

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

Remembrance Sunday 10 November 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Jamie Milliken, Minister of United Irvine Church of Scotland, for his thoughts on Remembrance Sunday, 25th after Pentecost.

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.

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Introduction

I am a parish minister in Irvine. Before serving in this current context, I served as a Royal Naval Chaplain; four years as a Reservist with HMS Dalriada in Glasgow, followed by two years with 45 Royal Marine Commando in Arbroath.

Context

The passages chosen for today's Weekly Worship are from the lectionary-based material for the week that includes Remembrance Sunday; these have been chosen for two reasons. The first is that many have heard, reflected on, and preached, the traditional readings for Remembrance Sunday and seek another perspective. The second reason is an acknowledgment that some worship leaders and congregations may not wish the whole service to dwell on the "traditional" readings for Remembrance, and so providing this alternative offers an opportunity to explore further revelations from Scripture on this occasion.

Overarching themes of the texts

Despite these not being the readings specific to Remembrance Sunday, they do all concern themselves with the overarching theme of sacrifice. Psalm 146 begs us to consider who we are making our sacrifices for, and in whom and what are we investing our lives, our hopes in. Jesus in the passage from Hebrews, gives His all, once and for all. And widows giving their all take centre stage in both the First Reading and Gospel.

It is not named Widow Sunday in the lectionary cycle, but you might be forgiven for thinking so, given the texts for this week (widows feature in the First Reading, Psalm, and Gospel readings). However, Widow Sunday might be particularly apt as it also falls on Remembrance Sunday, remembering those who have died in war and conflict, with war being a brutally efficient maker of widows and widowers, robbing people of their all.

Approach to the material

I have four questions running through my head when I come to reading a Bible passage for the purpose of peaching. The first is, "What was the problem then?" Exploring what problem God was seeking to address in the Biblical situation. The next is, "What are the problems today?" Where today do we face similar problems? Following that I ask, "Where was the grace then?" This helps to explore the action of God in the biblical setting, and again following that, "Where is the grace today?" Where is God acting today, and how and where can we join in?

It's rare for these headings to be overtly pronounced, as more often they weave themselves throughout the sermon. I use this approach as I find it brings balance to the context and contemporary situation, giving God God's place, recognising that this is something that is not solely our endeavour, but rather God partners with us as God works in and through (and sometimes despite) us to bring in something provisionally like God's Kingdom.

1 Kings 17:8-16

Background

We find the prophet Elijah in a place not of his choosing, having an unexpected, but amazing conversation. We only get parts of it, it's like a jigsaw puzzle found on a wet day at a holiday let, frustratingly there are bits missing – left to our imagination, we work with what we've got.

First as part of the backstory though, this is a story of two gods – one the true God and one who isn't. Elijah the prophet of the true God finds himself in the territory where the false god Baal is worshipped.

Elijah awakens by a stream that's run dry. He is well fed; God has been supplying his need for food – feeding him from a most unexpected place. He has been receiving rations of bread and meat twice daily from the ravens. That's out of character for ravens. When you throw bread to the birds, how often do you see the ravens sharing? And if you go to the window, they fly away.

It's unexpected, ravens were unclean birds – Jewish tradition had big warning signs all around them. However, here God has chosen to throw the rule book out the window, challenge, and grow Elijah. The true God provides food, even though, and maybe especially importantly, from an unexpected place. On the other hand, Baal – the false god of storm and rain, had a stream to fill, but the stream has dried up, Baal is nowhere to be seen.

Elijah is en route to Zarephath, to a widow who God has spoken to: God says, "I have commanded a widow there to feed you."

An unexpected place and an unexpected source. Sidon is evil queen Jezebel territory. Not a place where a prophet of the one true God would readily choose to hang out. And were there not lots of rich people living in Sidon that Elijah could call on instead? So why, of all people, send him a widow? Widows were so often destitute, the poorest of the poor; and this one seems to be no different. It's like ordering someone to find shelter with a homeless person. Why would you do that?

The widow speaks to Elijah, saying that she has only enough flour and oil to make one last meal for her and her son before they die. And here is Elijah – first asking for water, and then having the audacity to ask for bread, and when she responds with her plight – Elijah doubles down and basically demands that bread, even though she has told him it will be her last.

Sermon ideas

This is a place of difference, of incomplete stories and unanswered questions, of scarcity, of uncomfortable conversations that in normal circumstances would not take place. But needs must.

This is the place where God again seems to have dispensed with the rule book, a place where God's purposes will be brought about by unexpected means. Elijah was not at home, but God was at home there, working outside the usual safety margins.

How often are we the Church unwilling to meet people where they are, partner beyond our own comfort zone, share in conversations where we don't hold all the answers, how often are we truly open to finding God providing for us in unexpected places?

