

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

Sunday 17 November 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank the Guild of Health and St Raphael for their thoughts on the 26th Sunday after Pentecost.

17-23 November 2024 is Prisoners Week Scotland. The theme this year is “Hear my voice” and invites us to listen to those affected by or working in the Justice system – those in prison, their families, victims of crime, chaplains, staff and social justice organisations and individuals who help give voice to the unheard. Resources for worship can be found on their website: <https://www.prisonersweek.org.uk/home>

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the Sanctuary First website: <https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship>

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

Introduction.....	3
1 Samuel 1:4-20 and 1 Samuel 2:1-10	3
Daniel 12:1-3.....	4
Psalm 16	6
Hebrews 10:11-14, (15-18), 19-25	7
Mark 13:1-8	8
Sermon ideas	9
Prayers	12
Musical suggestions	18
Reflecting on our worship practice	20
Useful links	21

Introduction

Linking all these texts is a theme of keeping faith in God despite the odds, external events and uncertainty about the future. Indeed, these texts go further than mere surviving when times are tough – they promise, through poetry, song and story, that if we keep faith in God we will flourish. And this is not just about a spiritual mindset, it is about holistic health where the ‘heart is glad, soul rejoices, body rests secure’ (Psalm 16:9), because God is our God. Going beyond the mere individual, these are texts then place holistic health and flourishing in the faith within the radical context of the value of community, and encouraging one another in word and good deeds, especially in tough times when the rumours of war are circling.

[1 Samuel 1:4-20](#) and [1 Samuel 2:1-10](#)

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel set out the shift from a turbulent period of moral corruption under the Judges, to a single monarchy, with first King Saul then King David. In the given passage, we read about the extraordinary circumstances surrounding Hannah’s conception of Samuel, who was the final judge and who went on to lead the people into a kingdom, entreating them to worship and serve one God. But its interest is more than historical details. These are texts which ache with the suffering of childlessness, the power of trusting in God through periods of hopelessness and persecution, and the triumph of liberation offered to those who trust in God.

Samuel’s father was Elkanah, and he had taken Hannah (whose name means ‘favoured’ or ‘gracious’) as his second wife. His first wife Peninnah (whose name means ‘fertile’ or ‘prolific’) has many children, but Hannah was yet unable to conceive (1:6). There was tension and rivalry between the two wives, perhaps because Elkanah gave Hannah much attention and love, despite not giving him a child. Hannah’s not becoming pregnant causes her deep personal pain and, although Elkanah tries to console her, she would not be comforted.

They were at Shiloh for an annual feast. Shiloh was an important sanctuary as it was home to the ark of the covenant (3:3). The sanctuary was regulated by Eli and his two sons, but this was sadly a place of corruption (1 Sam 2). Indeed, it is interesting to contrast the Temple leadership at the time of the conception and childhood of Samuel, with the leadership that he would later offer to the people.

Hannah refuses to give up hope, entreating God in the Temple despite the derision of the priest, Eli. She begs for a son, and promised to dedicate her son as a Nazirite, if God were to

grant her the petition. She is blessed by Eli as she leaves the Temple, and when home her prayers are answered, and she conceives a son.

The final part of the passage (Sam 2:1-10) is a song of triumph which sits in direct contrast to her previous humiliation. She sings, exulting God, because the pregnancy shows that God exalts in her. There follows a series of contrasts in the text between poor and rich, love and exalted etc. God is understood to do both positive and negative things. God might 'kill', 'bring down to Sheol', and 'make poor', but God also 'brings to life', 'raises up' and 'lifts the needy from the ash heap'. This is a distinct theology where God is very much at work within the human world, and a part of all the ups and downs of life. But now Hannah rejoices, for she knows that God listens and can turn around people's situations.

