

Sixth Sunday of Easter – Year A

Sixth Sunday of Easter – 14 May 2023

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Rt Rev Dr Iain Greenshields, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, for his thoughts on hope in this time of change, and Very Rev Colin Sinclair for the use of his archive material from 2020 for the lectionary passages for the sixth Sunday of Easter.

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.

At the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2022, the Faith Nurture Forum were asked to: *Call the Church to pray, and instruct the Forum to produce prayer resources to encourage and equip people to pray for the future well-being, peace and revival of the Church.*

We have asked people from across the Church to write prayers to help us respond to this call. Their prayers reflect the range of different voices across the Church of Scotland, and offer a variety of prayer styles that can be used in public worship, church gatherings and meetings, or in your own personal prayer rhythm.

[These prayers can be found](#) along with the rest of the May Weekly Worship materials.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the [Sanctuary First website](#).

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 and biblical reflections on hope in this time of change.....	4
Archive material – Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year A	11
Musical suggestions	19
Reflecting on our worship practice	20
Useful links	21

Introduction and biblical reflections on hope in this time of change

In Hebrews 11 we read: “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see”.

All three of the passages I have chosen today speak about the theme of hope in different but complementary ways.

For the Psalmist, hope is to be found in the unfailing love of God – something that is expressed through God’s faithfulness, righteousness and justice.

Zechariah expresses hope in the fact of the Lord’s passionate love for Jerusalem and that despite all the odds and everything that seems to the contrary, this small and discouraged remnant of God’s people will be restored and rescued – the people are to get on with rebuilding the Temple in hope.

The passage in Revelation speaks to us of ultimate hope – the hope of the resurrection followed by the restoration, in perfection of all things.

There are three important observations for us to follow through on:

- The concept of hope, in the New Testament in particular, bears no relationship to our modern idea of hope in the sense of wishful thinking or simply having a hopeful outlook on life. Hope in the Bible is the certain expectation of what God will bring about.
- The Lord our God – in the unique activities of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – lies at the heart of all of the future promises of the Bible. Hope is not therefore dependent on who we are or what we do, but upon who God is [as Father, Son and Holy Spirit] and what has been planned in eternity and will be brought to pass in time.
- God’s promises have been unveiled, which we see in part through Jesus’ incarnation and perfect life, the cross, the resurrection and ascension – partly seen in the establishing of the Church; Christ’s Body, sealed and secured by the Holy Spirit and finally, what will be brought to pass in resurrection power, when we and all things are made new.

We therefore establish, in different ways in these three passages from the Psalms, Zechariah and Revelation, the living, current and future certainty in hope of all that God will be and do.

[Psalm 36:5-10](#)

Imagine condensing this passage down to a newspaper headline: **“God’s Unfailing Love”**

In contrast to the list of transgressions of ‘the wicked’, described in verses 1-4, God is described in the following terms:

- Unfailing in love that is indescribably vast
- Great in faithfulness
- Strong in righteousness
- Dependable in justice
- Caring deeply about all creation
- Despite all, God shows mercy to, and looks after all
- Fountain of life

The passage concludes with a prayer, to “Pour out your unfailing love” (v10, NLT), and to put an end to unrighteousness.

Returning to our news headline, our confidence is not in who we are or what we can become, but who the Lord is and will always be. This does not excuse unrighteous acts or ways of living, but is the foundation for change, because only in God is renewal possible because God is the constant in whom and from whom all goodness is possible.

[Zechariah 8:1-13](#)

Imagine another newspaper headline: **“Rebuild the Temple”**

Humanly speaking the situation might seem impossible – perfectly captured in verse 6: “This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says: All this may seem impossible to you now, a small remnant of God’s people. But is it impossible for me? says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.” (NLT)

This passage was written about 520BC, when Darius 1 was King of Persia. The Hebrews had returned from a long captivity to the land of Israel and it can be said that they were small in number; relatively poor; apathetic and feeling hopeless; and feeling that their situation is impossible.

Two prophetic figures are sent by God – Haggai and Zechariah, to encourage the people to start rebuilding the Temple – the visible place of worship to Yahweh [the Lord] – and they

were later followed by Ezra and Nehemiah. The people are encouraged to see the unseen – to exercise living hope.

What then, is the fundamental lesson that the people of God have to learn in this situation? First of all, they have to hear from the Lord, that God has a “passion” to restore what is broken (v2). Secondly, they need to grasp that what seems impossible to them is possible for the Lord Almighty [the Lord of Heavens Armies]. Third, it is important for them to grasp by faith that God is at work – “planting seeds of prosperity and peace among you” – God is filling out their deficit (v12).