There wouldn't be much of a story to tell here if Elijah had refused to eat from ravens and widows who worshipped false gods. But he did and we're still telling this story today.

We read in verse 16 that, "The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah." God provided and God blessed in the most unexpected of ways.

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was once asked about taking money from a variety of sources; he responded, "I shall take all the money I can get, and I shall wash it clean with the grateful tears of widows and orphans." He understood that God provides in unexpected places, he saw the greater picture of continuing God's work.

In these days of difficulty in the Church we need to think afresh. Where does our help come from? "Our help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121). That doesn't change – but the way God provides it does.

Sometimes, as with Elijah, that help from God comes in unexpected guises. Of course, as always, we need to be switched on. When people and organisations come alongside us and make offers – why are they offering this help? What is it that those who are supporting us want in return? What motivates them? But we also need to be open to God working in and

through unexpected people, and unexpected places, to bless us and to bless others through us too.

Hebrews 9:24-28

Background

I find Hebrews a challenging letter. Particularly this chapter, moving back and forth between what was, being the old sacrificial system, and what now is brought about by Christ's "once and for all" sacrifice. Throughout Hebrews I am struck by the repetition that continually revisits these themes. The words "once and for all" being an example of this, are also found at 7:27, 9:12, 10:2, and 10:10.

This revisiting and remembering is something that the High Priest did yearly on the Day of Atonement, when he went into the holy of holies and sacrificed a goat for the sins of the people. This yearly sacrifice reminded people of both their sinful nature and of the grace of God who purifies.

The yearly sacrifices made by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement were a precursor to Christ's "once for all" sacrifice. Jesus' death was both like, and unlike the Priest's sacrifice. It wasn't an earthly Temple but a heavenly Temple that Jesus entered. Jesus wasn't any High Priest; he was the Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16). It wasn't goat's blood, but Jesus' own blood that was shed. His sacrifice did not have to be repeated – it was, as we are repeatedly reminded "once and for all." And after the sacrifice the High Priest would then return to the people from the holy of holies and work with the people to continue in their sin management. When Jesus returns from heaven there will be no more sin management, but rather a final gift of salvation for those who are awaiting Him.

Sermon ideas

Repetition and remembering is good. It is good to be reminded of the forgiveness of sin and salvation through Jesus Christ, we do this during communion. Recalling Christ's body broken for us, His blood shed for us for the forgiveness of sin.

Repetition and remembering is good. It is good to be reminded of the cost of war. We remember with deepest gratitude those who lost their lives. We remember the ongoing mental and physical scars of war. We remember the devastating effect war has on loved ones, communities, countries, and environments. We remember the sin of war that steals young lives and diverts much needed resources away from building better futures.

Like the High Priest perpetually making sacrifices for sin, so we continue to make sacrifice for the sin of war, only it's not goats but our children who die. And while we may give thanks for their self-giving, and feel contrite, we do not experience cleansing, but grief and a realisation that humanity on our own seems incapable of ending war.

Our hope in this broken world is not in the "princes" (Psalm 146 – the world leaders, organisations, institutions, countries, and their systems) but in Christ alone, who has dealt with sin once and for all. We live in in-between times – between Christ's "once and for all" sacrifice and His return. We live in a time when war continues, and we, like the High Priests, continue this business of sin management, committing over and over to remember, pray, strive, and work towards peace and reconciliation. Remembering as we do, that war and sin do not have the final say, but that Christ does.

Mark 12:38-44

Background

Mark 12:38-44 covers two sections, in the first Jesus is having a go at the religious scribes who love to be seen, heard, and honoured. But in reality, they strip even the widows of their homes, they're in it for themselves – they don't care about others.

And the second section is about a poor widow who gives everything she has to the Temple money box.

The scribes who Jesus was talking about were the lawyers, they made up legal documents, they interpreted the Jewish law. Not all of them were the focus of Jesus' condemnation, but it's clear that some, maybe even many were.

Jesus has a go at them for milking their position, making a show of their own importance, and enjoying the praise of others. And yet, inside and deep down they are ruthless parasites sucking the wealth out of the poorest to keep themselves, and the system that enabled them in power and privilege.

Jesus condemns this.

This condemnation of the scribes' behaviour is the base on which Jesus builds His comments on the widow's offering. Jesus is sitting in the Temple and outside the treasury, the place where people give their offerings for the Temple.

He has watched many rich people casually toss into the coffers from their plenty. And then He sees a poor widow, who only has two copper coins to her name. That's all she has left in this world. She puts both in the Temple offering box.

She now has nothing. Jesus draws His disciples close and tells them the true significance of the widow's giving.

