

Third Sunday in Lent – Year C

Sunday 23 March 2025

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Bill Taylor, retired Minister and a Chaplain for the Presbytery of Edinburgh and West Lothian, for his thoughts on the third Sunday in Lent.

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.

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

This Sunday is the 19th day and third Sunday of Lent. We are almost halfway through the 40 days associated with the period Jesus spent in the wilderness and where He was tempted by Satan. Looking at the calendar, however, Lent turns out to last for 46 days counting from Ash Wednesday, 5 March, to Holy Saturday. Traditionally only weekdays were counted, Sundays being days of celebration.

'Oculi' is the Latin name for the third Sunday in Lent, meaning 'eyes' and is associated with Psalm 25:15: "My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net." Today's Bible readings encourage us to look and search, seek and find, taste and discover. Questions are raised about some of the choices human beings make, inviting us to look more closely at how we live and to exercise scrutiny. "Why," the prophet Isaiah asks, "do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2) Lent is a time for review, 'self' assessment in a sense, so that we might each consider how we are walking with the Lord. Fruitfulness is something expected by God, as the parable from Luke indicates. None of us can do this alone. In the presence of the risen Christ we are aware of the fellowship we share, the company along the way, our questions and faith.

Whilst the background is one of penitence, Lent is much more than self-denial, it leads us to an awareness of the needs of others as we give up what perhaps we easily take for granted, become more attuned to the impact of our choices and remember those who have little. Lent draws us to look more closely to Jesus, whose choices from the desert to the cross were about acting justly and loving both God and neighbour. Interestingly, for the first part of Lent, our sisters and brothers in the Muslim Faith are observing Ramadan (27 February-28 March), with its tradition of fasting and alms-giving.

I like to begin my preparation by reading each passage two or three times and noting highlights that emerge for me. I do this before looking at commentaries, though I will think further about these early 'discoveries' in the light of what I read or conversations I've had with others about the texts. I will leave a gap between this initial exploration to allow ideas to percolate or form more fully before attempting to draw up a reflection or write prayers. Wider reading, exposure to news media, what's happening around us, our experiences in life; these and more, influence how we see the texts. I am also looking for connections between the passages to identify common themes and build a sense of what the message might be in the reflection. I ask, when preparing, 'what is God's word for us today, from these texts before us?' When it comes to the service itself, rarely will I choose more than two readings, so some selection is needed. A gospel reading would generally take priority,

probably supplemented by either an Old Testament reading or a passage from another kind of New Testament book. Excerpts or a paraphrase of the other readings might inform prayers or choice of praise.

When it comes to delivering the sermon/meditation I was struck to read in Jane Dawson's biography of John Knox (Yale University Press, 2015) that he always preached *ex tempore*, believing the words of the Gospel: "for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say." (Luke 12:12) Knox had, of course, diligently researched his subject and written a script, and having done so, he spoke freely into the situation. I have sometimes tried this and found that I didn't cover everything I had planned to say, but what was lost from a script was a definite gain in the immediacy and contemporaneity of the communication.

[Isaiah 55:1-9](#)

The passage opens with an invitation for everyone who thirsts, a reminder that all are welcome, for which of us has not experienced some thirst or want or need? "Come to the waters" resonates with the account in John 4, where Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at a well, inviting her to ask Him for a drink and He would give her "living water". The gift of what money cannot buy is on offer, of love, of grace, not the results of our own efforts, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Verse 2 raises questions similar to those in Ecclesiastes, where so much human activity is described as "vanity and a chasing after wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:14). The question about spending money is a 'why' question, asking 'what's the point of it, what's the purpose in this,' suggesting futility and the need to think again. Self-denial has always been a feature of Lent, which is a time to review and reassess. Here the prophet asks us to give up what is false so we can delight in what is good. In our consumerist society we are aware these choices are not only about what's best for ourselves, but about what's best for the planet, for creation, for our neighbours, and especially for those in need or whose way of life is at risk because of the choices of others, such as those who dwell in island nations where rising sea levels caused by global warming threaten their homes and existence. Lent observed leads to greater sensitivity to the suffering and needs of others, people living with hunger, homelessness, poverty, illness and many forms of oppression.