Finally, they are encouraged against all odds, not to be afraid or discouraged and to go on rebuilding the Temple.

One wonders what fundamental lessons this has for us today in contemporary Scotland? Perhaps it is “Not by our power but by God’s”? We are called to grasp the nettle by moving forward in faith into a new/renewed future.

[Revelation 21:22-22:5](#)

A headline for this passage might read: “**Evil Gone Forever**”

Wishful thinking or concrete reality? What is described in Revelation that brings us to this place of confidence? How can we have such confidence that these things will come to pass?

First of all, we have to examine the whole of the message of the Book of Revelation, which depicts Father, Son and Holy Spirit as absolutely sovereign. It is almost as if a curtain is pulled back and we see behind the scenes, revealing that evil is in its death throes and that human capacity to direct the world purposefully and well is an unrealistic dream – this is something only God can do. In taking us behind the curtain we see that:

- The Cross of Christ fundamentally pays a price that none other could and that our hope is fully rooted in all that was achieved there for us.
- The resurrection of Jesus did not just *bring* eternal life – it swallowed up death in victory, and *guaranteed* eternal life.
- Evil is in its death throes and knows it – it is on borrowed time and Satan is already under the irresistible judgment of God.
- Human society will be renewed fully and forever when the Son, in His gracious, perfect love, comes to reign.

All the above and even more powerful images are found in Revelation. So when we come to the passage before us today we see there is no longer the need for physical buildings as places of worship because, “The glory of God illuminates the city and the lamb is its light!” (v24, NLT) Can you think of anything more glorious?

But there is more:

- The nations will walk in this light
- The rulers of the world will submit to this light
- Nothing evil will be permitted to exist
- There will be a perfect healing of everyone and everything
- There will be no curse, illness, death, corruption, disruption
- This will be forever

Again, this is no mere wishful thinking, because it is rooted in the works of Christ and the nature and character of God who will exert irresistible authority to make and maintain all things new. Just in case we dare suggest that this might make us “so heavenly minded that we will be of no earthly use”, perhaps we ought to consider that by not focussing our attention on these things we are diminished.

Sermon ideas

A headline that dovetails all these passages might be: **“I am in control – trust me,” says the Lord**

A friend of mine was going into hospital for a major operation. I asked how she was feeling and she admitted to being very anxious. “I find it very hard to hand over the control of my whole life to another person, no matter how skilled I know them to be.”

I got it! After many operations myself, some of them major, I understood how difficult it is to trust enough, to relinquish control – even if it means that I will be significantly better as the end result.

In Psalm 36 the Psalmist is at pains to point out how much better life in the community would be if people only trusted God enough to forsake the path they were on and chose instead to be more like the Lord.

Zechariah points out the deficit of faith leading to apathy in the lives of the returned Hebrews – they could not see through the eyes of faith that God was at work, or that their

immediate circumstances were not impossible in God's eyes, nor did they grasp that God was already sowing seeds of renewal. They were requested to get on with the job in hand – rebuilding – and entrust their circumstances to God.

Might this be a call to repentance, whatever that might imply for us, and a call to relinquish apathy and despair? Are we being urged to trust that God is calling us to rebuild not just our buildings, but our faith that Christ is at the heart of our society?

Finally, might it also be the case that we need to take seriously a greater concentration on our future hope – not looking to current political trends to save the world, but looking to the One who alone can and will fix what is deeply broken, while at the same time in our communities living out deep faith and hope so that we see – “thy Kingdom, come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Prayers

Gathering Prayer

We welcome You,

Father, Lord Jesus and Gracious Holy Spirit.

We are grateful that it is Your desire to be with and among Your people.

We recognise that You are here to enrich our faith and deepen our relationship with You.

Your desire is to help us, guide, us and direct us.

You want the very best for us.

Thank You for this moment of grace for all gathered here today

Prayer of confession

Too often we have failed You in thought, word and deed

Forgive us our sins

Forgive us for being unforgiving – especially when we have been forgiven so much.

Forgive us for those moments when we have been lazy and thoughtless.

Forgive us those moments when we could have made a positive difference but chose indifference.

Forgive us our sins

Help us to change – to use all of the resources You have given to us through Scripture, the Spirit, the Church.

Enable us to love when love is difficult.

Encourage us to try and put right the wrongs we have done – especially historic wrongs in our lives.

Fill us with Your Spirit and Wisdom, and a deeper love for all

Prayer of thanksgiving

We give thanks for one another;
for the Church, the Body of Christ, of which we are all a part.