Sermon ideas

The warning Jesus gave to the scribes, He gives to people in positions of power and privilege today. Beware the powerful privileged for whom it's all about manipulating image and soundbite, so they look and sound good – regardless of where the actual truth lies. People who will say whatever needs to be said to gain power or stay in power; who like the sound of their own voice; who do not truly care for the needs of the poorest, the hungriest, the homeless, and the dispossessed of our world – yet, will use them as pawns to shore up their own power and privilege.

As Jesus watched the widow putting her last into the Temple treasury I wonder, what were His eyes filled with? Was it an admiration at her faith and trust in God? Or was it tears at the sheer injustice of it all?

There's the story of the pig and a hen who were in a farmyard when the local welfare committee set up a community breakfast. The pig and the hen talked about how they could help. The hen said, "I've got it! We'll donate bacon and eggs each day to feed the hungry." The pig thought about this for a moment and then said, "You see, there's a problem there, for you, it doesn't cost you much, but it costs me everything!"

In this passage the value of the gift that the widow has given isn't in the money that is given, but in what she has left behind. For the rich, just like the hen, they give from their abundant plenty. But for the widow, like the pig – she gives her all, she has nothing left to give. And while the widow of Zarephath gave her all and was blessed with perpetual flour and oil, no such promise is made for this widow.

Often this passage is preached as "Give 'til it hurts," but is that what Jesus is saying here? I don't think it is – take this out of the religious context and instead of the Temple treasury put a government's tax policy. If a government took the last pennies of the poorest, would we look on in admiration? Why would Jesus be any different?

On Remembrance Sunday we remember those for whom war cost everything, their lives. As we consider this ultimate giving of all through the lens of this passage, we may reflect on

those who are in positions of power and privilege, who inflame and perpetuate conflict, at greatest cost to others, but no great cost to themselves (and potentially to maintain their hold on power).

This story continues into chapter 13, where we read: “As he came out of the Temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!’ Then Jesus asked him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.’”

And this is the final irony of the scribes’ greed and the widow’s offering. This widow has been convinced by scribes to give her all to the Temple treasury. For what? A Temple that in less than forty years’ time would be reduced to rubble. She gave her last for a pile of worthless stones.

So, what can we learn from this?

First, looking at our church. When people give money – we receive it humbly and thankfully and we use it wisely. So that the money given is used for building up God’s kingdom and not our own small kingdoms.

It warns us that we must be extremely careful not to manipulate the faith and goodwill of people into giving what they cannot afford.

And this Bible passage insists that we are extremely careful, that we always put the needs of the poorest before pandering to any power and privilege of our own.

And we are encouraged to call out and challenge leaders, people in authority, systems, and policies that prey on the poorest.

Sermon ideas

Sermon ideas are developed in the exploration of each of the readings.

Prayers

Call to worship (*Psalm 146:1,2*)

My call to worship is almost always a portion from the Psalms, today's Psalm provides an ideal call to worship:

Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!
I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

My prayers during weekly worship are extemporaneous, so writing down prayer is a challenge for me. Please accept my offering here. Before worship I reflect on the Bible passage(s) and the 'big idea' of the worship and with a good chunk of reliance on the Holy Spirit, I weave these into the various prayers. I keep a watchful eye on the news, and where areas of prayer stray into divisive areas I'll give thought and prayer before worship into how to express this.

Prayer of Confession / Repentance

Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!

Lord God,
You alone are worthy of all our praise.
Before the world began, You were,
in every moment and every place, You are,
and when all of this is wrapped up, You forever will be.

You, Lord God, survey all of history,
before a word is in our mind or spoken, You know it,
before we lift a hand or we withhold it, You know it.
You know our beginnings and You know our ends;
the wonder and the glory of life,
the tragedy and treachery of it too.

And through all of this You are steady,
Your love is constant,
faithful without end,
we praise You again today.

O, that our lives would more clearly reflect this praise,
for we too often like to look good,
but inside we are crooked.

We like to speak peace,
yet sow division.

We pray for the needs of others,
but too often do too little to make a difference.

We place our trust in all things that are passing,
instead of in Your constant love and care.

Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy,
Lord forgive us we pray.

Come again among us,
Holy Spirit, move, wind, and weave Your ways.
Speak to us through Your Word,
transform us into Your likeness we pray.

Give us we pray, Your resolve –
to think less of how we look before others,
and more about how You look upon us.
To truly be people of peace in this warring world,
agents of Your kingdom coming,
that through all we are, all we do,
our lives turn to give You honour and praise.

Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!

Thanksgiving / Gratitude

Lord God,
we thank You today for Your loving mercy.
Time and time again,
we have been unfaithful and undeserving,
and yet time and time again You have gone the extra mile.
When we have wandered off, You have sought us out,
when we have been in the pit, You have lifted us up,
when we have trusted in things that are fleeting,
You have been constant, watching and waiting,

longing for Your children to hear, and see, respond, and return.

