

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

### Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – 18 October 2020

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Rev William Boyle and the Worship Leaders at Port Glasgow New Parish Church for their thoughts on the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost.

Our new online music resource is now live: [here](#) you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4). The search function allows you to bring up a list of songs by keyword, tune, theme, author, composer and metre, covering all of the indexes in the hymnbook. The site features Weekly Worship and thematic/seasonal playlists, alternative settings and background information on the hymns.

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October is a month with a particular focus on tackling poverty. Thursday 17 October is the United Nations' International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and 5-11 October is [Challenge Poverty Week](#). Throughout the whole of October the Weekly Worship resources have been written by Priority Area congregations. You will also find videos with stories from these congregations and others on the Priority Areas [Facebook page](#) and we would encourage you to share these during worship as a way of highlighting how the church is engaging in anti-poverty work at a local level.

Since the early 1990s the Church of Scotland has placed a priority on putting resources into the most deprived communities. However, while there is great work happening in [Priority Area congregations](#) (those in the 5% most deprived parishes), it is important to recognise that the priority for the poorest and the most marginalised is the gospel imperative facing the whole church.

During this month we are asking every congregation in the country to look at poverty in their own community. Every parish will contain people who are in poverty, even if some of it is hidden. "Deprivation Stats" have been produced to show this for every parish. These can be found via the [Church Finder](#) on the Church of Scotland website and we would encourage you to use these as a conversation starter with your congregation or Kirk Session.

## Introduction

Through this time of health emergency and lockdown we have seen many people lose their lives and many people who had a job before lockdown now no longer have anything to go back to. People are struggling to make ends meet, to put food on the table, relying on the kindness of others, such as foodbanks and charities delivering hot meals. There will be many people in our country and world who are struggling, fearful of the future, who will perhaps doubt and question their faith. Who perhaps feel like God has abandoned them and is not answering when they call, desperate for a sign that God is there.

From our Scripture passages today, we are reminded that God reigns over us as King, everything belongs to God, who is revealed and is present in all things. A God who will answer when we call, even when it perhaps does not seem that way when we go through the struggles of life. Moses for example, is facing a future that looked as though it would be difficult, a future that worried him: he comes to God and he wants answers, he wants assurance that God will not leave him. God's promise is always to be with him and we trust that the same is true for us too as God's love is revealed through the life, death, and

resurrection of Jesus Christ. God loves us and we are called in turn to give all that we have and all that we are to God.

### **Exodus 33:12-23**

We join Moses at the beginning of his ministry when he had received the call of God to go to Egypt and set the people free. But as we read, he is struggling with doubt and his calling, and he realises he will need help.

Moses was facing a future that looked like it would be really difficult, a future that worried him. He wanted God to fill in the gaps so that he could face the future with more confidence. Moses tried to bargain with God in times of difficulty and we will perhaps do the very same thing. God responds to Moses – ‘My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’ (v.14) – God will always be with him.

### **Psalm 99**

Psalm 99 celebrates the Lord’s Kingship over Israel and the whole earth. The Lord reigns, as we see in verse 1. “The Lord is king; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!” And in verse 2, “The Lord is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples.” Reading both of these verses shows that God’s Kingship cannot go unnoticed.

The Psalm then goes on to talk about God’s holiness. “Holy is he” is used in both verses 3 and 5. The command comes to praise God’s great name and to worship God.

Moses, Aaron and Samuel all call on the Lord for an answer and God responds – in turn all three are obedient to God. The psalm ends by acknowledging God’s response in answering, forgiving, and taking their side. It refers again to God’s holiness. “Extol the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the Lord our God is holy” (v.9).

### **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

1 Thessalonians is one of the earliest of Paul’s Epistles, written from Corinth around 51 AD. Thessalonica was a busy seaport and the largest city in Macedonia. It occupied a strategic position for trade and commerce. Most of the inhabitants were Greek but there were other groups, including Jews. Paul preached in the Jewish synagogue but also worked among the Gentiles. He left the city because he was afraid the church would be persecuted, as he

himself had been. Paul was unable to return to Thessalonica but sent Timothy to minister to the believers there. Paul wrote the letter in response to Timothy's report that the church in Thessalonica was prospering.