We thank You, Almighty God,
for Your great gift of salvation,
planned from all eternity and brought to fruition in Christ.

We thank You for the love that governs everything You do,
so freely given to all of Your people.

We thank You for Your presence,
especially in our most difficult and challenging times of life.

Gracious Lord, we give You thanks

For the opportunity to serve You, and the honour of being Your people,
we give You thanks.

For the world and glorious universe in which we are privileged to live,
we give You thanks.

For the little graces we receive each day, which so often we take for granted,
we give You thanks.

For the gift of life, the gift of grace, the promise of eternal life and the renewal of all things
Lord God, for all of Your gracious benefits, we give You thanks

Prayers of intercession

Gracious God,
we are thankful You hear our concerns –
that You are deeply aware of the concerns of our hearts

If our concern is for the world and its people, Yours is deeper still,
Lord, teach us how to pray and what to pray for.

We think of our world, broken in so many places
[name places that you wish to pray for, e.g., in your community, nationally and internationally]

Broken places, yet so many more besides.

For those working to bring peace, reconciliation, hope and healing
in all the broken places of our world,
strengthen them, we pray –
encourage them, fill them with hope and resilience.

We know that You love this world You have created –
forgive us for causing such damage and catastrophe to such a beautiful place.

Strengthen the resolve in those who are fighting for Earth's future and climate change .

You have asked us to pray for those who serve as leaders in our nation –
we pray for the UK Government at Westminster,
the Welsh Assembly and Stormont in Northern Ireland and the Scottish Government.
Grant wisdom, grace, love and vision to all who serve as our leaders.

We pray for all who serve in local government
and the burden they have to use what resources they are given to care for local society –
may they be granted wisdom, grace, love and vision.

You, know the many who grieve through various forms of losses.
In their sorrow and loss, speak words of compassion and restoration,
either directly through Your Spirit or through human agency –
bring comfort especially to the dying.

Lord God, You have placed your Church strategically on earth
to be light and salt to the earth
and to bring the good news of our Lord Jesus, Crucified and Risen, to all people.
Strengthen our resolve, faith and confidence
to be Your Church and to speak powerfully in Your name.
And the earth shall be full of the glory of the Lord

Musical suggestions

- CH4 395 – “What wondrous love is this” – Appalachian Hymn 1867
- CH4 549 – “How deep the Father's love for us” – Townend
- CH4 706 – “For the Healing of the Nations” – Fred Kaan
- CH4 738 – “Glorious things of thee are spoken” – John Newton

- “The Lord’s my Shepherd” – preferably Townend version
<https://songselect.ccli.com/Songs/1585970/psalm-23>
- “In Christ Alone” – Getty and Townend
<https://songselect.ccli.com/Songs/3350395/in-christ-alone>

Archive material – Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year A

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Very Rev Colin Sinclair, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, for the use of this archive material from 2020.

Introduction

Repeatedly throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testament, is the call, “Do not fear, I am with you.” In the readings for this Sunday that reality is described both in terms of the transcendence of God – who is present everywhere – and in terms of the imminence of God – who is with us where we are. However, God is no attention-seeking showman. Sometimes we have to look hard for God and sometimes we have to trust that God is there when we are tempted to think otherwise. Nor is the promise that “God is with us” an insurance policy against pain, or a talisman against misfortune. Rather God is with us in our pain and present even when life goes against us.

Our understanding of God is framed by the revelation of God to us in Jesus Christ. His suffering and death help us to believe that God understands what we face. His resurrection is the anchor on which we depend, believing that suffering, evil and even death, do not have the last word. Everything now has to be evaluated in the light of the Easter events. Our view of Jesus, our understanding of God, our need of forgiveness and our future hope, revolve around that weekend that shook the world.

We have a message to proclaim. We have a model to imitate. We have a promise to trust. Suffering can be redemptive. Judgment is in safe hands. We have not been left destitute. That is quite enough to aid us in our preparation to lead worship for this coming Sunday!

My approach is to read the passage in context and see where it leads. I then try and describe what I have found. I also try and pick up common themes as I go through each passage and bring them out where appropriate. I am always happy to be surprised when the passage takes me in a different direction from what I had originally imagined.

Acts 17:22-31

Paul's sermon on the Areopagus is quite different from other sermons in Acts. This is because Paul targets the message to his audience and wants to connect with them as far as possible. Paul is speaking to Gentiles not Jews, Gentiles who enjoy intellectual discussion and speculation.