You have beckoned us back through Your prophets,
speaking Your word afresh for each new generation,
You have sought us out through Your Son Jesus Christ,
living, and loving,
challenging and inspiring,
healing and leading.

And all of this leading to the cross,
for we turned on Him like we turned on the rest,
we despised Him and we rejected Him.
And yet,
and yet, with arms stretched out wide to embrace the world,
He expressed a love that would not let us go,
once and for all.

A love that three days later rose again from the grave,
a love that is stronger than death,
and opens the doors to life –
life now and life forever.

Lord today we remember with gratitude
all those who give, so that others may have life.
We remember especially those who have expressed a selfless love,
laying down their life for a friend.

We remember with gratitude
those who are not content with the broken status quo of this world,
but rather stick their neck out to bring about peace,
and in doing so face the consequences
that Your prophets and Son have faced before them,
Lord, have mercy; give strength and resilience.

We remember with gratitude,
that You keep coming after us,
again and again in the nature of Your constant loving mercy.
Always beckoning us back
to You, and to Your ways,

one more time, and forevermore.
Thank You Lord, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Prayer for others / Intercession

Lord God,
We bring before You today our broken world,
a world at conflict and war.
We pray especially for those who are caught in the middle,
lives and livelihoods lost, or never to be the same again.
Futures stolen from young women and men,
hearts broken in those who grieve.
Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy

We bring before You today our unequal world,
a world divided between haves and have-nots
where the rich get richer, and the poor don't seem to matter.
We pray especially today for those who are displaced by war –
seeking out home, a safe refuge, a place to rest and have a future.
Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

We pray today for our governments,
and the difficult decisions faced, where there are no easy answers.
We pray for wisdom, discernment, boldness, and action.
We pray for world leaders to hear and abide by Your word,
for whom power is not about self-serving, but serving the needs of others –
especially for the sake of the least, the last, the lost, and the lonely.
Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

We pray for Your Church,
that we might not just speak of peace, but actively seek it,
among ourselves and in this world.
That we trust in You and Your ways,
and forever encourage others to do so to.
That we might not just pray for those most in need,
but put our time and talents, and our money at Your disposal,
as acts of worship and service to You and for our neighbour.

Give us discernment we pray,
to see where You are moving,

to have eyes afresh for this new day,
ears that are willing to listen,
hearts that are ready to respond,
and a nimbleness of spirit,
to join in where You are
and touch lives afresh with the good news of Jesus.
That Your Church may continue to worship, praise, and serve You
from the heart of Your people.
Lord in Your mercy hear our prayer, amen.

Blessing / Closing prayer

So go, go from here to live and to love in Christ's name,
knowing that He first loved you and gave His all, once and for all
that we can be at one with God and with one another.

And now,
the Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. 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.

- CH4 259 – “Beauty for brokenness” – a general response to the readings, with references to bread/war/a prayer for the least, the last, the lost and the lonely. Also relates to today’s prayers [MP 806]
- MP 395 – “Judge eternal, throned in splendour” – calls for justice, peace and the reign of God

Psalm 146

- CH4 124 – “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation”
- CH4 129 – “The Lord is King! Lift up thy voice” [MP 656]
- CH4 160 – “Praise, my soul, the King of heaven”
- CH4 192 – “All my hope on God is founded”
- MP 57 – “Bless the Lord, O my soul” [JP 19]
- MP 1259 – “Bless the Lord, O my soul” (Matt Redman & Jonas Myrin)
- MP 1072 – “In Christ alone” – also reflects the Hebrews passage

Hebrews 9

- CH4 258 – “When the hungry who have nothing share with strangers” – war and seeking peace
- CH4 456 – “Christ is the world’s true light” – the saving action of Christ. Also echoes of the Psalm (swords to ploughshares etc.)
- CH4 457 – “All hail the power of Jesus’ name!” [MP 13]
- CH4 458 – “At the Name of Jesus” – Christ’s return and the saving action of Christ

Mark 12

- CH4 286 – “Tell out, my soul” – God usurping human systems of injustice, lifting up the downcast) [MP 631/JP 229]
- CH4 521 – “Children of God, reach out to one another!” – with references to widows, the Temple and the theme of today’s prayers

Remembrance

- A suggested playlist of songs from CH4 for Remembrance Day can be found on the Church of Scotland website. <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me/playlist/remembrance>
- GWA 135 – “Honour the dead, the country’s fighting brave”
- GWA 136 – “Hope for the world’s despair”
- MP 509 – “O Lord, the clouds are gathering” – themes of war, hunger, bread, and the plight of the poorest. Also recognises the church as fallen, but still with potential for God to restore her to be an instrument in God’s hands

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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