

## Basingstoke and Reading Circuit Worship for Sunday 23 August 2020

### Welcome & call to worship

Welcome to worship!

We are part of a great company of people on earth and heaven who are joined by God's Spirit, and who worship together in God's presence.

We pray for God's Spirit to bless us and move in us, in our first hymn.

**StF 385 - Holy Spirit, we welcome you** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUIXBmT-JNk>)  
or *H&P 308 – O breath of God, breathe on us now*

1

Holy Spirit, we welcome you,  
Holy Spirit, we welcome you!  
Move among us with holy fire  
as we lay aside all earthly desire,  
hands reach out and our hearts aspire.  
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit,  
Holy Spirit, we welcome you!

2

Holy Spirit, we welcome you,  
Holy Spirit, we welcome you!  
Let the breeze of your presence blow  
that your children here might truly know  
how to move in the Spirit's flow.  
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit,  
Holy Spirit, we welcome you!

3

Holy Spirit, we welcome you,  
Holy Spirit, we welcome you!  
Please accomplish in us today  
some new work of loving grace, we pray —  
unreservedly — have your way.  
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit,  
Holy Spirit, we welcome you!

Christopher Alan Bowater  
(b. 1947)

### Prayer of approach

Let us pray.

Creator God,

all of your creation speaks of your power and your beauty.

Your goodness is beyond our understanding.

Yet we have come to know that you are a God of compassion, mercy and grace.

You love us beyond measure, and you invite us to draw near.

We praise you for your glory,

and we thank you for that amazing grace that never turns us away.

We know that there is nothing we can do to earn your love,

Lord Jesus Christ,

you call us to come to *you*, not to come to church;

you promised rest for the weary

and you promised you would be with us always, everywhere.

You know us; you know what hurts us;

you know what brings us joy, and you know our sorrows and anxieties.

You can't stop loving us.

So we come to you, because where else would we go?

You have the words of eternal life

and we believe and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

You are the one who showed us what God is like;  
you are the one who lived our life, died our death, and you are alive now.

Holy Spirit, we welcome you.  
Let the breeze of your presence blow  
so that whoever we are, wherever we are,  
we will know your loving presence and be open to your work in our lives.  
Teach us your wisdom, and help us to discern your purpose and direction for our lives.

Gracious God,  
Creator, Saviour, Spirit,  
we praise and worship you. Amen.

Listen for God's word coming to us in scripture.

**Readings** Exodus 1: 8 - 2:10  
Romans 12: 1-2

**Exodus 1:8 - 2:10**

**Romans 12:1-2**

### **Introduction to hymn**

We've been reminded during these recent months that worship doesn't only happen when people come together in a church building. Our hymn is a prayer that worship will be a natural part of every moment of our lives, however ordinary or humdrum.

### **StF 73 or H&P 792 - Fill thou my life, O Lord my God**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8d0bMPI2hY>

1

Fill thou my life, O Lord my God,  
in every part with praise,  
that my whole being may proclaim  
thy being and thy ways.

2

Not for the lip of praise alone  
nor e'en the praising heart  
I ask, but for a life made up  
of praise in every part;

3

Praise in the common things of life,  
its goings out and in;  
praise in each duty and each deed,  
however small and mean.

4

Fill every part of me with praise;  
let all my being speak  
of thee and of thy love, O Lord,  
poor though I be and weak.

5

So shalt thou, gracious Lord, from me  
receive the glory due;  
and so shall I begin on earth  
the song for ever new.

6

So shall no part of day or night  
from sacredness be free;  
but all my life, in every step,  
be fellowship with thee.

Horatius N. Bonar  
(1808–1889)

## Gospel reading      Matthew 16:13-20

### Sermon

Do you remember seeing this photo?



The man in the picture is Andrew Graystone, a writer, journalist and broadcaster. When he woke up one Friday morning in March last year, to the news of the mass shooting at a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, his thoughts went to Muslims in his own community in Manchester, who would, that day, be gathering to pray.

He wanted to stand in solidarity with his Muslim neighbours, but thought he would look a bit silly just standing at the gate and grinning. So he grabbed a piece of cardboard – an old file hanger – and wrote a message on it:

“You are my friends. I will keep watch while you pray.”

