

LAIRG CHURCH OF SCOTLAND & ROGART (ST CALLANS) CHURCH OF SCOTLAND  
SCO20871 and SCO10035

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> January

**Call to worship**

You have called us here, O God,  
And we have come, to worship, to pray, to praise and to reflect.  
You have called us here, O God,  
And you will call us on, into the actions and activities of this week.  
Give us your grace, your wisdom, and your strength, to know the tasks that are ours to do,  
today and in the coming days. Amen.

**Hymn : O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder**

O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder  
consider all the works thy hand hath made,  
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,  
thy power throughout the universe displayed;

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,  
how great thou art, how great thou art!  
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,  
how great thou art, how great thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I  
wander  
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;  
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur  
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:  
Then sings my soul...

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,  
sent him to die – I scarce can take it in  
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,  
he bled and died to take away my sin:  
Then sings my soul...

When Christ shall come with shouts of  
Acclamation  
and take me home – what joy shall fill my heart  
Then shall I bow in humble adoration  
and there proclaim,  
‘my God, how great thou art!’  
Then sings my soul...

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**Opening Prayers**

As we prepare for worship, let us be still, and allow you to be here with us.  
Let us be quiet, and embrace this present moment that we will only have this once.  
Let go of the past and for these moments forget about the future.  
Just be here in the present and allow God to come and be with you in this very moment.  
Just for a minute let us sit quietly, in the stillness, in the silence, in the moments of self-  
doubt and self-pity.  
Let us know that you are close to us – by some mystery.  
Come close, forgiving and accepting God, today – and accept us by your grace.  
In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

**We say together the Lord’s Prayer**

**Readings: 1 Samuel 3:1-10 - Samuel’s Calling and Prophetic Activity**

**3** Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

**2** At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; **3** the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. **4** Then the Lord called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” **5** and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. **6** The Lord called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” **7** Now Samuel

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did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup> The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup> Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. <sup>10</sup> Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

**John 1:43-51 - Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael**

<sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." <sup>44</sup> Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." <sup>46</sup> Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." <sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" <sup>48</sup> Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." <sup>49</sup> Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" <sup>50</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." <sup>51</sup> And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

**Reflections on the readings**

'How do you know me?'

Nathaniel's question of Jesus is incredulous. He sounds a bit put-out, taken off-guard, disarmed. How do you know me? What do you know about me? What do you want with me?

Nathaniel's defense mechanisms kick-in, the same way mine do when I realise the person that just cold called me is trying to sell me something, or when I discover the Facebook advert I was about to click on was specifically designed to make me do just that... If you are anything like me you don't like it when people invade your personal space, or appear to know something about you that you don't think they should.

Most of us like to just 'mind our own business, thank you very much'.

But that's not really how our relationship with God works, is it? Our human relationships are not great comparisons for what it is like to come to know God more, to be immersed in the way of the divine. Often people have used marriage as a kind of example for a relationship with God – but we all know that neither of the parties in a marriage is perfect, so it's not a great reflection of our relationship with God. Sometimes we hear about the 'love of a Father.' This perhaps helps some of us, but certainly not all, especially those that have a difficult relationship with their earthly father. God the Father is so much more loving, so much more generous than our earthly parents could ever be, and he knows us more deeply.

God knows so much about us, all of us, 'every hair on our head' as is often quoted. But what do we know of the divine? That, I believe, is why God calls us. God is relationship, God is invitation. God desires us to be closer to the divine spirit that flows through all things.

I want to just touch on three ways that God calls us:

1) All callings include that sense of deepening our relationship with the divine. God's calling to us may be very specific, but it can also be an invitation just to be more in tune with the Spirit of God, to be more in line with the love that God has for the whole of creation. If you are familiar with the Chronicles of Narnia you may remember the call of Aslan, the great lion. God's call echoes that of Aslan in the final chapter of C. S. Lewis'

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Narnia series: 'come further up and come further in'. As the characters from the series enter heaven – they are invited further and further into the love of God. In the same way God calls to each of us, to come further in to a relationship with Him.