The song reaches a powerful and telling conclusion: "for not by might does one prevail" – power in all things rests with God alone. Thus, finally God's absolute power is celebrated, and in 2:10 we get to the heart of the importance of this pregnancy. This pregnancy is celebrated not just because it is the answer to one woman's prayers, but that there is a king coming to which God will give strength, and "exalt in the power of his anointed". There is a king coming, and this is the work of God in the story of the redemption of God's people. As you read Hannah's song you may see resonances with other texts, namely 2 Sam 22, Psalm 113 and Mary's song when she was pregnant with the Christ child (the Magnificat). She too, like Hannah, found 'favour', and she proclaimed that her 'soul magnifies the Lord', and that her child will 'send the rich away empty'. Two women, two pregnancies, and two key births in the story of salvation and the revelation of what truly matters in God's kingdom.

There is a powerful theme within the long chain of the salvation history of God's people, a story created and linked together by the faithfulness of a few in a world of change, political upheaval and sin. We see here the evolution through Samuel to better times, though the reigns of Saul and David were far from perfect. The story shows us that however bleak things look, things can always change and improve, though we would be wise to never think human rule will be perfect. Indeed, in Hannah's song, just like Mary's song, we see the reversals of God's kingdom and that should give us hope for whatever personal, community or global situation brings us distress today.

[Daniel 12:1-3](#)

The book of Daniel is familiar to many for the stories of the faithful being thrown into the furnace, and of surviving the lion's den. All great fodder for children's stories, and colouring

pages! But approaching this book as an adult and especially living when we do, there might be a sense of unease arising from the apocalyptic pictures and calls to action.

The story of Daniel is set just after Babylon's first attack on Jerusalem. The Babylonians had taken the city, plundered the Temple, and were taking swathes of their population into exile. Amongst the prisoners were Daniel (later called Belteshazzar) and his three friends, whose Babylonian names were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The book of Daniel can be split into two parts. The first part (chapters 1, 3, 6) is their story and how they kept hope alive while living in the land of their conquerors. The other chapters (2, 4, 5, 7) include visions and stories that instruct the reader in not rebelling against God, encouraging patience while waiting for God's rule to return. In chapter 11, the author writes about a vision of the future where kings will rise and fall, including the final 'king of the north', who will invade Jerusalem and desecrate the Temple. But even he will finally fail and be defeated.

There are many debates about the identity of this king, with some arguing it is the Syrian King Antiochus who lived in the mid second century BCE. Others think it is a description of the Roman Empire. No single historical figure or empire fits the description entirely.

In the given reading, there is a vision of the end times to come, the final resolution of God's world. The fate of the righteous and the wicked is decided. St Michael the Archangel comes as a sign of divine intervention in the natural order, but there is a strong hint of predestination in this text with only some being saved, a theme that is attractive to the author.

In verses 2-3, the text suggests resurrection of the dead, the only time in the Hebrew bible where this is explicitly affirmed, though belief in it was more widespread than the texts might suggest. The dead here are revived so that justice might be done – both on those who sinned in life, and those who suffered even though they did no wrong.

The apocalyptic imagery is picked up by Jesus and is written about in Mark's gospel (14:62), and in Revelations, where John applied them to the Roman Emperor.

Whatever the situation that the author had in mind, the book of Daniel is written to give hope to all who read it.

Sadly, apocalyptic visions and language seem not out of place in our own days. Perhaps when you read this text your mind has gone to the climate emergency, or international political situations. If so, there are clear messages of hope. Not least, we know that all the

empires, emergencies and conflict of the author's days are past, ours will pass too – and God remains with us. We read with hope that the “wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”

The texts suggest a kind of ‘power behind the madness’ that will break through for those who maintain hope. Reading this we might find comfort in the passage of time that this text suggests, and the story of redemption that underlies all space and time: God's promise and power over, through and despite human actions. There is a pattern here that comforts. Whether it is apocalyptic beasts, humans glorifying in their own power, or anyone who doesn't acknowledge God, God will one way or another bring about God's kingdom. So, the message is simple – keep the faith.

