks not so much c bread & wine - the symbol of his actual flesh, and his blood given as his body was nailed to the cross for our salvation - but as he said in v63 it's about spiritually feeding on him

The Gospel reading is from John 6:56-69 *"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.*

*57 "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.*

*58 "This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."*

*59 These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.*

*60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"*

*61 When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you?"*

*62 "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?"*

*63 "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*

*64 "But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him.*

*65 And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."*

*66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.*

*67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"*

*68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

*69 "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

This is the Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

Discipleship is all about a life-living, life-giving spiritual relationship with Jesus

But people in John 6 complained 'What you're saying is too hard' & many followers chose to leave Jesus

So he turned to the Apostles & asked *Will you leave me?*

Peter said No; *you're the Messiah, Son of God, Life-giver we've believed and come to know who you are, & trust you*

We are on your side, Jesus!

Paul however, in Ephesians 6 warned: if we are on the Lord's side we will find ourselves in a battle against Satan and society v10 says *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*

11 *Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

12 *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

13 *Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.* This is the Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

Christians today are in a spiritual battle; and that battle is hotting up as the return of the King draws near

We can stand and suffer like many today and follow Paul who in v20 described himself as *a prisoner in chains*

We have a choice: either to stand firm and fight against evil **or** we can flee from the battle by succumbing & surrendering to it

Psychologists talk c the Fight Flight mechanism In the spiritual realm there's a Fight Flight mechanism

It's like a two way Switch - choosing **UP** for following Jesus, & **DOWN** for following the World the Flesh & the Devil and daily we have to choose which side we will take.

Will it be DOWN - the easy route of following our Culture or UP - the hard route of following Christ

Will it be the path of compromise or the cross?

Isaiah said in Is7:9 *If you don't stand firm in faith, you'll not stand at all.*

Our daughter was told in her Career's Class at school: If you want to get on in life you have to lie.

She has succeeded, and won awards, but without doing that

The Bible says: If we're going to stand for the Lord *we need to be strong in the Lord.* Every day we will need to turn to Him and depend on Him for his enabling and directing

We will need the mighty power of his Holy Spirit

How often we find ourselves at a dividing river looking over to *the other side of the River* and the land of Promise

Jesus stands in the water and asks: Joshua, Peter, Paul (and us) *"Do you want to leave me ... and go away?"*

-Peter said NO; You mean everything to us. *We trust you* and we'll follow you

-Joshua 1,200 yrs beforehand, answers *As for me & my family we will follow the Lord*

-Paul 30yrs after Christ's ascension says: whatever it costs I'll go for Jesus & live *in the strength of the Lord!*

So. Which side of the river are we on; & which side will we take?

**Song** I have decided to follow Jesus *Traditional*

v1 *I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus,*

*I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back*

v2 *Though none go with me I still will follow ..... no turning back.....*

v3 *The world behind me, the cross before me ..... no turning back.....*

v4 *Will you decide now to follow Jesus? ..... no turning back.....*

For our **Creed** we will use the confession of Peter

"Lord, You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." This we believe (**this we believe**) **Amen**

and now **we pray** our **Collect** for today

O God, you declare your mighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity. Mercifully grant us such a measure of your grace, that we, running in the way of your commandments, may receive your gracious promises and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord **Amen**

-We pray for our world troubled by disasters in Haiti, in southern Europe and North Africa, and violence in Afghanistan

Our world groans with man's carelessness, greed, and abuse, We pray for those concerned for a better environment, and those caring for the homeless and helpless. We pray for Aid workers and Christian workers who have been evacuated who feel disorientated and guilty leaving the people they love.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

-We pray for your Church fractured by division, racially, nationally and theologically. We pray for those confused by error, sidelined by prejudice, and ignored by selfishness. We pray for the suffering church as it stands firm against the political and spiritual powers of evil. From the world, the flesh and the devil, good Lord deliver us

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

-We pray for our community and all who suffer especially those in Plymouth coping with the death of a mother, a father and his child, neighbours, and passers by. We pray for all those who suffer in body mind and spirit. For those effected by the virus in this land and abroad (especially those without resources to get medical help), and those bereaved by whatever reason. We pray for those in the NHS, Ambulance and rescue services who seek to help

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

-We pray for ourselves in all the challenges and changes of life. We give you our frail hearts and weak lives as we say that we choose this day to follow Jesus, to take up the cross and stand against sin to establish truth, righteousness and mercy in our land

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

**Lord Prayer**

**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 them that 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**

**Song** Stand Up Stand up for Jesus

© George Duffield

Stand up stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross  
lift high his royal banner, it must not suffer loss  
From vict'ry unto vict'ry his army he shall lead  
till every foe is vanquished and Christ is lord indeed

Stand up, stand up for Jesus the strife will not be long  
This day the noise of battle, the next the victor's song  
To him that overcometh a crown of life shall be  
He with the King of glory, shall reign eternally

**Benediction**

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you  
The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and Holy  
Spirit be upon you and remain with you (and those for whom you pray) this day and for evermore **Amen**

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