

Welcome to this act of worship. Take comfort that although you may be on your own, you are part of God's church, worshipping God together with others at this time.

Call to Worship: Psalm 85: 8-9

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

Prayer Lord God of all, now, I set aside this time and space to be in your presence. Help me to open my heart, mind and will to you, in order that I may receive everything that you have prepared for me. Amen

Hymn StF 25, verses 1&4

God is here as we his people meet to offer praise
and prayer,

May we find in fuller measure what it is in Christ
we share.

Here, as in the world around us, all our varied
skills and arts

wait the coming of the Spirit into open minds and
hearts.

Lord of all, of Church and Kingdom, in an age of
change and doubt,

Keep us faithful to the gospel, help us work your
purpose out.

Here in this day's dedication, all we have to give,
receive:

We, who cannot live without you, we adore you!
We believe!

Prayers

Praise be to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He chose us in love to be holy and blameless.

He called us in love to hear the good news of salvation.

He blessed us in love and included us in his most marvellous plan.

Praise be to God. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Reading: Amos 7: 7-9 Being chosen

In this story from the Hebrew Bible about God's plumb line, Amos, an ordinary shepherd from Judah in the south, was chosen by God to go to Israel in the North, to give them a very uncomfortable message from God....

'I had another vision from the Lord. In it I saw him standing beside a wall that had been built with the use of a plumb line, and there was a plumb line in his hand. ⁸He asked me, "Amos, what do you see?"

"A plumb line," I answered.

Then he said, "I am using it to show that my people are like a wall that is out of line. I will not change my mind again about punishing them. ⁹The places where Isaac's descendants worship will be destroyed. The holy places of Israel will be left in ruins. I will bring the dynasty of King Jeroboam to an end." '

Amos has pretty damning message for the King Jeroboam, his family & people. Unsurprisingly, his message is not well received and Amos is told to go back where he came from!

Amos holds his ground, firm & sure, in the knowledge that he has been chosen by God for this very purpose and he tells the priest Amaziah that God will not be ignored.

Prayer of confession Holy God, you called Amos as part of your plan for your people. You chose him, an ordinary man, to speak to your people. You used images to help him understand what to say. If your plumb line was held up against our lives, we know that there would be crooked parts that do not measure up to your plan for us.

Lord, we are sorry. We turn to you once more in repentance:

Forgive us, Lord, for the times we don't appreciate how truly amazing it is to be chosen by you;

for the times we question you and don't live out your plan;

for the times we knowingly and deliberately do not follow your way of living, shown to us in the life of Jesus, thinking that we can ignore your plan, choosing only the parts we like;

Forgive us, Lord, cover us with your grace & mercy and get us back on track. Be the power in our lives which enables us to change, so that we can stand true, next to your plumb line of love, peace & justice.

Amen.

Readings: Ephesians 1: 3-10 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Mark 6: 14-29 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Reflection: Being chosen

Can you remember a time when you were chosen for something, to be in a team, to do a job? Being chosen can make us feel special, valued, wanted.

Now do you remember a time when you were overlooked, not chosen or last to be chosen for a team? Such experiences can lead to feelings of disappointment, not being valued, being rejected.

Paul writes to his readers, telling them that they are all chosen by God. Even before the world was created, Paul declares that in Christ, God's people were chosen....it includes everyone!! Not everyone recognises that God's choice includes them.

We're chosen for a purpose: to receive God's blessings, which Paul names:

- adoption as God's children
- To receive God's grace, lavishly poured out in Jesus.
- To receive forgiveness for sin
- To receive our redemption through Jesus' death & resurrection
- To be gathered in Jesus at the end of time
- To know the will of God in Christ
- To receive an inheritance as God's children, to live to praise God always, a blessing sealed by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

With those blessings come also responsibilities, for God chooses people not just for our own sakes, although our salvation through God's grace is vital, but we are chosen also for what God wants to accomplish through each of us, towards fulfilment of God's bigger plan for the whole cosmos....drawing all things together in and through Jesus, so obedience to God's call on our lives is crucial.