[Psalm 16](#)

The original meaning and use of this psalm is obscure, with several competing theories. Most scholars would argue that it is a psalm of confidence, perhaps of an individual confessing trust in God and faithfulness. Others say that it is a royal psalm that is speaking about the confidence of the Israelite kings that God will protect them. However, the mention of the land (v5-6) might also indicate that the writer was a Levite expecting to inherit the land (Deut 10.9).

The psalm itself is quoted by Peter in Acts 2:25-28 who uses it to defend a faith in Jesus as the Messiah expected, although few today would defend the idea that this psalm was written by David or that the messianic prophecy was the original intent of the psalmist.

The psalm itself is an inspiring song of someone who may be facing clear and present danger. The faithfulness that they have shown to God is their passport to security and to true flourishing, perhaps even in death. They have not turned to false gods, and they feel God's presence very close at hand.

In verses 10-11, we might read this as belief in life after death, but it is disputed whether this was a common position in the times when these texts were written. It may be a deep expression of faithfulness, that this close and intimate relationship with God will never end, not even in death.

This faithfulness gives them power: “Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure” (v9). We might today characterise this state as holistic health – in heart, soul and body. This is the true shalom, this is true peace despite the dangers.

This is a psalm for us today, in our own times of chaos. We too, at some point over the last few years as we faced Covid, austerity and political upheaval, might have whispered in our hearts “keep me safe” (v3). Today this psalm brings inspiration and comfort as we lean into the faithfulness of the author. In a world with multiple distractions and false gods of material success, career, possessions, and status, it is a timely reminder that there is one God, and if we keep faith in the God who loves us more than we can possibly imagine, we too might be freed from the allure of false gods, and experience the holistic health and peace to say with the psalmist, “my heart is glad, my soul rejoices and my body rests secure”. How good it would be to find this true rest.

[Hebrews 10:11-14, \(15-18\), 19-25](#)

As a whole, Hebrews celebrates the coming of Jesus Christ and encourages faithfulness to the covenant. The text emphasises throughout that Christ is the cause of our salvation and exemplifies correct behaviour. And while we await what comes next, Jesus is also our comfort and aid while we endure the world.

In the texts for this Sunday, the authors point to the end times (v.14) and speak of “perfection”, which means the cleansing of consciousness that is brought about by Christ’s sacrifice. In verses 19-25, readers are exhorted to live, in the meantime, as members of this new covenant, where faith, hope and love are emphasised (see 1 Cor 13:13). The relationship to the Temple and to God has been changed by the sacrifice of Jesus: we can all go where previously only the high priest could enter the presence of God. In verse 20, the “way” is the Christian movement, with “sprinkled clean” perhaps alluding to baptism.

The passage ends with beautiful texts emphasising the importance of encouraging one another. There will always be disputes over the faith, over worship, over how to be the body of Christ in a complex world. But if we encourage one another, the companionship and sharing that this brings will strengthen us all. To be provoked to good deeds is an outcome of living in the new covenant and an imitation of Christ.

This text therefore not only speaks powerfully of the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice, but it moves into the ethics of how to form a community on ‘The Way’ today. The Church is not another social club, or place of historic interest. As R.S. Thomas says in his poem ‘The Kingdom’, there should be ‘quite different things going on.’ Conversations of encouragement, honest sharing of the struggles of this life, radical service of the poor, and meaningful relationships. People should peek through the doors of the church and see that faith in Christ makes a noticeable difference in the words and actions of those who follow Him today.

Mark 13:1-8

This passage is often called the Olivet discourse because it was delivered from the Mount of Olives. On the surface, Jesus appears to be talking about the destruction of the Temple (v1-4), something that happened in 70AD, about 25 years after the death of Jesus. The Temple was a triumph of engineering at that time and Jesus' prediction is shocking, given the importance and scale of the building.

In the context of Mark's gospel, the destruction of the Temple was brought about through the disobedience of Israel and their failure to recognise Jesus as being the Messiah. In this reading, the destruction was a divine punishment.

Other commentators have developed the meaning of the destruction of the Temple beyond punishment. It could also be interpreted as the overturning of the sacrificial system as the definer of God's relationship with humankind. This passage therefore is about the deeper revelation of Jesus and that His coming death and resurrection would set the relationship between God and God's creation, overturn the status quo, redefining power and wealth and ushering in a new system of reconciliation, justice and freedom.