The invitation comes again: "Come, buy wine and milk"; "Incline your ear and come to me." The poet/prophet invites the listeners to digest what is good. That which truly satisfies is there for us. Again, there are resonances: we recall how, following the feeding of the 5,000, "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'" (John 6:35). There is a difference between

hearing and listening. The prophet invites us to listen carefully and discover the everlasting covenant God has made. The Old Testament speaks of God making a covenant with a number of individuals, including Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and here, with David. The offer of such a relationship with the God who is faithful is made again in this verse (v3). These are, in fact covenants for all peoples, and we see this in the reference to other nations made in verses 4 and 5, others are drawn to the covenant God has made with David. These are reminiscent of earlier verses found in this part of Isaiah. “[the Lord] says, ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’” (Isaiah 49:6).

Jesus spoke of the new covenant made possible by His blood, a covenant through which the sins of many might be forgiven, and invited us to celebrate it in the sharing of bread and wine (Luke 22:20).

Again, in verse 6, an invitation is made: “Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near;” David has already been mentioned in this song; those hearing it may have recalled David’s advice as he prepared for his succession: “And you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve him with single mind and willing heart; for the Lord searches every mind, and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will abandon you forever” (1 Chronicles 28:9). There is a time of opportunity, the right time, a fitting time to seek the Lord. The “while” suggests this may not last, so it will be prudent not to waste the time “while he is near”.

This is reminiscent of Jesus’ parables in which He suggests there is an urgency about responding to the life of God’s kingdom, e.g. the Wedding Guests, the Heavenly Banquet, the Sheep and the Goats, the Virgins and their Oil lamps, the Parable of the Talents and today’s parable, that of the Unfruitful Fig Tree. God is near, the prophet proclaims, even though there are many uncertainties about what the future holds and the days are challenging, this is the right time to find God. At a time of global instability, there comes this word – God is near. God is discoverable, knowable. God can be found! This is good news for all, even those who have previously turned away, as we see in verse 7: “let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

Note the abundance of God’s pardon. Paul writes: “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Jesus has come “to seek out and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10), and we are reminded that God also seeks. The Parable of the Prodigal Son shows us a father who scans the horizon in search of his lost child (Luke

15:20). Such unconditional love is not necessarily how the world works, and we are reminded in verses 8 and 9 of the difference between Creator and created. Thus, it is with the divine, the beyond, the highest, that we are invited to engage. Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

Isaiah 55 is the last chapter of what is known as Second Isaiah, whose writing began at chapter 40, an unknown poet-prophet but a single source, writing in the period before the end of the Exile when the prospect of a return to Jerusalem (538 BCE) in the time of Cyrus the Great is in view. Beginning with words of succour, “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God” (Isaiah 40:1), Second Isaiah contains the four Songs of the Suffering Servant who was “wounded for our transgressions” and “by whose bruises we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5), and concludes with the joy of creation, where the thorn is replaced by the cypress, the mountains and hills burst into song and the trees of the field clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12-13).

[Psalm 63:1-8](#)