In this passage, Paul gives thanks for the church in Thessalonica and praises the believers for their continuing faith, and hope. He rejoices that news of the believers has spread beyond Thessalonica. He reassures them to go on working quietly while waiting for the return of the Lord.

The way Paul encourages the Thessalonians to live is how we as present-day Christians try to live too. We are thankful to God; prayerful in our work; going in faith and love to further the Kingdom of God. We try to set an example by living a Christian life. Through the good and bad, the highs and lows, we want people to see us as children of God and in this way, we hope to bring others to the Lord.

As Christians, we should encourage others and reach out to those who need help to deal with the stresses of life. If we have a strong sense of future, if we are positive about the way ahead, we have hope. People who feel they have no hope for the future, for whom the way ahead is uncertain can experience emotional or mental illness. Our faith fills our present with hope for the future. Our faith gets us through the difficult times.

Paul's letter to the Christians in Thessalonica encourages them to think positively about the future, in expectation and joy. This same belief allows us to cope with our concerns for ourselves and for others. Many people today are concerned with poverty and the struggle to survive on a daily basis. We should be prepared to go beyond our circle of family and friends, to go outside our comfort zone, to show care and compassion to those in need; to bring a message of hope for a better future to those who are struggling. By showing how God has helped us and given us hope, others may come to Jesus through us.

## [Matthew 22:15-22](#)

In the reading from Matthew's Gospel, representatives from two Jewish leadership groups came to Jesus with questions: questions about His authority and about the Law. By asking the questions, the groups were trying to trap Jesus by placing Him in a no-win situation.

One of the questions was short and to the point: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" Jesus' problem is that by answering yes, then He could be seen as supporting the Roman occupation and this would not be a popular answer among the Jewish people. On the other hand, if Jesus answers no, He could be seen as plotting against Rome.

Jesus calls for a coin and asks them to identify whose image is on the coin. When they identify the Emperor's face, Jesus replies "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

Jesus used this coin to make an important point. He was implying that those who questioned Him cared more for religious platitudes than the actual heart of the law – love of God and love of neighbours. Jesus was making the point that it is much more important to love God and our neighbours than anything else. Loving God and our neighbour must be our main priority. Do we love God? Is everything in our lives first and foremost dedicated to God? Do we offer all our gifts and talents, our health and strength, our wealth and our time in God's service? Only by doing so, can we be used to help our neighbours. As God's followers, we are expected to use our gifts to share God's love and care with everyone within our community. By doing so, we can all help to meet the needs of all those whose lives are blighted by poverty.

## Sermon ideas

A theme that emerged for us was: '*finding fulfilment in holiness*'. Being content no matter what the circumstances and counting your blessings rather than your troubles. This manifests as a mixture of peace and enthusiasm. Feeling safe in the knowledge that we have an all-powerful God on the throne interspersed with excitement for the opportunities we have to further God's Kingdom.

Like Moses' flock, we are God's chosen people, selected and moulded and with work to do. We should be full of faith, hope, joy, positivity and above all peace in the midst of turmoil.

Do we go about God's work full of joy? Do we wake up each morning praising God for another day in which to serve?

Even if we appear happy, often hidden from our public image is misery that comes from feeling unfulfilled. A disconnect between ourselves and our loving Father in Heaven.

How do we become *set apart* if we are so easily dragged into the cycle of wrong thinking, bad decisions and heartache that affects those without God?

In Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica he encourages the believers there, saying that in spite of persecution they received the word with joy, and he calls the work they are doing a labour of love and shows that they are setting an example to others. Isn't that the best method of outreach still to this day?

The service could include testimony of lives changed and hearts softened to love others and giving up all earthly idols to walk with God, just as the Thessalonians did.

The worship leader could look at idols we have in life: from our image, to career, money, addictions and how they are getting in the way of our true purpose in life; relationship with God.

Moses cries out to be shown the way of God so that he may know God and find favour, asking that God goes with them so that they may be distinct from all other people.