As so often, Paul begins with a word of praise to get them on side. They are so religious that as well as having shrines to all the gods that they know, they also even have a shrine "to an unknown god," to make sure they leave no-one out. Paul's point is that for all their devotion and religion, they are limited in their knowledge and understanding of God.

Paul has come to fill in the gap and to share with them what God has revealed to him. Behind the plethora of gods stands the one Living God, the creator and sustainer of life, who is above all gods and is not dependent on our service. God is not territorial, having made all nations and so is God over all. God's longing is that all creatures would turn and seek their Creator. To reinforce this argument, Paul recognises and respects their culture by citing from it a quotation from the 6th century BC poet Epimenides of Cnossos in Crete: *For 'in him we live and move and have our being'*

To think that God could be an image made by human hands, however skilfully formed, is laughable. So the time has come for them to change their mind set and re-orientate their lives (i.e. repent). The clock is ticking and one day they will be held accountable for the choices they make, the worship they offer and the lives they lead. That judgement will be made by Jesus who revealed His divine power by conquering death and by God raising Jesus from the dead.

There were different reactions to Paul's sermon – scornful dismissal, awakened curiosity and a few who came to a living faith. Preaching still produces a variety of responses.

Psalm 66:8-20

The Psalmist calls on the people to praise God. Life had not been easy (how often that is true) but God had not abandoned them. There were some tense moments, when the people being tested almost slipped, but God's hand was there to steady them. Even at their darkest points God did not abandon them. There are so many points of their history where this could be true, with the Exodus and the Exile being the supreme examples. When life is tough we can either turn to God in trust or turn from God in despair or bitterness.

The response to deliverance should always be gratitude and worship. Having called on God to help, it is only right and proper to make time to express thanks when such help is forthcoming. The worship will include an appropriate thank offering sacrifice. We do not offer sacrifices now, as was done in the psalmist's time, but we can offer both the sacrifice of praise (for real worship should cost us something) and we should also be willing to present our bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2). One of the marks of authentic faith is that it is not just an add-on, but a choice that others can see costs us something.

Finally, the psalmist invites others to gather round and hear the story of their faithful God. The psalmist had to consciously choose God over sin, but it was a decision they never regretted. God had listened to their prayer and had answered them; and in so doing had confirmed God's love. Such grace is always deserving of our worship and praise.

1 Peter 3:13-22

It sometimes is hard to make sense of God when life is tough. The Early Church was no stranger to suffering. Normally when you do the right thing then all is well. But sometimes even when you do the right thing, nothing you do can satisfy those who want to make life hard for you. Never forget whose you are and in whose hands you are held. Trust in God is a powerful antidote to fear of others. Our response in the face of such injustice is not to respond tit for tat, but in a fully Christian way, to testify to your trust that Jesus is Lord.

The way you speak, as well as what you say, matters. Your tone can support or undermine the truth you wish to share. Gentleness and respect are often missing from today's 'outraged generation,' but they are more powerful influencers than they appear. Even those who deliberately seek to undermine will find, despite themselves, that such a response challenges them as to their own attitude. So keep your conscience clear and let your words be winsome.

As a Christian we follow a Saviour who suffered unjustly, so it should not be a surprise if we also suffer. However Christ's mission was clear; He came to bear our sins, to die in our place to reconcile us to God.

The last part of our passage has been the subject of great speculation and a range of interpretations. Let me simply say that the writer wants to show that Jesus, who is Lord over all, is Lord over the living and the dead, that there are no 'no go' areas. Nothing is deemed out of bounds to Him. As Paul says: "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11). For the baptised Christian we

face not judgement but salvation as we make our stand with Christ. We trust that as He conquered death so we, with Him, will be raised to newness of life now and life everlasting hereafter.

[John 14:15-21](#)

The setting for this is the Upper Room on the night of Jesus' betrayal and arrest. Though Jesus was aware of the gathering storm and as we will see in Gethsemane, shrank from it, still, in obedience, He faced it. Yet here, when he most needed support, Jesus is found once more giving out to comfort His friends, the disciples.

Though Jesus would shortly be leaving them, He would not be abandoning them. In His place would come "another," (word used means "another of the same kind"). He is "Jesus' other self." In fact, whereas Jesus could be only in one place at a time in the flesh, by His Spirit, Jesus could be with all His followers all the time; and not simply alongside them but within them. As an advocate, the Holy Spirit would defend them and give them the words to say in their own defence. The Spirit would be a helper to strengthen them, a presence to support them and a guide to lead them in the way of truth. The Holy Spirit would overcome their ignorance and their forgetfulness, by leading them into the truth and by reminding them of what they have learned.