Psalm 63 is ascribed to David, written by him from the Wilderness of Judah, possibly at the time of his son Absalom’s rebellion, when David had to flee for his life and he and his troops had to live rough in the wilderness (2 Samuel 1:27). Eagerly he seeks God. Thirst is used again as a metaphor for an urgent spiritual quest. G.A.F. Knight suggests this psalm may be behind Jesus’ beatitude: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6). Jesus often quoted the Psalms, His kingdom teaching was influenced by them: “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). David’s soul thirsts – to what is the Psalmist referring? The word ‘nephesh’ means one’s whole being. Our soul is “all that is within me”, summoned to bless God’s holy name. (Psalm 103:1-2). Note the depth of the Psalmist’s desire for God. His flesh, fainting, in the heat of the desert, paints a picture of eager longing. In Hebrew thought there is no separation between the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the physical. The Bible invites us to encounter God with all our lives. The desert or the wilderness is a strong biblical theme. Peake comments that the phrase ‘a dry and weary land’ is “a figurative expression for the sense of deprivation that affliction brings.” (Peake’s *Commentary on the Bible*, Nelson, 1981 p 426) This is a place of testing, and in Lent especially we recall it was in the wilderness, driven there by the Spirit, that Jesus was tested (Mark 1:12-13). Through wilderness experiences, when life is tough, and when, as with the temperatures in the desert, there are extremes – we can be led to an awareness of the one who can assuage the deepest thirst and restore our wellbeing. To David, God is clearly associated with healing and wholeness, with mercy and grace, hence

his longing for God. Imagine the impact on wellbeing and mental health if we knew God as the Psalmist did, or as Jesus did. Jesus encouraged His disciples to remain united to Him, saying, “I am the true vine”, and explaining, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11). Perhaps this is why theology matters!

Verse 2 gives us a short description of what worship is about: when we come to worship, we seek to see the face of God and to wonder at God’s power and glory. When we open the church doors it is to this that we welcome people. Life is such a good gift of God, but David, in fear of his life, suggests God’s steadfast love is better, it never falters, even when life is precarious (v3).

Praising with lips, lifting up hands, (vv3-4) these invite us to consider how we engage our whole being when we gather to worship. Music and song were such important elements of worship in the Temple. What do we do with our hands in worship? Sometimes we clasp them – here an open attitude is described: hands lifted ready to offer and open to receive.

Finding it hard to sleep at night? A good sleep brings benefits, memories are laid down, the body repairs itself – we could do no better than follow the Psalmist’s advice, thinking of God and meditating on God’s love through the long watches of the night (v6). There are many forms and kinds of prayer. Sometimes they are brief; prayers uttered in a moment, possibly before an event or test, but here the Psalmist enjoys long periods of time in God’s presence, as people lingering over a sumptuous feast (v5), delighting in the food and fellowship, thus the Psalmist enjoys and luxuriates in God’s presence. One is reminded of that question in the Shorter Catechism about humanity’s chief end – to know and enjoy God forever. Christian Meditation is a rich mine of spirituality that invites us to spend longer periods in God’s presence.

Here David celebrates. He recalls how God has been his help “and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy” (v7). Places of shade in the desert are much sought after by many creatures. Birds will lift their wings to provide their young with shade from the searing sun. So, with the assurance and strength God gives, we are able to face the challenges that lie ahead. When the heat is on there is respite in God’s presence: “the peace that the world cannot give” (John 14:27), enabling us to journey on.

God’s right hand signifies authority and power – little wonder then that the Psalmist’s whole being should cling to such a one (v8).

[1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#)

It was a long walk to freedom and the diversions taken ultimately cost dearly and led to severe consequences for many. Those who complained or openly rebelled against Moses, and the way of life God had given through him, found their lives came to a sad and sorrowful end. The episode of the golden calf was followed by internecine killing and plague (Exodus 32). A further plague associated with sexual immorality and idolatry (Numbers 25:9) resulted in the death of thousands; it is referred to by Paul in this passage (v8). The rebellion of Korah and his followers (Numbers 16), who contested Moses' leadership, was followed by a natural disaster, when the earth opened and swallowed many. The Pentateuch interprets these events as connected with choices that incur God's displeasure, as does Paul (v5). In this season of Lent, when we are encouraged to examine our choices and the way we live, it is good to ask, 'what gives God pleasure or displeasure?'