There are many people in our Priority Areas crying out for the exact same thing. But we must start with ourselves as believers. Those trusted to set an example. Do we always put God at the forefront of everything in our own lives? From relationships, work issues, to decisions (big and small) in order that they may be blessed?

Jesus calls the Pharisees hypocrites and He amazes them with His response to give back to the emperor what is his and to give to God what is God's.

Do we know the difference between what is God's and what is the World's? Jesus tells us that no one can serve two masters.

It's only when we realise the true cost of discipleship, and still choose to follow God, that the blessings and fruits of that new life in Christ become apparent and we find fulfilment in holiness.

As the Psalmist says - God will be forgiving when we keep God's decrees and turn from wrongdoing. So, let us be all-in!

## Prayers

When writing prayers, I would always consider the theme, or a situation which is affecting our circumstances. Since this month is about Tackling Poverty, I have tried to make each prayer relevant to that. We need to reach out to those in every type of poverty: economic, social, spiritual to name a few. Poverty can be because of a situation we find ourselves in, caused by crisis or loss of some kind, so no one is exempt, since we all experience this at some time or other in our lives.

While being respectful, I prefer to use straight forward everyday language, as I would when having a conversation with a loving parent or a good friend. I use ways of addressing God depending on the type of prayer e.g., loving, gracious, generous, caring ....

### **Approach**

Loving Lord, Jesus,  
we come into Your presence to worship and praise You.  
We come from different places,  
different families  
and different circumstances.

However we have come here today –  
whether the last week has been good or bad,  
whether we have known joy or sorrow,  
let us leave our cares and concerns aside  
and come united in our faith and hopes for the future.

We bring our skills and our talents which You have given us,  
and we promise to use them to help others  
and to reach out in love  
showing others what it means to be a child of God.

Help us not just to listen to Your voice but to obey.  
Help us not just to talk, but to put our words in to action,  
so that all we do is done in Your name  
Amen

### **Confession**

Gracious and merciful God,  
we are sorry that we seldom live up to Your expectations.  
We are sorry that our promise to follow Your example  
and to share Your never-ending love  
are too often promises made in vain.  
So, forgive us, Lord.

We are ashamed that we fail You so often.  
We are ashamed that we do not always follow in Your footsteps.  
We ask You to guide us and set us on the right path.  
When we are weak, make us strong.

When we are discouraged, encourage us.  
When we take for granted all You have given us  
and do not share what we have with those who live in poverty,  
forgive us, Lord.  
Remind us that everything we have comes from You  
and everything we do is done for the work  
and the glory of Your kingdom  
Amen

### **Intercession**

Lord,  
We bring to You now our prayers for others and for ourselves.  
Lord we ask that You bless and guide Your church  
here in this parish and throughout the world,  
helping us to reach out to others,  
sharing with them the good news of Christ  
and standing with those who are most in need of our help,  
love and support.

Guide us in our relationships with others,  
within our families, with friends, neighbours  
and those who we struggle to love or try to avoid.  
Fill our homes and communities with the warmth of Your love,  
may we learn to love and accept all.

Pour out Your Spirit into the world,  
bless those struggling with poverty and homelessness,  
evil and war.  
Help us to reach out to those who are in need.

Bless those who are ill at home or in hospital,  
those who are feeling anxious or low,  
feeling like they would rather just give up than live on.  
May they know Your love and sense Your presence with them  
and may we as a church  
reach out to them in their time of need.

Bless the leaders of nations and people.  
Guide them in the decisions that they make,



ensuring they work hard and fight for the people they represent.

Lord, may we always sense Your presence in our lives  
and in the lives of others.

Transform us to be the people that You would have us be.

All of this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ,  
our Lord and Saviour  
Amen

## Alternative Material

This material has been supplied by kind permission of **Spill the Beans** and allows you to explore the readings or theme of the service in creative ways that include everyone gathering for worship.

New material from Spill the Beans is provided in the latest issues available from their [website](#).