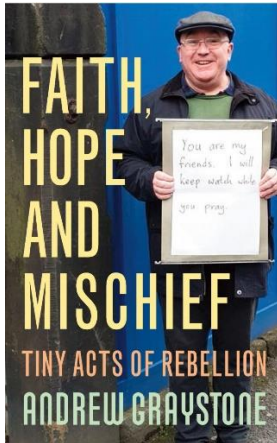
He stood outside the mosque as people entered, and stayed at the gate until they left.

Someone took a picture of him, and posted it online, and as the day went on, it was being shared widely, not only in the UK, but around the world.

Andrew, a Christian, received messages from strangers saying they had been touched and encouraged by his simple action. Then he started to get requests for interviews from around the world. He received tens of thousands of personal messages and gave scores of interviews to news agencies, radio and TV stations in the UK, across the Muslim world, and perhaps most movingly, on local radio and TV in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Andrew has written more about this experience, and also stories of many other small, less-noticed actions, in a new book I've been reading called *“Faith, Hope and Mischief: Tiny Acts of Rebellion.”*

I recommend the book, described by broadcaster Jeremy Vine as “challenging, hilarious, poignant.”



Andrew's theme reminds me of our reading from Exodus today. I love this story of the Hebrew midwives and *their* 'tiny acts of rebellion'.

First of all, all the important characters in this story are *women* – living in a world where women had much lower status than men, and are usually anonymous if they are mentioned at all in scripture. Here, the midwives are *named*!

With great courage, and at risk to their own safety, Shiphrah and Puah disobey the Pharaoh's orders to kill every newborn Hebrew baby boy. When summoned to explain, they say, "the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them."

And there are other women in the story, who each enact "tiny acts of rebellion."

The mother and sister of the baby Moses, and the daughter of Pharaoh himself, all choose to ignore the law that Hebrew baby boys should die.

As a result of their acts of rebellion, the baby in the bulrushes grows up to be the leader who will be used by God to set his people free from slavery and oppression.

### **Tiny acts of rebellion**

There was a time in our society, when being a committed Christian carried the expectation that you aspire to total respectability, uphold the status quo, and be a model citizen.

Thankfully, we have come to realise that this is far too simplistic, and it's more complicated than that. Yes, much of what we recognise as Christian discipleship also accords with the law of the land, and with society's expectation that we be decent and kind.

And yet .... and yet, the scriptures and our history teach us that we are called to question human authority, to stand up against injustice wherever it is to be found, to go against the status quo or the prevailing culture when necessary, and to be willing to undertake tiny acts of rebellion.

One writer longed for the rise of Christians who "challenge current prejudices...disturb the complacent....obstruct the busy pragmatists...question the very foundation of all about them....and are **nuisances!**" (*Harry Blamires quoted by John Stott in "Issues Facing Christians Today"*) or, as Andrew Graystone calls it faith, hope and **mischief**.

Christians who are nuisances – I don't remember learning about that in Sunday School!

A few weeks ago, our District Chair, Andrew de Ville, reminded us that Jesus is saying to us: "Whatever you have to offer – however little you feel it might be – I can use it, I can bless it, I can multiply it, I can bring good out of your life – if only you would let me."

Of the dozens of stories from our own era that illustrate this, I'll share two.

The first is well-known – the story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott.



This was a political and social protest campaign against the policy of racial segregation on the public transport system of Montgomery, Alabama. In December 1955, Rosa Parks, an African-American woman, was arrested for refusing to surrender her seat on the bus to a white person. This one event triggered a year-long campaign of boycotting buses, until a US Supreme Court decision that declared the Alabama and Montgomery laws that segregated buses, were unconstitutional.

Rosa Parks' tiny, yet courageous, act of rebellion of simply staying seated on a bus, was a seminal event in the civil rights movement.

The second story may not be so well-known here. It was one of a multitude of non-violent civil disobedience actions during the first Intifada in occupied Palestine, and it concerns 18 cows (yes, cows!) in the West Bank town of Beit Sahour, close to Bethlehem. In 1987, residents of Beit Sahour wanted to boycott Israeli products in protest at the occupation. They bought 18 cows from an Israeli kibbutznik to create their own source of milk. They felt that they couldn't decide their own future unless they could control their economy and the basic foods.

Starting a dairy was a bold step for Palestinians. They *are* farmers, generally with sheep and goats, but cows were something more complicated. And farming in general was not what the adults in Beit Sahour were about. None of them had seen a cow before. All of them were intellectuals, doctors, professionals.