Interestingly, this passage also refers to food and drink and again, the references are located within a desert landscape. Paul invites us to recall the sojourn at Meribah when, with the people complaining of thirst, Moses was instructed by God to strike a rock with his staff and it poured forth water enough for all to drink. (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:1-11). There was a well-known legend (1) at the time of Paul's writing, that the rock followed the people so that they might never be thirsty again. Building on God's intervention and sustaining presence as the people journeyed "under the cloud" and "passed through the sea", Paul tells us that Christ was with them as they journeyed through days of hardship to a better future. Paul opens his readers' eyes to see Christ present in the most challenging of circumstances, and that Christ's is a presence that sustains. We might ask, 'how do we deal with events that have been hard, with those things we wish never happened, yet did?'

Here Paul takes a 'lessons-learned' approach and uses what is past to better inform us for the present so that we choose what is life-giving and of service to others (v11). We are always learning – Paul drives that home in v12. None of us should consider that we have arrived, we are all on a journey. Though one day we shall be like Christ (1 John 3:2), we are as yet a work in progress. "Take care." Paul warns, "Lest you fall." Graciously Paul offers that times of testing are "common to everyone" (v13). It is no sin to be tempted. In solidarity with all, Jesus was tempted, notably in the desert, at the start of His ministry and on many subsequent occasions He was offered the ways of power, popularity and spectacle. Because Jesus held to the good in the face of temptation we can be assured that there is one who is able to help us find the way out. God, Paul assures, is merciful and will not permit the time of testing to last beyond what we can endure. God will provide a way out. We can break free!

“We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” (Psalm 124:7-8).

Though we may not always be, God is faithful, and lifts those who have fallen or are low, raising us up with Christ to the new life of God’s kingdom. As John Baillie put it: “Bless you, Lord, for your hand upon my life and for the sure knowledge that however I may falter and fail, your everlasting arms are always underneath me” (2). We who have been forgiven much can live thankfully, joining in with all who seek a better life for every sister and brother of Jesus.

[1] William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible Revised Edition, The Letters to the Corinthians, Saint Andrew Press 1975

[2] John Baillie, A Diary of Private Prayer, updated and revised by Susanna Wright, Scribner 2014

[Luke 13:1-9](#)

Jesus addresses the received wisdom, the unspoken rules and hidden assumptions, what everyone was thinking, even if they didn’t come out and say it. Namely, those who had lost their lives because of military action by the occupying forces or because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, somehow deserved their fate, because somehow they were worse than other people. Jesus upsets all this (vv1-5). Maybe what happened had nothing to do with how these people lived their lives? Perhaps they had lived as other people lived ... the point being all are in need of repentance and especially those who rush to judgment, condemn their neighbour and show no compassion. Amidst his suffering, Job found the hapless advice of his friend Eliphaz who said: “Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.” (Job 4:7-8)

Jesus firmly questioned the assumption that sickness was the result of an individual’s sin. Innocents often suffer. Those who seek to act justly and live as God requires can expect opposition and suffering (Matthew 5:10-12). There is the episode about the man who had been ‘blind from birth’ and of the disciples who asked Jesus who sinned – “this man or his parents?” Jesus countered with a different view, suggesting that from his suffering unimagined good would follow. “Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.’” (John 9:3). After an application of mud and saliva to the man’s eyes and a wash in the pool of Siloam, the blind man was able to see.

Siloam and its tower were part of an aqueduct system constructed and run by the Romans but funded controversially from the Temple treasury (3). News arrives “at that very time” (Luke 13:1) of an incident in the Temple at which the Romans had used force to suppress a group of activists from Galilee. Galilee was renowned as a region where there was unrest. Jesus’ general call to repentance in verse 5, “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did,” may be a criticism of those who thought the answer lay in revolutionary activity – for Jesus foresaw the destruction of the Temple which took place in 70CE – but it certainly is a call to live with the priorities of God’s Kingdom. If this is so it fits with what follows. The fig tree, along with the vine, was symbolic of the nation of Israel.