## Bible Notes

### Knowing God – [Exodus 33:12-23](#)

It is well known by scientists that human beings are pattern generating machines. It is how our brains work and it is brilliant for helping us recognise objects, and perhaps more specifically to recognise faces.

We're so good at it, that we see patterns everywhere. We might see Mother Theresa in a bun, or Jesus on a piece of toast, or we look up into the sky and recognise the preeminent Christian symbol in two dissipating contrails—and we marvel.

It is a matter of survival. We need to be able to recognise people and things, to know who we can trust, who we can rely on. And we need to be able to do it fast and instinctively.

We put so much weight behind this that a phrase such as “seeing is believing” is taken for granted. We feel so much more secure when we can see something concrete and substantial in front of us.

At first glance, this is what is going on in today's passage from Exodus. Moses is seeking the reassurance of God's presence, and that seems to be what God is offering Moses. "Don't fret, Moses, I know you and I favour you." However, there is more to it than just that.

This passage comes in a section of Exodus where, as we saw last week, Moses is interceding on behalf of the errant sinful people that he is leading. This is no easy task, and Moses is deeply frustrated with them and the ease with which they forget God and turn to other idols.

What Moses is doing here is to argue for God's presence with the people at all times. This is confused by a mis-rendering of verse 14 in many of our translations. The New Living Translation has God saying right at the start of this conversation, "I will personally go with you, Moses", thereby rendering the rest of the conversation superfluous. The Revised English Bible has it better when it has God responding to Moses, "I shall go myself..." There is no 'with' in the Hebrew text. Without it, you can understand Moses' concern that God will leave them, and Moses knows what is likely to happen then after the incident with the Golden Calf. So he keeps arguing with God.

In verse 17 Moses has success and God agrees to Moses's demands; this is truly wonderful. Moses is pushing and pushing on behalf of his people. He is pushing the Holy God to be present among the sinful Israelites, to live with them.

In Chapter 34 that follows we see Moses was right to hold out for this as the Lord speaks and proclaims his compassion and mercy when he appears in his glory. It is almost as if in this account Moses is trying to help God reveal himself and who he is to the people—a God of unending love.

Yet this mercy and forgiveness is still qualified. Moses has done an incredible job in interceding for the people, but he can't quite persuade God towards total forgiveness. That is for a later story.

How do we intercede with God on behalf of others? How can we, through our own lives, help people to understand and see God's presence?

### **Retelling for young people**

*You will need a large cloak for the storyteller to wear as they tell this story and slips of paper, pencils.*

The themes of this story are quite 'deep,' which is a challenge for retelling the story for young people, particularly the very young.

Before leading into the storytelling, ask the young people for ideas about the things they remember that God has done (or that Jesus has done – may be easier and more concrete) and add their suggestions to the slips of paper.

Ideas such as 'healing people', 'leading people', 'teaching', 'feeding 5,000', 'saving the Israelites', 'helping me', 'created the world', and so on.

Once you have a bundle of ideas, start retelling the story, wearing the cloak:

One day, Moses was speaking with God. Moses was a bit concerned with all the trouble he was having with the people and he needed God to guarantee him that God would always be with them.

God said to Moses, "Please don't worry, Moses, I will go with you and everything will be fine. I know you."

Moses asked God, "Show me that you are here now."

God answered, "I will pass in front of you, but you mustn't look at my face, because it would be too much for you. You will need to meet me on the mountain."

And so Moses climbed up the mountain to meet with God. When he got there God said, "Hide in this gap in the rocks and I will pass by, but no peeking until I am passed, then you can see me from behind.

*Walk around the room and let the slips of paper drop behind you as you continue.*

Moses did what God asked, and sure enough he saw God after he had passed by, seeing where God had been and he was reminded of all the things God had already done.

Things like...

Moses knew that God was with him and with all the people.

## Activities

### Mirrors

Put the children into pairs facing each other and then they must mirror everything that the other is doing. The first person to go can dictate the movements and the other one has to follow: it must be done slowly for the full effect. They then swap with the second person taking the lead.

This can be used both to explore how we look to others and follow them when we trust them. This is what we try to do with God as we see God through faithful people like Moses (or Jesus), to follow his example.