Within six months, the whole town had turned to the local dairy for its milk, dubbed "Intifada milk." The self-made dairymen delivered it by night so Israeli soldiers wouldn't see it. One day an Israeli soldier came to the farm, took photos of the cows, and told the Palestinians they weren't allowed to have the cows and gave them 24 hours to shut it down. The cows were declared "dangerous for the security of the state of Israel" and became fugitives from the law. What happened then has been immortalised in a wonderful animated film called "The Wanted 18."



In a tiny act of rebellion – an act of non-violent civil disobedience, the cows were moved from place to place as the dairy went underground, where the cows, now fugitives from the law, continued producing "Intifada milk." Young people from the town began creating graffiti urging "Boycott Israeli Products." Hundreds of Israeli soldiers arrived to do house-to-house searches as helicopters circled overhead.

What these, and other stories like them, have in common, is a willingness to take risks in tiny acts of rebellion, to go against the prevailing culture, or even to break the law, in the cause of justice and compassion.

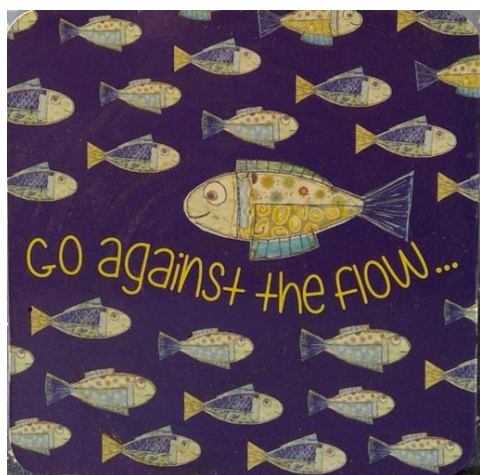
We can all see the mess and pain and sadness and unfairness of our world, and we see it on a vast scale. It's too easy to feel helpless and hopeless. Most of us would love to be able to change the world, and we may look to those who change history by their courage and amazing deeds and words. And it's good to be inspired by such heroism and greatness. But for most of us, it's the small everyday opportunities we need to look for.

The story of the midwives Shiphrah and Puah encourages us in our discipleship, to develop creativity, imagination, courage, risk – to think 'outside the box'.

And engaging in tiny acts of rebellion is good for us! If you've ever taken part in a public protest against an injustice, or you've subverted expectations for the sake of God's kingdom, then you'll know that it's empowering, and it kindles *hope* in us that things can change and that we *can* make a difference. One Christian leader says "Hope is believing in spite of the evidence – and then watching the evidence change." (*Jim Wallis*)

### **Transformed minds – thermometers or thermostats?**

Someone gave me this coaster a while ago – it's a drawing of a fish swimming the opposite direction from all the other fish, with the caption, "Go against the flow".



I think it's a great illustration of what Paul means in the reading we heard from Romans – "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." (*Romans 12: 2*)

We are to allow God to renew our minds and our thinking, so that we discern God's will, especially when God's will does not conform to the world around us, when it means going against the flow.

This transformed mind is a gift of God, and we receive it when we focus our trust, our allegiance, our loyalty on God and God's kingdom.

The writer of Exodus explains the midwives' actions by twice saying that they 'feared God' (*Exodus 1: 17 & 21*). This doesn't mean that they were frightened of God, so much as they

obeyed God, they put God first when facing human power and authority. They didn't engage in civil disobedience for the sake of it, or because they were naturally rebellious – they did so because their first loyalty was to the God of justice and mercy. Their tiny acts of rebellion came about because they trusted God, because God is to be honoured above any human power and authority.

In our gospel reading, Jesus blesses Simon Peter because he recognises Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. Notice what Jesus said: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven." (*Matthew 6: 17*) God was at work in Peter's mind, giving him insight and understanding about Jesus. Later, Peter would screw things up in a big way, but here, God was at work in him, and would be at work in him again later.

How we live is determined by how we *think*.

A transformed mind is a gift of God to those whose minds and hearts are focused on God. It isn't about greater Bible knowledge – though that will help. It's a spiritual change worked within us by God's Spirit. One paraphrase of our Romans verse renders it like this:

"Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you." (*Romans 12: 2 The Message*)

In this world, we are either moulders of society, or we're moulded *by* society. Most Christians, said Martin Luther King, "are thermometers that record or register the temperature of majority opinion, not thermostats that transform and regulate the temperature of society." Are we thermometers or thermostats?