Just as in times of sorrow “the vine withers and the fig tree droops” (Joel 1:12), so in their highest aspirations the people of the Old Testament looked forward to a new time when there would be no more war and people would live in peace: “but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken” (Micah 4:3-5).

The Parable of the Unfruitful Fig Tree (vv6-9) seems harsh, yet we also find compassion here in the second chance given to the fruit tree to be fruitful. Moreover, intensive care is offered; fertilizer is dug into the soil. God is the God of second chances, and third and fourth, and more, seventy-times seven, or, as Peter found out, God’s forgiveness and love is without limits (Matthew 18:21-22). But if God’s mercy cannot be exhausted neither is it meant to be assumed. The parable intends that we for our part seize the day and seek to live fruitful lives from now on. There is an urgency, “today is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2), not some far off, distant time. The sooner we assume our identity as God’s children, the better; the more likely we are to produce the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 2: 22-23). Such things take time to grow, best tended to as soon as possible.

[3] William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible Revised Edition, The Gospel of Luke, Saint Andrew Press 1975

Sermon ideas

Sometimes it’s easier to receive a sermon or reflection when it’s divided in two, with maybe a hymn or a musical reflection in-between. A first section with today’s material might take either of the Old Testament passages or the Epistle (which itself recalls Old Testament events). The second section would focus on the Gospel.

The following themes suggest themselves to me: Invitation, Desert, Thirst, Journey and Stages of Faith, Compassion, Temptation, Fruitfulness and Fertilizer.

You might like to begin Part 1 by reflecting on or asking what it's like when we receive an invitation. How did people feel? What would it have felt like if they hadn't been given an invitation? There are basic truths here that speak of how no-one is left out and all are loved by God. Each person is the apple of God's eye and all are welcomed in fellowship. God cares, draws near to us in Jesus, that we might share in the life of the Kingdom, know it for ourselves and seek, with the Spirit's help, that its abundant life might be the experience of many, especially those sisters and brothers of Jesus who are in need, including the hungry, thirsty, or strangers, those without shelter and adequate clothing, people in hospital or in prison (Matthew 25:31-46).

In the light of God's gracious invitation, you might like to introduce some background information about Lent – we have choices! Both Psalm 63 and Isaiah 55 speak about thirst and how our deepest longings and hopes are found in God. Our western society is replete with choices: menus, TV programmes, media, consumerism, online or on the high street. What are the choices we seek that turn out to be hollow and do not satisfy? What choices do we need, does society need to make? You might like to take a few minutes to introduce some quiet time, taking a verse like Isaiah 55:6, "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near," and encourage people to reflect on the phrases it contains, thinking about what they say. Alternatively, you might like to try some simple breathing exercises as a way of experiencing silence or a growth in awareness or less stress. You can find these at NHS Inform Scotland's website.

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/stress/breathing-and-relaxation-exercises/>

Dialling down the input can be one of the benefits of seeking a lonely place, as Jesus did, where He could have time to pray. Some of us will find something akin to this when we go for a walk and have space to think. The desert or wilderness has often been associated in Christian tradition with God, perhaps because its environment focuses the mind on what's needed for life. Water is clearly that, in the hot, arid, unforgiving landscapes of the rocky deserts of the Middle East. The idea of thirsting after God comes readily to mind. Here we are brought face to face with what each of us is about, just as Jesus was when he was given various options for how He would live His life by the Tempter in the desert. All can discover that it is God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, who is the One who assuages our thirst and refreshes our souls.