Amos heard God's call to go to Israel in the north, from his home in Judah in the south. He was not a prophet, just an ordinary shepherd who also looked after fig trees, but God gave him a prophetic message for Amaziah the priest, King Jeroboam of Israel and his people, to turn back to God or face the consequences, which were not going to be pretty!

The whole purpose of John the Baptist's life was to prepare the way for Jesus..., to call God's people to repentance, to turn back to God and live as God had called them to live, as his chosen people. John was faithful to his calling even when it meant speaking out against Herod for taking his brother's wife as his own....an act which eventually cost him his life.

Paul's mission was to the Gentiles and he too was obedient to God's calling in the face of all kinds of opposition & hardship.

Paul, John & Amos were all obedient to God's plan for them as it was revealed to them but none of them experienced an easy life. All who recognise God's choosing and the call on their life can look forward to the blessings God pours out in and through Jesus Christ, BUT being chosen by God and being given a task to do is no guarantee of a trouble-free existence.

In all things we are called to trust that God is working out God's good purposes for the whole of creation, and that those good purposes have Jesus at their heart; his death and resurrection are what draws creation together, uniting all things in Christ.

Recognising that in Christ, we're chosen by God, doesn't mean that all people chosen by God have to be alike.....clearly they are not. Uniformity is not God's goal....it is unity, people drawn together into one body, with Christ as the head.

Jesus' followers in Ephesus had no cultural template to follow...they had to work out how they lived out their new Christian identity, coming as they did from many different social groups & backgrounds: Greek, Roman, free, slave, rich, poor. It was faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour which drew them together, across the social boundaries of their time to form a new community. It must have been a challenging time for them, an unsettling time as the social norms of the day were dismantled and people worshipped and prayed together.

Paul himself had known the unsettling experience of encounter with Jesus....his life was turned upside down. People of 'The Way', as Jesus' followers were known, changed in Paul's eyes from enemy to friend,

from 'other' and different, to brother or sister in Christ. Paul had a completely new identity, a different perspective. Our real identity lies not in being a member of the church....but having a living relationship with Jesus Christ and letting his power transform our lives.

May we know for ourselves and share with others the love of Jesus and the assurance for them that they too are chosen by God, that the God who loves them, has a plan for their lives and wants to give them the same blessing as we enjoy....we must be prepared to be changed by such sharing too. Amen

Hymn StF 471

Lord I come to You	<i>Bring me near</i>	Lord renew my mind
Let my heart be changed, renewed	<i>Draw me to Your side</i>	As Your will unfolds in my life
Flowing from the grace	<i>And as I wait</i>	In living every day
That I've found in You	<i>I'll rise up like the eagle</i>	By the power of Your love.
Lord I've come to know	<i>And I will soar with You</i>	
The weaknesses I see in me	<i>Your Spirit leads me on</i>	
Will be stripped away	<i>In the power of Your love</i>	
By the power of Your love	Lord unveil my eyes	
<i>Hold me close</i>	Let me see You face to face	
<i>Let Your love surround me</i>	The knowledge of Your love	
	As You live in me	

Prayers of Intercession Rejoice in the Lord always. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

God of joy, we bring our prayers to you as acts of love for you and for our neighbours.

In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayer.

You call us to take courage and hope in you. We pray for ourselves and those dear to us.

Your word is faithful, Lord; hear our prayer

You show goodness to those who trust you in sight of all. We pray for our community and for our neighbours. **Your word is faithful, Lord; hear our prayer**

You strengthen your people with wisdom. We pray for the church in all places, that we may be faithful in solidarity across generations and geography.

Your word is faithful, Lord; hear our prayer

Yours is the Spirit of reconciling love and healing power. We pray for the world, for our enemies and for all in conflicts across this world.

Your word is faithful, Lord; hear our prayer

We offer you other concerns we carry in our hearts.....

Your word is faithful, Lord; hear our prayer

We offer all our prayers in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen

Blessing

Mighty God, we thank you for all we have heard about your great love for us: how we have been included in your plan; how you chose us before creation.

We choose now to serve you in everything we do.

Bless us and remain with us always, in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.