Let's be encouraged that whoever we are, our lives are not insignificant. What we have to offer is not too small. We don't have to continue feeling powerless and hopeless. God is in the business of transforming us from the inside out, and that transformation includes renewed minds. We know that Jesus is Lord, and that ultimately, the reign of God will come to fullness. In the meantime, God wants to use us, as Andrew Graystone suggests, to look for "creative, joyful, cheeky, unorthodox ways to shift the status quo." Tiny acts of rebellion may change the world.

There is another letter in which Paul talks about our minds, and I close with his words, an early Christian hymn:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(*Philippians 2: 5-11*)

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Let us pray.

Loving, compassionate God,  
you call us to be willing to go against the flow,  
and to take risks for the sake of your kingdom.  
We so often feel helpless and hopeless.  
We are weak and timid, and too easily moulded by the world around us.  
We fail to put our trust in you.  
Forgive us, we pray, in Jesus' name.  
Transform us by the renewing of our minds,  
so that we may discern your will - what is good and acceptable and perfect.  
Amen.

**StF 504 or H&P 739 - May the mind of Christ my Saviour**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ghgaqT57lk>

1

May the mind of Christ my Saviour  
live in me from day to day,  
by his love and power controlling  
all I do or say.

2

May the word of God dwell richly  
in my heart from hour to hour,  
so that all may see I triumph  
only through his power.

3

May the peace of God my Father  
rule my life in everything,  
that I may be calm to comfort  
sick and sorrowing.

4

May the love of Jesus fill me,  
as the waters fill the sea;  
him exalting, self forgetting —  
this is victory.

5

May I run the race before me,  
strong and brave to face the foe,  
looking only unto Jesus  
as I onward go.

Katie Barclay Wilkinson  
(1859–1928)

**Prayers of concern** – adapt or add to these prayers to meet your own concerns  
(from *Iona Abbey Worship Book 2017 edition*, copyright © *The Iona Community 2016*)

Maker and Lover of all,  
in the mystery of your kindness  
you have bound us to each other,  
and called us to serve the earth and its people.

So, hear us, as we pray for the churches to which we belong  
that they may ever be centres of faith, hospitality and imagination,  
modelling the future rather than lamenting the past.

(pause)

God, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Grateful for the life in our bodies,  
we pray for those whose lives are diminished  
by ill health, depression, grief or rejection,



asking for the healing, the affirming, the listening  
which will encourage and restore them.

*(pause)*

God, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Conscious of the peace we experience in worship,  
we pray for those who have no peace  
because of war, or the fear of war,  
or the threat of violence,  
or the experience of racism,  
or the grip of hunger,  
or the loss of hope.  
May the voice of the victim be heard  
and the work of the peacemakers be blessed.

*(pause)*

God, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Surrounded by the loveliness of nature,  
we pray for the earth,  
especially where it is damaged by human carelessness  
and threatened by human greed;  
and ask that we may learn to care for the earth as you do.

*(pause)*

God, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

And because we are here to meet with Jesus,  
we join our words to those he taught us, saying,

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.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.

Amen.

**StF 407 - Hear the call of the kingdom**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDfuGb89x\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDfuGb89x_8)

or H&P 698 - Let him to whom we now belong

1

Hear the call of the kingdom,  
lift your eyes to the King;  
let his song rise within you  
as a fragrant offering  
of how God, rich in mercy,  
came in Christ to redeem  
all who trust in his unfailing grace.

2

Hear the call of the kingdom  
to be children of light  
with the mercy of heaven,  
the humility of Christ;  
walking justly before him,  
loving all that is right,  
that the life of Christ may shine through us.

*King of heaven, we will answer the call.  
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,  
filled with passion, filled with power to  
proclaim  
salvation in Jesus' name.*

3

Hear the call of the kingdom  
to reach out to the lost  
with the Father's compassion  
in the wonder of the cross,  
bringing peace and forgiveness,  
and a hope yet to come:  
let the nations put their trust in him.  
King of heaven, we will answer the call ...

Keith Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980), Stuart  
Townend (b.1963)

**Blessing**

Now go in peace,  
do what God wills,  
follow where Christ calls,  
pray for the gifts of the Spirit;  
and the love of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
remain with you always.