Understandably the disciples wanted confirmation about when Jesus' prediction would happen. Like all of us, they were keen to have the facts. Jesus warned them in verses 5-6 against enthusiasm about the end times and advised them not to be led astray by false teachers. Jesus gives no clear timescales.

In verse 6, Jesus says, "Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray." It is not clear who He is talking about. "I am he", in the Greek is: "I am", the divine name. There is little consensus over who these people might be, whether they will be claiming to be Jesus or just claiming to be divine. Will they be claiming to be the messiah, or a representative of the Messiah. This warning appears to be important to Mark, as he repeats it in verses 21-23.

In verses 7-8, we have the "wars and rumours of war" phrase. It has been much used over the last 2,000 years, sadly. Scholars have wondered which events Mark is referring to – perhaps unrest in the Roman Empire and earthquakes around 68-69CE. Such apocalyptic predictions were common in texts of this genre of the time. But whatever Mark is referring to, these events were not the end, just an early stage of what is to come.

The destruction of the Temple was not the end. It was the beginning. It was not about dismantling God. It was about new beginnings in faith. A building may be destroyed, but the

place where God dwells cannot be destroyed because God lives in Jesus and His word, as well as in the hearts and minds of all believers.

Sermon ideas

In our introduction and commentary above, we identified a few themes that appear in the passages such as keeping faith in God despite the odds, external events and uncertainty about the future:

- Not merely surviving when times are tough but that if we keep faith in God, we will *flourish*
- Not just about a spiritual mindset, it is about holistic health where the “*heart is glad, soul rejoices, body rests secure*” (Psalm 16.9), because God is our God
- Not just the individual health, but the flourishing of the whole community, nations and the world, even amidst “war and rumours of war”

Additionally, you could focus on a few other themes that arise from the passages.

1 Samuel 1:4-20 1 Samuel 2:1-10

There are touching and sensitive themes to pick up in the Samuel passage around childlessness/child-freeness and the complexities of conception, birth and child-rearing in our own days. For many, unplanned childlessness leads to deep distress and with mental health impacts, and many might tune into Hannah’s distress. We also have the wider themes of women’s emotional landscape being ridiculed by society, and even inside the Church.

The theme of God’s faithfulness to answer prayer is one, as ever, to be handled with sensitivity. Prayers sometimes go seemingly unanswered, despite the dedication of those who pray. However, what is unchanging is God’s power, and it is not by our might that we can do anything.

As a charity with health and healing at our heart, we want to celebrate the many modern miracles of scientific research and medical practice. Many, many children have been born because of modern interventions such as fertility medicine, surgical interventions and surrogacy options. But again, sensitivity and love must be paramount for those whose hopes have been dashed again and again after numerous unsuccessful conceptions; those who feel let down by their own body, whose prayers have ended with deep disappointment, who have lost confidence in God’s love or God’s power and who now experience another closed door when a medical intervention has failed.

In those moments, strength can sometimes be found in solidarity with those who have travelled the same road. Local groups and online communities for families who experience childlessness (chosen or involuntary) and those who experience 'child-freeness' (by choice or not) offer a place of support, encouragement and care. They can give a different perspective on the circumstances or hold a space to tell your own story. They can help people move on with their life whilst still honouring the pain or sadness that a person may carry within for a lifetime.

Solidarity can also come from hearing or reading another person's story. If this is an area you would like to talk about during worship [we offer this moving episode from our Gohealth Podcast](#) to listen to and perhaps draw upon. This link will take you to a page on our website where you can listen to the podcast or read a transcript of the conversation (*Sacramental stories – childlessness*).

In it, GoHealth CEO The Revd Dr Gillian Straine interviews The Revd Lucyann Ashdown, a trained midwife, a Church of England priest, an academic and hospice chaplain. They talk about Lucyann's career bringing together faith and healthcare, her experience of childlessness and where she finds hope.