### Glory to the CD

*You will need: lots of CDs (ask people in the congregation for any freebies, old discs), CD marker pens, coloured tissue paper, glue, garden sticks, string, scissors.*

Give each child 3 or 4 CDs. Ask them to draw or write things about themselves on one side of CDs and cover the other side of the CDs with a collage of small pieces of tissue paper.

Provide each child with a green garden stick or straws and string so that they can make a mobile. Thread string through hole in centre of cd and tie onto stick at different lengths. This activity helps everyone to talk through the story and explore the idea that God's glory is seen in our own faces.

### Whole Glory

*You will need: large black card sheet, brightly coloured ribbon and paper, scissors, glue.*

Make a piece of installation art: make a hole in a black sheet of paper. From the back of the paper stick long strips of coloured paper ribbon. In addition use various colours of A4 sheets of paper and cut out swirls. Stick them on the back of the black sheet of paper. Bring them all through the hole and ask people to write different ways they have seen God's glory break through: loving each other, kindness, peace-making etc.

### Worship Reflection

Deep in who we are  
is who God is.

A light,  
the same light  
that lit God's eye  
when God first thought of us.

That was the imagination  
of creation,  
set free from heaven,  
and placed in our hearts,  
round which gathered soul  
which grew  
into us  
and the promise we are.  
And every so often  
when we speak of God:  
the justice that brings renewal,  
the love that births universes,  
the hope that speaks of reconciliation,  
that light  
round which soul has gathered  
flares  
and burns through the skin,  
and lights up our eyes,  
for it is alive  
and recognises  
how close the kingdom  
has come.

## **Prayers**

### **Call to worship**

'Don't look into the sun!'  
we are told,  
for the light will hurt our eyes.  
'Don't look at my face!'  
God tells Moses,  
for you will be overwhelmed.

Look at where he has been,  
look at what he has done,  
and bow down in worship,  
for the awesome God  
of Abraham, Isaac and Moses  
is present this day,

in this place.

### **Being in God's Presence**

*Place the objects mentioned in a central place or on the communion table.*

On the mountaintop  
after the wind  
after the fire  
after the silence  
you, O God

*(Open the Bible)*

By the red sea  
enemy behind  
and ocean before  
and the parting of the sea  
you, O God

*(Pour some water)*

In the garden  
just at dawn  
with the gardener  
and tears  
you, O God

*(Place a flower)*

At the table  
where crumbs fell  
but even the dogs  
feasted  
you, O God

*(Break bread)*

In this moment  
gathered here

each of us waiting  
for glory revealed  
you, O God

*(Either a handshake or light a candle)*

### **Sending**

Glory isn't light,  
glory is heavy,  
heavy enough to be shared  
in the sharing of life.

Go share God's glory  
with the world!

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### **Musical suggestions**

*You can hear samples of these suggestions in the 'Weekly Worship' section of <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/>. This new online music resource will allow you to listen to and search the breadth of music available in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4).*

*You will find hidden gems and alternative arrangements to familiar songs that will inspire creativity and spark fresh curiosity about how we best use music in worship.*

- CH4 180 – “Give Thanks With a Grateful Heart” – Expressing our adoration and thanks to God
- CH4 192 – “All My Hope on God is Founded” – Reminds us of our dependence on God
- CH4 198 – “Let Us Build A House Where Love Can Dwell” – Our response to God by inviting all into our family
- CH4 259 – “Beauty for Brokenness” – Its theme is one of intercession and petition for others

- CH4 470 – “Jesus Shall Reign Where’re the Sun” – God reigning over us
- CH4 544 – “When I Needed A Neighbour” – Challenges us to care for our neighbours regardless of creed or colour
- CH4 550 – “As the Deer Pants for The Water” – Our Response to Christ; our deep need for God can be compared to hunger and thirst
- CH4 562 – “Through the Love of God Our Saviour” – Our response to God in devotion
- CH4 724 – “Christ’s is the World in Which We Live” – Asks for wholeness and healing for our world

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