

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

Sunday 27 October 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Everisto Musedza, Minister of Cowal Kirk, for his thoughts on the 23rd Sunday 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.

Introduction.....	3
Job 42:1-6, 10-17	4
Psalm 34:1-8, 19-22.....	5
Hebrews 7:23-28.....	5
Mark 10:46-52.....	5
Sermon ideas	6
Prayers	7
Musical suggestions	9
Reflecting on our worship practice	10
Useful links	11

Introduction

The resources for the first four Sundays in October have been prepared by [Priority Area congregations](#) (those in the 5% most deprived parishes). This is a month with a particular focus on tackling poverty. October 7-13 is [Challenge Poverty Week](#); and October 17 is the United Nations' International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. We would encourage you to explore ways in which your congregation can engage in anti-poverty issues at a local level.

Once I know the scripture readings, I read them and think on them for a day or two so that I can contemplate on them. I reread them using different translations, and since I work in a Priority Area, I also want to explore what the passage might read like in different social structures. I then note the questions, emotions, and reactions that jump out for me.

I will look at a few commentaries to see what other scholars think. I then put everything together by Friday. On Saturday evening, I go through the sermon and do likewise on Sunday morning before I set off to lead worship.

The passages this week explore the struggles of ordinary people and what God offers if people cry out to God. The overarching theme in our passages is this response when people seek God.

The main actors in our passages: Job, David, and Bartimaeus, had to overcome the opinions of others to get to God. Job had lost everything he had and yet still remembered to call on God. David was facing a life-threatening situation and yet also remembered to call on God. He never doubted that God would come through for him and his description of God is enlightening. Bartimaeus had to overcome the crowds, and he too remembered to call on God.

There are many lessons for us to learn from these characters that we encounter today. Just like them, we also experience many challenges, but the question is, what do we do when we are confronted with them? Do we, like these characters, call on God – or do we rely on our own selves?

This Sunday gives us an opportunity to explore the experiences of these biblical characters and draw life-changing lessons. Lessons on what to avoid and of course lessons that we can embrace as guiding principles to respond to life's challenges.

[Job 42:1-6, 10-17](#)

Here in the last portion of this book, we encounter Job interacting with God. Job had gone through so much trouble, had lost everything, and much to his dismay no one seemed to understand what had really happened for him to suffer such tragedy. Job's friends had come along to offer him some kind of comfort, but in their quest to comfort Job, they somehow accused him of sinning and had tried so hard to have him admit his wrongdoing and seek God's forgiveness. Their concept of God was that God could never allow evil to overcome the righteous.

In all his suffering Job's understanding of God is also put to test; he had longed for an audience with God and wanted to prove his innocence. In our text we catch up with Job talking to God – finally getting the opportunity to face God and honestly share his thoughts.

In a bid to understand his struggles, Job had questioned God's dealings with him. However, when God showed up and asked Job questions, Job suddenly realises that his own righteousness is inadequate before God's holiness. God had the masterplan for his life and Job realised his understanding of God's dealings with humanity was limited.

All along Job had relied on what he had heard of God from others, but now that has changed, because not only has he heard God, but has also seen God which caused Job to admit his lack of understanding.

What is interesting is that when we call, God does answer. When we seek, God does show up. It was true for Job, and it can be true for us today.

Some questions that arise from this passage:

- Can anyone fully understand God's dealings with humanity?
- Are we prepared to listen to God?
- When we lack understanding, do we trust God?
- Why do we question God when we are experiencing difficulties?

Job's friends assume they know and understand what he was going through. But they were all wrong – they lacked an understanding of what had happened. It is sometimes the case that folk assume they know what's happening and offer solutions based on these assumptions, how (especially with regard to Priority Areas) can we be better at listening fully to the issues, and then equipping and empowering those who are facing the issues to speak and consider the appropriate responses and solutions?

Psalm 34:1-8, 19-22

This psalm was written by David when he pretended to be insane in a bid to save his life. David was running away from Saul who wanted to kill him, and he found himself before the Philistine King, Abimelech (1 Samuel 21:10-15).

In our passage we encounter David praising God for deliverance. David acknowledges the power of God in the difficult moments of life. Even though his life was in great danger, David recognised that there is an all-powerful God who hears those who call out.

We can appreciate in this passage that God pays attention to anyone who calls out, can be guaranteed help and offers way out when we love and trust the Lord.

In seeking to understand this passage, we are invited to ask, what is being promised here? What do we do when we are afraid and in trouble?

Again, we encounter the God who hears when people call – in verse 6 David called out to the Lord and the Lord heard him.

Hebrews 7:23-28

This passage clearly sets out what Jesus came to offer to those who find themselves at the margins. Jesus is described here as the permanent priest who lives forever and is the one who can meet all our needs because He lives to intercede for such needs.

Again, we see that God is more than willing to hear us if we seek an audience with God.

Mark 10:46-52

Within this context we meet a man who was blind, and one can only imagine what sort of challenges this man had because of this disability. The community had sidelined him to the margins, and reduced him to an 'insignificant other'. So when Bartimaeus called out to Jesus, they told him to be quiet because in some sense they felt this 'insignificant other' was embarrassing them and they tried all they could to stop him. Again, we see the obstacles he had to encounter to get to God.

Bartimaeus had to overcome the crowds. He had to defy those that tried hard to stop him from calling out. But when he called, Jesus heard him and answered his request.

