

The Church's prayer for Sunday 7th November

Heavenly Lord,
you long for the world's salvation:
stir us from apathy,
restrain us from excess
and revive in us new hope
that all creation will one day be healed
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible Readings and Reflection for Sunday 7th November

A reading from Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

³ Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴ Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." ⁵ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

A Gospel reading from Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

A reflection from The Ven Alex Hughes, Archdeacon of Cambridge

As you may know, in the Church of England, like many other churches, we follow a set pattern of readings that runs over a three-year period; and in each of the three years most of the Sunday Gospel readings come from either Matthew or Mark or Luke. At the moment we are in year B, which is the year for Mark's Gospel. In a couple of weeks' time, on Advent Sunday, we'll change to year C, and all our Sunday Gospels will be from Luke. Passages from John's Gospel get sprinkled across all three years.

Anyway, the reason I tell you this is partly because it might be interesting for you to know how the Sunday readings come about, but mainly because, if you have been following the

story from Mark since last Advent, you might be wondering why, at nearly the end of the year, we've suddenly jumped back to Chapter 1, and very earliest days of Jesus' ministry. To be honest, I don't really know why we go back to the beginning again just before the end; but let me try to make some sense of it.

In today's reading we find Jesus wandering along the shore of lake Galilee. He doesn't have any followers yet, and no reputation. He's just starting out. At this stage, neither he, nor anyone else knows exactly what will happen over the coming few years. Unlike us, who have already read to the end of the story, they are all still at the beginning. So it may be that the people who put together our pattern of readings don't want us to forget how it all started.

The wisdom of tradition says that we mustn't be tempted to think that we've got to the end of the story, and have no need to start all over again. I think it is quite important to say this loud and clear. One of the most helpful talks on prayer I have ever been to was many years ago, when I heard Stephen Cottrell, now Archbishop of York, say that he had never got any further than being an "experienced beginner". It's encouraging to hear this from someone high up in the church, I think; and it resonates with my general experience that the Christian life involves a series of new starts, and the best we can ever say is that we are "experienced beginners".

It may be a very long time ago that we first heard the call to follow Jesus; but how often do we need to hear it again; to be re-called, when he have gone off track? Because let's be honest, it's hard to focus only on *one* voice, the voice of Jesus, amongst all the other voices that clamour for our attention. So many people want to make a claim on our time, our energy, our money and so on; there are so many demands to meet; and quite often it seems as if these voices are nearer and more insistent than the call of God. People will notice very quickly if we stop attending to our families, our colleagues, our friends, our emails; but they won't know if we forget to say our prayers each day, and listen for the word of God. At least, that's how it can seem; and before you know it, another year has gone by, and the call of God seems like a distant memory.

So thank God for the tradition, which intrudes upon the year's end with a reminder of how it all started out ... with the promise that, no matter how far we've strayed, the journey is there to begin again. For Christ is always to be found, walking along the shoreline of our busy, hectic lives, and calling us to be with him. His presence is constant: it is we who slip away and find ourselves adrift yet again, and sometimes in deep water. In this we are no different from the first disciples, who left their nets immediately and followed Jesus, but who also abandoned him in his hour of need. There was hope for them, and there is hope for us too.

Let us be experienced beginners, joyful in the knowledge that Christ's call to us remains constant, no matter how far we have wandered away from our first intentions or how long we have tuned our ears and turned our lives to other things.



Let us pray

Lord Jesus,

guide us by your Spirit to discover your call upon our lives.

Grant us humility to listen to your voice

courage to act when you call

faithfulness to follow where you lead

and a selfless abandonment to do your will. Amen.