Psalm 16

If you are using the Psalm 16 text it could be an opportunity to invite people to consider how they encounter God's good counsel and refuge. The words overflow with a sense of someone who has unlocked true peace and happiness amidst all the world can throw at them. How then can the rest of us genuinely become a bit more like that?

Is it from knowing and obeying the law and following God's way? Is it from internalising the poetry of the Psalms, the deep teaching of Paul's letters, the wisdom and Spirit of the Hebrew laws and the stories of real people in these of these ancient texts?

How can we be nurtured and transformed so that we can join the psalmists in saying, "my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure"? What impact on our community might we make if we were a Church known for our rejoicing, for being glad and secure?

This could be a time to teach some simple discipleship tools and ways to engage with Scripture and other texts that inspire faith – Lectio Divina, breath prayers, contemplative readings and other similar approaches are all good places to start. The Hebrews passage talks of having the laws written in our hearts and minds – which may link these two texts

together, rooting our contemporary practice within the biblical narrative of the new covenant and what living in the Christian community might look like.

It could be a time to offer ideas that you know of that help people sustain regular devotional practice or to be mindful of the presence of God with us throughout the day.

You might invite people to reflect on the times they have felt gladness in their heart, when their soul rejoiced, and they felt secure in their body. What brought that about? Who was there? What happened? Where was God in all of that – or where did you see signs of the fruits or the gifts of God's Spirit?

Hebrews 10:11-14, (15-18), 19-25

How many church relationships have you known or been in that seem to take the first part of 10:24 and forget the second part as if it reads, "And let us consider how to provoke one another", leaving out "... to love and good deeds." How many times have we ourselves contributed to gossip or exacerbated conflicts to score points? How often have we seen relationships become a source of discouragement, in contrast to the encouragement called for in verse 25?

It is unsurprising however that this call for provoking "love and good deeds" in one another and being a source of encouragement doesn't come out of nowhere. It follows on from a few verses that in many ways set the preconditions of being set free from the things that decay our efforts to be a community of flourishing and fulness of life.

The sacrifice of Christ and His victory, the testimony of the Spirit, the law within our very hearts and the forgiveness of sin, confidence to draw close to Christ, being cleansed and the confession of our hope for the future. That is the context of our new relationships with one another. The foundation upon which our mutual provocations to love and good deeds is built.

How then do we reimagine who we are as a community of people serving and sacrificing together – encouraging one another, provoking one another to live in fullness and be overflowing with good deeds?

[A recent inspiring story from the Church of Scotland can be found here.](#) It tells of how a congregation in the Gorbals, Glasgow supported a Muslim woman from Sudan to become reunited with her family after ten years. It is inspiring, challenging and encouraging. Perhaps telling this story 'On the mountains' as well as others like it, might help us to, "provoke one another to love and good deeds."

Prayers

These prayers were written at the beginning of August with the anticipation of what would be happening in the world in November 2024.

Anxieties about the forthcoming US presidential elections and recognising that 17 November is right in the middle of the COP 29 (11-22 November) Climate Change conference in Baku, Azerbaijan.

We also identified that Wednesday 20 November is World Children's Day.

They are also a reflection of the discussion we held as a GoHealth team as we explored the Bible passages together and sought to pick up the themes that surfaced. These themes included the pain of new things coming to birth; the messy work of being born again; themes of childlessness and joy despite the circumstances.

We were quite taken with the theme of Hannah's childlessness and have included a longer prayer for the thanksgiving and intercession that includes multiple voices exploring the various circumstances of women in the Bible. We have used their lived experiences as a springboard into praying for and with the lived experiences.

Gathering prayer / Call to worship

"You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy" *Psalm 16:11*

We gather in anticipation
with the words of the Psalmist
on our lips and in our hearts

Show us the path of life

When our heart is glad
and when it is not

Show us the path of life

When our soul rejoices
or when it does not

Show us the path of life

When our body rests secure
or when it is restless with insecurity

Show us the path of life.