Sermon ideas

In today's passages we see Job, after going through a lot of difficulties, finally getting an audience with God. I tend to invite people to explore difficult moments in their lives in the form of questions around how they had to deal with these situations. Job had to deal with other people's opinions. You might want to further explore ways of dealing with other people's opinions and how that can affect our views about God?

We see David expressing his views about God and what God meant to him. You might want to explore the promises and the blessings that God offers to those that call on the Lord.

It might also be interesting to compare Job's response to God and David's response. Both men were experiencing difficulties in their lives and yet their views about God are somewhat interesting.

If the setting in your worship allows for people to chat about this in pairs or small groups, this might generate interesting views on how to respond to difficulties.

In Mark we encounter blind Bartimaeus, who again had to call out to God for attention. Explore the obstacles that he had to overcome to get Jesus' attention. Mark calls him 'blind' Bartimaeus to tell us and remind us of his hopelessness.

Invite those gathered to think about the challenges to people who have to overcome obstacles to be seen and heard. Further explore the complications that people experience in Priority Areas as they try to find a voice. Some questions might be:

- Can people freely express themselves in our worshipping spaces?
- What might be the obstacles?
- What are some of the assumptions that we have about Priority Areas?
- What good can come out of our area/Priority Areas, where others may perceive it to be lacking?
- How might we hear and share stories from Priority Areas to better understand their experiences?
- Do we care enough to listen to these stories, or just like Job's friends, do we assume we know why people are where they are at?
- Bartimaeus had to shout over the crowds to be heard. In what ways do we identify – or not – with Bartimaeus in our own context?
- How do we help or hinder people struggling to be heard?

As we can see in all our passages, the main characters do call on God and God answers. I would normally try and incorporate the theme in my all-age talk. So think about moments in which those around have called out for help and they did not get it. Ask them to share how they felt and then explore the feelings and reactions when they called and were heard. This might just help setting the scene.

Prayers

I tend to use the experiences of members of the congregation and the community that I have visited during the week as my guide to gauge where the congregation is at. This helps shape and formulate my prayers. I also use the scripture passages that we will be reading that Sunday to help inform the content of my prayers.

Call to worship

Feeling overwhelmed –
Come, for the Lord is here.

Surrounded with anguish and feeling trapped –
Come, for the Lord is here.

Confused and not sure where to turn to –
The Lord is here.

Call, and the Lord will answer.

Let us call together as we worship.

Adoration/Confession/Repentance

All-knowing God, the Creator of all things
we come before the throne of grace to worship You.

We acknowledge that You can do all things and no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.
You deliver us from fear,
You listen when we call,
You save us from all our troubles.
Today we come because You have invited us to come.
Our lips declare Your praise,
and we have come to exalt Your name together.

Lord, we confess that on many occasions we have failed to call on You.
We have trusted our own strength and failed to give You Your place.
Forgive our stubbornness.
Lord, we ask that You change and renew us.
In Jesus' name we pray and ask these things. Amen

Thanksgiving /Gratitude

God, we give You thanks for the gift of life and for the gift of family and friends.
We give You thanks for Your provisions and for Your guidance in our lives.
We are grateful for the many moments in our lives when we have called on Your name
and You have answered us.
Just as You heard Job, David and Bartimaeus when they called upon Your name,
we know too well that You will continue to hear our prayers.

Thank You for Your faithfulness.
Amen

Prayers for others/Intercession

God who hears when people call out to You,
hear our prayers for others.

We pray for the Church, that it may be Your hands and feet in our communities.

We ask that You stir the hearts of those in positions of authority to make provisions that
seek to address inequalities.
Help governments to end poverty and repression.

We call on You today to hear the prayers of those that are afflicted, in need or oppressed.
We ask that You hear our prayers for the vulnerable members of our society,
that they may find support and care.

We ask that individuals and families struggling to deal with financial challenges may find
help and aid.

We pray for the needs of our communities in which we live and serve.
Comfort for those who are mourning the passing of loved ones.
Help us to make a space to call home for those that are lonely.
We pray for those who feel overwhelmed, that they may find rest in You.

In silence we bring to You our concerns and the concerns of those dear to us.

[Hold a time of silence]

We offer all these prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen

Blessing/closing prayer

Go out in the God's strength.

Go and serve those struggling.

Go and make a difference in your home, family and in your community.

The God who knows and hears all is forever with you both now and forever. 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 27 – “I will always bless the lord” – This is Psalm 34, so it can help bring the psalm alive again by singing it and then later hear it being read.
- CH4 196 – “Come, now is the time to worship” – I see this hymn as an invitation to call on God. It sets the scene for people gathered to cry out to God.

- CH4 198 – “Let us build a house where love can dwell” – This hymn for me helps compliment the struggles and issues raised in our scripture readings. When people are struggling, they tend to look for a place where they are welcomed.
- CH4 350 – “When Jesus the healer passed through Galilee” – Verse 4 of the hymn captures the story of Bartimaeus as he cried out to God.
- CH4 351 – “Jesus’ hands were kind hands, doing good to all” – “The healing of Bartimaeus demonstrates the kindness of Jesus. This hymn just reemphasises just that.
- CH4 547 – “What a friend we have in Jesus” – Since the theme in our passages today was all about calling out to God. This hymn encourages and challenges us just to do that.

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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