

May 7, 23 – Online Vocations and King Charles Coronation

Pre-service music:

A charge to keep I have

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1M-64OwBK1E&t=61s>

Will you come and follow me?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-Bq1YtpQL8>

I, the Lord of sea and sky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UA2fMeXEKLA>

Jesus calls us here to meet him

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuIQUvsFD00>

== ORDER OF SERVICE ==

Call to worship

Be Thou My Vision – StF 545

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CMclLT_Hjg??

Prayer for Charles and ourselves to be filled with God’s Spirit -- Ephesians 3.14-21

Sermon – Breathing in the Spirit, responding to God’s Call

Longing for light, we wait in darkness -- StF 706

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kt3Qc04ulOM>

Intro to prayers/hymn

Let us Build a House – StF 409

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhPnjA7wsIY>

Intercessions/Lord’s Prayer

To God be the glory -- StF 94

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vbGFupxwu0>

Closing Prayer

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God Save the King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0a5KcGHwnzA>

Call to worship/Coronation prayer

Dear friends,
we have come together in the name of Christ
to offer our praise and thanksgiving,
to seek forgiveness of our sins,
to hear and receive God's holy word,
and to pray for the needs of the world.

We also gather this day to pray for our King,
that, both now and always,
God may grant him wisdom and grace
for his ministry among us.

By the power of the Holy Spirit,
may we, with Charles our King,
give ourselves to the service of God and others,
that our communities may flourish
and be places of trust and friendship.

Ephesians 3.14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,
from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.
I pray that, according to the riches of his glory,
he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being
with power through his Spirit,
and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,
as you are being rooted and grounded in love.
I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints,
what is the breadth and length and height and depth,
and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,
so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us
is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

Breathing in God's Spirit; responding to God's Call

Today is Vocation Sunday in the Methodist Church –

The Sunday when we think about how God calls each of us --

Calls us to particular tasks at particular times for particular reasons –

We hear in scripture about God calling Moses and Aaron and Joshua

to lead the Hebrew people out of slavery and into the Promised Land;

God calling Isaiah and Jeremiah and Jonah and Elijah to be prophets

To warn and encourage people to change their ways;

God calling Deborah and Samson and Eli to be judges for their people's disputes;

God calling Mary to bear the Messiah

Jesus calling John and James and Matthew and Thomas to be his disciples

And the blind and the lame and the outcasts to follow him.

We know from the scriptures that God continues calls us to different tasks:

Some to be teachers or writers,

some to be mothers or fathers or godparents

Some to be doctors or teachers or ambulance drivers,

Some to be church treasurers, some to be medical researchers,

Some to be flower arrangers, some to be computer experts,

Some to be preachers or church leaders,

others to take up the collection and wash up after the Coffee Morning,

Some to be graphic designers, or newspaper editors,

Some to drive buses or rubbish trucks or milk floats...

And on this Coronation weekend, we remember that occasionally God calls someone to be king...

It's easy enough to get swept up in the pomp and circumstance of the occasion

And forget that 'King' isn't the only important job around!

God has work for all of us to do.

+As the Covenant Service reminds, some of the tasks to which God calls us are "easy,

And others are difficult, Some bring honour, others bring reproach..."

And though not many of us receive 'chrism oil' when we take on a new responsibility,

Or have a national holiday declared

Or ride to our new position in a chariot

Or have music composed in our honour

Or concepts celebrating our appointment...

God still has work to be done, and God still calls God's people to be building up God's kingdom

Of justice and joy and peace.

The Covenant service also reminds us that God gives us the power to do

Whatever God calls us to do...

And that whatever power we're given to fulfil God's calling

also brings responsibility to use that power for the good of others.

So it's not our place to covet the power or prestige of others

But to recognise and use the power we have for the common good

And to keep encouraging others to use whatever powers they have for the common good.

The passage from Ephesians that I used as a prayer a few moments ago

Speaks to this recognition of power

And it frames it in terms of the power of God's Spirit, God's love within us,

Spurring us on – empowering us, in-spiring us...

That word 'in-spire' is essential here –

The '-spire' part is about Spirit, about breath, about the power of the Spirit.
We often use a similar word, 'enthuse', which is also about God's spirit –
The '-thuse' or 'theos' of God coming within us.
Both these words point to our power ultimately coming from God –
Who is ever-so-eager to fill us with power when we ask.