Gather us all into Your presence
fill us with Your joy.

Show us the path of life.

Amen

Confession

Merciful God

Forgive us for the moments that we missed
or the opportunities we squandered
that denied fullness of life
to all Your children.

Forgive us for anything we have done
that has in any way stifled or
blocked Your will at work in Your world.

Redeem our regrets
release us from remorse
refresh us anew

with Your unending mercy,

for we place our hope in Your promise: "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds
no more."

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Thanksgiving / Gratitude and Intercession

You could involve a number of voices in this interactive prayer of thanksgiving and intercession.

For our prayers of thanksgiving and intercession we draw on the story of Hannah, from our readings today. We follow her example of praying with honesty and openness in the Temple.

She poured out her desire for a child to God in prayer – so fervent was her prayer Eli the priest thought she was drunk. But her response to Eli was: "Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time" (1 Samuel 1:16)

What desires are in your heart that you wish to bring to God in prayer today?

Hannah was not the only woman in the Bible who struggled to have a child. Nor was she the only person who prayed with fervent desire and honest wrestling with God.

Today for our prayer of thanksgiving and intercession we use the stories of nine* women in the bible to help lead us in our prayers:

*You might choose to use fewer than 9 stories.

Voice 1: Eve

“The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all who live.” *Genesis 3:20*
In Hebrew, Eve means ‘living’, or ‘giver or sustainer of life.’

We give thanks
for the miracle of life,
for every person
uniquely and wonderfully made,
every single one of us!

We pray for all
within our fellowship
who are unwell
or nearing the end of their life.
We pray for their healing
in the fullest sense of the word.

Lord in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer

Voice 2: Sarah

“Now Sarah said, ‘God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.’” *Genesis 21:6*

Sarah had laughed when she overheard the messengers foretell news of her pregnancy. Sarah was a mature mum, to say the least, giving birth to Isaac around the age of 90! Her laughter-filled joy was after long years of disappointment.

“Is anything too wonderful to the Lord?” the messengers at the Oaks of Mamre had asked her. In fact, Sarah and Abraham named their son ‘laughter’, the meaning of the name Isaac.

Thank you, God of laughter
for the joyful story of Sarah giving birth to Isaac.

We pray that our known and secret disappointments
will one day be a source of joy in and through our lives.

We bring those disappointments to you now
in this time of shared silence

[Pause for silence]

Lord in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer

Voice 3: Rebekah

“Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived.” *Genesis 25:21*

Not only did she conceive, she gave birth to twins! Jacob and Esau.

Labouring God,
thank You for these stories of hope
where longings are met
and expectations exceeded.
May they be encouraging and uplifting
for those whose hopes have been crushed.

Lord in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer

Voice 4: Jochebed

“The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby she hid him for three months.” *Exodus 2:2*

It was a dangerous time to have a baby boy in Egypt when Moses was born. That is why Jochebed had to hide him away, to prevent him being killed by Pharaoh’s officers. He had commanded that all baby boys be killed. When Moses got too big to hide, his mother placed him in a basket in the reeds alongside the river. His sister Miriam kept watch.

The other part of Jochebed and Moses' story was the incredible work of the midwives Shiphrah and Puah. They refused to fulfil the Pharaoh's orders to kill every baby boy that they delivered. They remained true to their vocation to bring life into the world.

Life preserving God,
thank You for the courageous ones,
for those who move towards places of violence and suffering,
who choose to do the right thing over the wrong orders.
We pray for strength for all those choosing courage in conflict areas across the world today.
We pray for peace for all the mothers having to put their children in boats because it is safer there than on the land.

Lord in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Voice 5: Rachel

"Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel was in childbirth, and she had a difficult labour. When she was in her difficult labour, the midwife said to her, 'Do not be afraid; for now you will have another son.' As her soul was departing (for she died), she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath." *Genesis 35:16-18*

Ben-oni means 'Son of my sorrow.'

Approximately 800 women die every day from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth - equivalent to one woman every two minutes.