2) Many people experience a sense of calling to a specific task or vocation: this happens in a huge variety of different ways, and there is no blueprint for what a calling has to look like. Some people feel the clear sense of call to pursue ordained ministry, others to follow a particular career path or to lay down a job in order to follow a specific direction. We see something of this kind of call in our Old Testament reading today: God knows Samuel by name, calls him by name, and here – even as a young boy – Samuel begins his vocation as one of the leading prophets of the Old Testament.

Have you ever had an experience like this? Might God be calling you to something specific right now? To what extent are you listening for the prompts (like Samuel), or are you assuming that 'this would never happen to you' (like Eli appears to assume for the first few verses of today's reading). Alternatively, perhaps you are actively running away, like Jonah?

3) Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly of all, God calls us to be 'fully ourselves'. God invites us all to recognise the Christ within us, and to accept ourselves for who we are. God doesn't call us to focus on the self-destructive, self-critical voices of our human nature because they are not 'of God' instead he invites us to see ourselves as 'fearfully and wonderfully made' as the Psalmist puts it.

Today – perhaps you are just being called to be you.

To be authentically, totally, and divinely you. That doesn't mean you have to be like anyone else, it just means you have to listen out for the Christ within you.

This is what Nathaniel experiences in the story from the Gospels – Jesus knows him.

Jesus knows him even before they met. The Christ-energy within Nathaniel calls out to the Christ-energy that is Jesus, and there is a connection. Nathaniel is offended at first, but within seconds he is declaring "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

The God who made the mountains and the stars is calling you. Desiring you. Hoping for relationship with you. And he has a plan for you – a plan designed just for you.

So are you going to take the next step today towards seeing that plan fulfilled? Are you going to listen for the still small voice, calling your name?

It takes great awareness and an openness to the ways of the Spirit to sense God's promptings on our lives, but trust me – they are there. Can we still the mindless chatter of our everyday lives, and really listen?

There, listen...the divine is calling your name.... Amen.

**Prayers of intercession**

*[You may wish to light a candle and place a small mirror beside it, so that it reflects the candle flame.]*

Creator God, we bring ourselves into your holy presence and give you our full attention. We praise you for your greatness, your awesome power, your majesty and beauty that we see mirrored in the world around us. We treasure each opportunity to discover more of you in times of prayer.

Jesus, Son of God, you greet us as individuals who are intimately known by you. For you know our name, our personality, our potential for good and for evil. We long to reflect your goodness in our lives. We listen for your word of forgiveness, comfort and challenge.

Holy Spirit of God, you urge us to share our faith with others, through acts of kindness, words of truth and commitment to your call. Please show us where there is particular need in our local community, and help us to respond with love and generosity, sensitivity and wisdom, courage and perseverance.

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Loving God, the world is crying out for justice, renewal and peace. We call to mind those parts of the world that are in pain and offer them into your loving care. We long that you will show us how to reflect your message of truth, hope and love in all creation. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

**Hymn: O God, you search me and you know me**

Oh', God, you search me, and you know me

All my thoughts lie open to your gaze  
When I walk or lie down, you are before me

'Ever the maker and keeper of my days

You know my resting and my rising  
You discern my purpose from afar  
And with love everlasting, you besiege me  
In ev'ry moment of life or death, you are

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord  
You have known its meaning through and through  
You are with me beyond my understanding

God of my present, my past and future, too

Although your Spirit is upon me  
Still I search for shelter from your light  
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you  
Even the darkness is radiant in your sight

For you created me and shaped me  
Gave me life within my mother's womb  
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you  
Safe in your hands, all creation is made new

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**Blessing**

You have called us here, O God,  
And now you call us out, you call us on, you call us forwards.  
As we go from here, O God,  
We know your Spirit goes before us.  
Guide us, by that Spirit, to know your voice when you call, to follow in your way, and to bring your Kingdom closer, today. Amen.