I have a friend who suffers from mental illness.
She's often afraid to get out of bed in the morning.
She gets panic attacks when she tries to take a walk around the neighbourhood.
She's always tired, but she can't sleep at night – or in the day.
I keep telling her to take deep breaths.
'Keep breathing,' I hear myself saying.

And sometimes when I hear myself saying that, I think:
is this just what any secular counsellor would say?
Where is God in this?

And then I remember again that 'breath' and 'Spirit' are all the same word in Hebrew
And in Greek –
So a physical, practical way of being 'inspired' or 'enthused'
Can be as simple as taking a deep breath –
Especially if that act of taking a breath reminds us
Of the power God offers us – to come and cleanse and empower.

A few weeks ago we had another scripture about God's Spirit coming to empower...
The 'Dry Bones' scripture of Ezekiel -- like the Ephesians scripture --
Reminds us that if we're just going through the motions of doing,
But have no 'breath', no 'Spirit' within us,
Then we have no life in us.
Indeed, when we check to see if a person is alive
We check first to see if they're still breathing.
The breath, the Spirit within us, is what keeps us alive and functioning as spiritual beings.

Liturgically, we're in the part of the Church Year between Easter and Pentecost –
Coming up to what's known as Ascension Day,
When Jesus's body ascended into heaven, but his Spirit stayed with us ...
To enable us to do the things that he had been doing...
John 14:12 says:
"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing,
and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."

In this verse, Jesus says he is 'going to the Father',
but he promises that his Spirit will be with us and within us...
God's Spirit within each of us to do the things God needs us to do
To build up God's Kingdom –
To take care of the vulnerable, to remind all that they are loved,
That God has work for all of us to do.
Over this weekend, many of us have witnessed Charles' coronation
And the prayers for God's Spirit to be within him as he leads our nation.
I imagine that, though in many ways he's prepared for this all his life,
It must still feel rather overwhelming at the moment.
I wonder if Charles – or a close advisor – was reminding him to 'keep breathing'...

Keep remembering that he's not on his own in this.
God does not leave any of us alone in this.
God continually offers to give us God's Spirit
That will give life and breath to all we do,
Especially when we do it in God's name.

That's important to remember when we consider another scripture passage chosen for today:
"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,
in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts
of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (1 Peter 2)

As I mentioned earlier, we're not all called to be King –
But God invites all of us to be part of God's 'royal priesthood'
called to be active in God's work, filled with God's Spirit
Inspired to continue the work that Jesus started while he was bodily present with us
Now possible in an even greater way
Because God's Spirit is not confined to one person
But can and will fill us all to do the work Jesus did...

We've looked at the words 'inspire' and 'enthuse',
And now there's still another word to explore:
*'Vocation' comes from the Latin word 'vocare', to call,
and means the work a person is called to by God.*

We often think of 'vocation' within the church as going for ordination –
But in truth, God needs many different kinds of work done –
Just as God doesn't call everyone to be a king,
We also couldn't function very well if everyone were a minister!

This is the time of year when each of our circuit lay employees has an Annual Review –
And one of the areas we explore is their 'vocation' –
Their calling to be working for God's kingdom as a Lay Worker –
Which means everything from doing the circuit bookkeeping
To setting up spreadsheets for the Preaching Plan
To negotiating with building contractors
Can be part of building up God's Kingdom!

When we think about God's calling on this Coronation weekend,
I reflect that Charles has known for many decades now
What his eventual 'calling' would be –
And he's had plenty of time to prepare for that!
But in the waiting time, he also had other 'callings' to address –
Using whatever resources, whatever gifts he had...

God has called me several times in my life to do different things –
I've shared with you before that God called me to do various studies
To marry my husband and then to travel with him to work in India.
God called me to be a mother to a variety of children –
Some coming from my womb and some from my heart –
To some I was a teacher, to others their pastor or minister or youth leader,
To some I am their grandmother...
God called me to be a music teacher for many years
And then God called me to be a minister.
And now I find my vocation, my calling, changed again as I am a superintendent.
I often hear other superintendents – even other ministers—

Who find themselves burdened with endless administrative responsibilities
And tasks they're rather not do:
"God didn't call me to this."
That might be true, but more honestly, God sometimes calls us
To things we'd rather not do.
And rather than putting restrictions around what we consider to be God's calling,
Perhaps it's truer to recognise that Jesus calls us to follow him –
And that following might just take us to things we don't want to do –
Perhaps even be crucified.