The journey through the desert by those fleeing captivity in Egypt took 40 years! Many events and happenings, both wondrous and devastating, took place along the way. The story of the Exodus is one of God's faithfulness, even if God's people were not. Paul imaginatively helps us see how Christ is here in the experience of wilderness, wandering or deprivation. He was their rock beside them as they journeyed, the rock from which flowed the water of life. Just as there are connections with Communion in the readings for today, there are with Baptism. Those who have been baptised in the threefold name of God are anointed ('Christ' means 'anointed one') to share with Jesus in His ministry to the lost, the forgotten, the overlooked. In the synagogue at Capernaum Jesus took the scroll of Isaiah and read: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18-19)

It could be said we are all at different stages in our journey of faith, yet wherever we are, Christ is by our side, God is near. It might be helpful to ask people to think about stages of faith. Some will be new to faith, some might sense there have been various stepping stones along the way, others might like to consider what they think the next stage might be. The idea of 'stages' chimes with the compassion shown in the Parable of the Unfruitful Fig Tree, which might be found to be at a different stage the following year. Some consideration might be given to how we develop compassion in a polarised world of extremes, where events and change transpire and cause us to ask big questions about life. In their book, the late Bill Clinkenbeard and Ian Gilmour (5) suggest various models of Church that could effectively engage with the contemporary world, mindful of the storms that are very present in our time. What does fertilizer look like for us as Church? What helps us be fruitful? Identifying the specifics for each context in which we are called to be church will provide important keys for the forward journey, but might we all be called to respond anew to God's gracious invitation?

The passages from Luke 13 bristle with politics and questions of national identity. Is there such a thing as the soul of a nation, and if so what values in that society might be pleasing to God? In His Nazareth manifesto, previously cited (Luke 4:18-19), Jesus makes clear His concern for the poor and the oppressed. As Christ's followers we are called to stand alongside and make representation for social justice and greater wellbeing in our society.

[4] *Stirred by the Storm*, Imprint Digital, 2024

Prayers

Call to worship (*Psalm 103:1-2*)

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless God's holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And do not forget all God's benefits.

Prayers of approach, confession and supplication (*Psalm 25:15*)

My eyes are ever toward the Lord,
who will pluck my feet out of the net.

Gracious God, who invites us here,
gladly we come to offer You praise and worship.
You are the rock on which we stand.
Our deepest longings and greatest hopes are met in You.
With the help of the Holy Spirit, we bring our very selves to You.
Who we are and care about, we lay at Your feet, our Maker, Redeemer and Sustainer.
In Your presence we are renewed, You are our well-spring of living water,
Your faithful love restores our souls.
None can compare with You who, in Jesus Christ, has come among us that we may know
God is near.

God of wonder, lift our eyes to You,
help us look upward, show us the things of heaven, that Your kingdom may come on earth.
Risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ,
who sits at God's right hand and prays for all Your sisters and brothers,
grant us a glimpse of Your glory, that we may serve You with joy and courage each day.

In Jesus we see all that we can be,
the pioneer of our faith and the goal to which we strive.
We confess that our thoughts and our ways have not been Yours, O God.
When we have chosen not to see others with the eyes of Christ's compassion,
when we have lost sight of whose we are,
forgive us these and all our sins, we humbly pray.
Saviour Jesus, who has endured every temptation, we turn to You afresh.

Grant us to live now as those who have been forgiven much, with gladness and hope and love,
that we may serve You, Gracious God, in this and every day.
You invite us to be a part of Your Kingdom
that many might know the abundant life that is found in You.
Holy Spirit, who leads us into all that is true,
here we are, coming as you prompt us, responding to the gracious invitation,
may we live to the glory of God's holy name.

And in the words Jesus taught His disciples, help us as we pray:

[The Lord's Prayer may be said according to your tradition]

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

In some churches there may be an offering prior to this.

In the prayers that follow you are invited to join in with words of response.

Lord, hear our prayer
Lord, graciously hear us.

Bountiful God, freely You have given that which is good and freely we have received.
We bless You for Your constant love, which is new every morning.
We thank You for all that Jesus our Saviour has won, bringing living hope to the world.
With gratitude we offer You the gifts we bring, that in Your service they may speak of the wonder of Your love.

Lord, hear our prayer
Lord, graciously hear us.