Man of sorrows
hear the grief of our hearts
for our unequal world.
Help us to do what we can to deliver
the justice and peace many so desperately need. Amen.

Voice 6: Hannah

"O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child..." *1 Samuel 1:11*

Hannah longed for a child and poured out her heart before God so fervently, Eli the priest thought she was drunk! God heard her prayer and in time she had a son, Samuel.

O Lord of life, look on the misery of all Your children.
Remember those suffering, starving and barely surviving.
Do not forget those the media has long lost interest in.
Hear our prayers for peace and provision. Amen

Voice 7: Michal

“And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.” *2 Samuel 6:23*
There are at least seven women in the Bible who struggled to have children, or who are described as barren. Michal is the only one who did not in the end have a child.

2 Samuel 6 does not make it clear why Michal is childless. Verse 23 comes directly after she and David, her husband, have strong words about his naked display of devotion to God, but it does not state that her childlessness is punishment. We are not even told whether Michal wants to have children. All we know is that she did not have a child. The rest is a mystery to us.

Thank you for Michal,
for her inclusion in the tapestry of scripture
and for the reminder that there is no one way to do life.
May her story help shift judgement and shame. Amen

Voice 8: Elizabeth

“This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.” *Luke 1:25*

What a remarkable woman Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, was. Zechariah couldn't even tell her that she was going to have a baby, having been struck mute at the prospect himself. Can you imagine him trying to sign-language that!

And as she comes to the awareness of her pregnancy in later life, her words express her acceptance and joy. She is full of gratitude.

Joyful God,
thank You for unexpected, pleasant surprises.
For the reawakening of long-forgotten dreams.
May we always be open to the possibility of Your generous gifts
and may we avoid passing judgment or shaming anyone in our community
because of what they have or haven't done. Amen

Voice 9: Mary

“And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” *Luke 2:7*

It adds to the wonder of the Incarnation that Jesus chose to come into the world in this risky and vulnerable way, as the child of a pregnant teenager.

The risk of death in childbirth in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus’ birth makes this an even more incredible idea to consider.

And yet, that Jesus, the Word made flesh, chose to come into the world by this risky way shows how in life, as in His death, He was willing to fully enter into solidarity with the pain of the world.

Thank You, Jesus
for entering into the pain of the world.
Help us to be Your hands and feet here now
bringing to birth Your will on earth as it is in heaven.
Amen.

Blessing / Closing prayer

May we hold fast to all we hope for
without wavering.
May we know God’s promise of faithfulness
in all things.
May we continually provoke one another
to love and good deeds
and may the boundary lines fall in pleasant places
for us all,
this day and evermore,
Amen.

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music version is now available; and the words-only book, digital resources including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from

<https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

- GWA 221 – “Lord you hear the cry of the widow weeping” – the words here mention childlessness amongst the many difficulties people face and would be a strong addition for any service
- CH4 118 – “Womb of life, source of being – intimacy with God, trust in God’s care. Priestly role. Some words evoke the imagery of motherhood, and this may be a useful link if you are highlighting any of the themes of childlessness in the Samuel passage.
- CH4 270 – “Put all your trust in God and 192 All my hope on God is founded – connects with the message from the Daniel passage and the faith shown by Hannah
- CH4 275 – “Come no, O Prince of Peace” – a song of peace which may tie well with any themes in Hebrews around the relationships we have with one another. CH4 527, CH4 528 and CH4 566 take the same theme.
- CH4 322 – “Good Christians, all rejoice” – suitable for Psalm 16, especially the verse ‘my heart is glad, soul rejoices, body rests secure’. CH4 9, CH4 106, CH4 322, CH4 449 and CH4 742 all lend themselves to a sense of gladness and a time of rejoicing.
- CH4 565 – “How can I keep from singing – a beautiful song of keeping faith in response to God’s love.

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different "Spiritual Styles"?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?

Did it function well as a whole?

How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?

- How balanced was the worship?
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/
community?
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

God Welcomes All can be ordered from [Hymns Ancient & Modern](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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