But we've just celebrated Easter recently,
And we know that even crucifixion is not the end.
God's Spirit keeps popping back up – like the proverbial Jack-in-the-box
Who can never stay confined long under the lid –
Whenever the crank on the side of the box is turned
And the music begins,
God's Spirit is alive again!

A more accurate test of our vocation is to recognise
That God most often calls us to the place where our gifts and talents and experience
Match up with 'the world's greatest need.'
Recognising that 'world's greatest need' is going to be different for each of us –
Because we all view the world in different ways,
So we each see a different part of the world's need.
Perhaps where we can help each other is recognising in each other
The gifts that each has received that the world needs.
And how best those gifts can be used...

Through the years, I've had the privilege of walking alongside several people
Who have felt called to ordained or lay ministry within the Church.
I remember my own call to ministry –
For me, it came during a worship service at an Annual Conference in Florida,
When a Korean Bishop said something (I don't remember exactly what it was!)
That spoke directly to me.
Though I'd heard good and great sermons for years,
Suddenly I heard God calling ME to be a minister.
That call was surprising enough that I needed a while to process what I was hearing:
Was God actually calling me? To what kind of ministry?

When I shared my sense of call with some other ministers (all males at that time!)
They mostly said: "When I felt the call, I dropped everything and went for training!"
I remember thinking at the time: yes, but you had a wife,
And I have a lovely husband, but I also have four children
And a full-time job which I love,
and I live on the top of a mountain in S India
Where there is no formal training for ministry available.
In fact, it took me 11 years from that call to be fully ordained,
It wasn't something that happened overnight
Like having a fairy godmother wave a wand over me.
I learned that sometimes God's call is merely a prod to follow a different path
Rather than jump right into a destination.
Indeed, it is often the journey that prepares us for our call.

(And as we're thinking about King Charles today,
We can certainly point out that he's been on a long journey!)

I've also 'travelled with' others who have felt they've been called,
But when they got to the Candidates' Committee,
They found their call was challenged –
Sometimes even rejected.

And they were quite amazed, even devastated!

It's easy in such a case to think that those challenging a call are opposed to God's calling
But I've learned that the group's responsibility was to 'test' that call –
To determine if it indeed was how it was being heard.

And what God was actually calling that person to do and be.

Even in my own case, I understood my original call to be a minister
Was to be stationed in Florida, where I had grown up.

But God had other ideas.

And every time I went to the Candidates' Committee in Florida
I felt, this is not where I'm supposed to be,

But I don't know where I'm supposed to be,

So I'll keep coming here till I hear otherwise.

And then, eventually, God called me to come to England...

And that's where God has been using me for the past 22 years.

I wonder what God is calling you to do and be?

I wonder what use God has of your particular gifts and talents and experiences?

I know for a fact that God usually doesn't just call once

And then leave everything as it is.

God continually calls. And keeps calling.

God continually promises to inspire.

God keeps offering to breathe God's Spirit into us.

For the good of each of us

For the good of all of us.

So keep breathing.

Keep inhaling God's Spirit.

Keep listening for what God's world needs

And what skills and gifts God has equipped you with

That will help to meet that particular need.

Keep listening and watching and noticing and breathing in God's Spirit.

God isn't finished with any of us yet. Amen.

Intercessions based on StF 409

Let us build a house where love can dwell, and all can safely live.

We pray for peace in our world and communities [*pray for current world affairs*]

Make this a world where the love of Christ shall end divisions:

Let us build a house where prophets speak.

We pray for those in leadership roles, in government, local authorities, churches, schools and businesses.

May their words be strong and true, and may all they serve encounter your grace

Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine and wheat;

We pray for those who are hungry, hungry for food,
hungry for company, hungry for answers, hungry for justice.

May we share with them the feast that frees us:

*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.*

We pray for our community the place around this space,
the people we know and love and those we find difficult to love.

We pray for those who unwell, who are grieving
and those known to us in the quietness of our hearts.

*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:*

All are welcome, All are called by you

Lord's Prayer

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, in company with our King,
we rededicate ourselves to your service.

Take our minds and think through them,
take our lips and speak through them,
take our hearts and set them on fire with love for you and your kingdom;
that here we may have your peace,
and in the world to come may see you face to face;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, forever more. Amen.