May You who set aside all vain glory show us how to serve and witness to Your unconditional love.
We pray for a world confused and perplexed by so many things, as often we are.
For all who wonder 'why?', for all who doubt when faced with bad news,
whose wellbeing is threatened by hateful words,
who see around the storms of conflict and war.
Jesus, Light of the World,
may Your light shine through, a beacon to guide and sustain us all.

Lord, hear our prayer

Lord, graciously hear us.

We pray for the choices we make, and for those whose decisions affect the lives of many, remembering especially people in positions of responsibility, civic leaders and politicians. We pray for mutual understanding between the nations, for ways of resolving issues that are just and peaceful, and for an end to conflict and violence.

Lord, hear our prayer

Lord, graciously hear us.

Gracious God,

we thank You for the work of all who broaden horizons and lift our thinking with imagination.

We pray for the work of teachers, researchers, scientists, and all whose skills help improve quality of life.

Help us together to apply lessons learned and to open routes out of poverty and lack of opportunity, that all God's children can live life to the full.

Lord, hear our prayer

Lord, graciously hear us.

In quiet moments we bring to You those whom we, like the first disciples, ask Jesus to bless.

[Hold a time of silence]

Thank You, Risen Lord, that You pray for us in heaven above, as we recall all who have gone before and who are with You in the life everlasting and with whom we are yet one.

Lord, hear our prayer

Lord, graciously hear us.

To You be all glory, faithful God of hope and love. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

Words of dismissal and Prayer of blessing

Seek and you shall find,
knock and the door shall be opened,
ask and you will receive.

And may grace, mercy and peace, from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God,
be with you now and forever.

Amen

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All (GWA) 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 words-only versions are now available; and 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 109 – “For days within the wilderness”
- GWA 110 – “You lead us through the wilderness”
- GWA 111 – “God, come now to explore my heart”
- GWA 184 – “Let all who are thirsty come”
- CH4 96 – “You are before me, God, you are behind” – from Psalm 139, celebrating God’s wonderful knowledge which is ‘too great to understand’. The last verse invites

God to 'search me and know my heart' and reminds us that God also seeks and searches. It's often sung to the tune Highland Cathedral (CH4 336).

- CH4 111 – “Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!” – celebrating the Trinity, this hymn conveys the mystery and wonder of God.
- CH4 167 – “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah” – recalling God’s accompaniment through years of desert journeying, tying in with the Psalm and 1 Corinthians texts.
- CH4 198 – “Let us build a house where love can dwell” – a reminder that all are welcome!
- CH4 250 – “Sent by the Lord am I” – a good final song, before the blessing. It’s short and benefits from being sung twice. The words enlist us in the work of justice and peace ‘making the earth the place in which the kingdom comes’.
- CH4 259 – “Beauty for brokenness” – a song that celebrates Jesus’ bias to the poor and touches on many contemporary pressing issues and questions
- CH4 465 – “Be thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart” – a song that invites us to reset our focus and look to the High King of Heaven, appropriate on Oculi Sunday.
- CH4 530 – “One more step along the world I go” – a travelling song to a lively tune.
- CH4 532 – “Lord, you have come to the seashore” – with broad Lenten themes, worshippers are invited to give what they have in the service of the Lord.
- CH4 550 – “As the deer pants for the water” – conveys a thirst for God as expressed in the reading from Psalm 63:1-8
- CH4 641 – “Seek ye first the kingdom of God” – as the hymn book says, this can be sung as a canon with the refrain. The words are taken from lines of Scripture and link in with the theme of searching.
- CH4 804 – “You shall go out with joy” – puts into song the words at the close of Isaiah 55. This can be sung several times, and you can invite people to clap their hands and express joy! It’s fun to ask people to sing this as they leave.
- Mission Praise 712 – “O soul, are you weary and troubled?” – best known for the chorus, ‘Turn your eyes upon Jesus,’ this is another song for Oculi Sunday
- A suggested [playlist of songs from CH4 throughout Lent](#) can be found on the Church of Scotland website.

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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