The paradox of Jesus' presence is that:

- Jesus will be absent, but present
- Jesus will be hidden, yet visible
- Jesus will be dead, yet alive

The paradox of their future is that:

- They would not be orphans, but adopted
- They would belong, for God is their Father
- They would be secure, for Jesus will never leave them
- They would be loved, and loving leads to knowing

Far from being orphans without any family, they would become part of a world-wide family. Many testify to the sense of connection they find meeting Christians whom they have never met before, even across cultural and language barriers. Without spelling it out, Jesus hints that though for the world the cross would be the last time He was seen in public, for the disciples the seven weeks of rich resurrection appearances would be the hope they would hang on to in the years that followed.

However, the mark of discipleship would be shown in the obedience of faith, a continuing commitment to follow Jesus wherever He led them. This will show whether their professed love for Him is authentic or not, but in such living they will know God's love and understand better God's love for them, both that of the Father and Son.

Sermon ideas

The most common form of Psalm is the lament, yet too often we shrink from it in our worship. In practice, for many people life is tough. We need to find ways of being able to express that, while still hanging on to our faith. For the psalmist, the disciples and the Early Church, the life of faith was a challenge and sometimes seemed to go against the evidence. Thankfully, our faith is not set against a triumphant warrior who would seem distant from our experience, but a crucified Saviour who knows only too well what we are going through. In such moments we are called, to look back and remember what God has done, both in history and in Christ. We are called to look up and remember who God is, our creator and redeemer. We are called to look forward and believe that in the end God will triumph, for love is stronger than hate, truth is stronger than lies and life is stronger than death.

Prayers

Prayer of approach and confession

Eternal and ever-blessed God,
we give You thanks
for the joy that comes
when we gather to worship together
and are truly united as the people of God.

We thank You for the family of faith,
united in our desire to follow Jesus.
Thank You for those with whom we have laughed.
who have made this world a more cheery place.
Thank You for those with whom we have wept
and we have shared our sorrows
in our times of need.
We bless You for those we have served alongside
sharing together in a common task,
whose support has made the work more manageable.
We bless You for those who have shared our dreams
and pursued our visions,

as partners in a common purpose,
working to an agreed goal.

Thank You for those with whom we worship together,
for those with whom we pray together,
for those in whose company
we have listened to Your voice
and sought to see You face to face.

Forgive us for everything that has interrupted
the companionship we should enjoy:
for selfishness that made us want nothing
but our own way,
for intolerance which made us see nothing
but our own point of view,
for self-assertiveness that made us seek to impose
our own will upon others.
Have mercy, good Lord.

Forgive us for arguments in which we lost our temper,
for discussions in which bitter words
and sarcastic comments were thrown about,
for things we said in the heat of the moment
and now bitterly regret.
Have mercy, good Lord.

So cleanse and purify us, that in the days to come
we will work to live in unity with one another
because we are one in Christ.
Hear this our prayer
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Offertory prayer

Living God

You have given us life and breath and all that we have.
We have nothing to give to You
except what we have received from You.
So, with these offerings,
given in this and other ways,

help us to dedicate to You
all that we have and are,
so that You may have what is indeed Your own,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Prayers of intercession

Let us take our weariness and tiredness to God
who picks up those who have fallen
and raises up those who are brought low
Bless those, good Lord,
who are bowed down
under the burdens they must carry.
We pray for those who are crushed by their responsibilities at work
and those who feel the pain of our world,
who marvel that others can seem so indifferent to it.
Help them to keep on going.
Bring supportive friends alongside them.
Give them tokens of Your grace,
fresh vision and courage
and signs of encouragement in their struggle.

Let us take our loneliness to God,
who delights to put the solitary into families.
God our Father,
bless those who are lonely
those who have grown old
and whom the passing years have taken
all their friends and contemporaries.
Bless those who are shy,
who find it hard to initiate conversation
and have never known real friendships.
We pray for strangers in a foreign land,
for asylum seekers and refugees,
separated by language and culture
from familiar ways and much loved customs.
We remember all those
who even in the midst of crowds feel alone.

Help the Church, we pray,
to be a place of acceptance and belonging,
a place of welcome and inclusion,
where all can find a home,
a listening ear, a friendly smile and a helping hand.
Let us take our sorrows to God,
who binds up the broken-hearted
and comforts those who mourn.
Bless those whose hearts are sore today.
Be very close to those
whose family circle has been invaded
and whose joy has been darkened by death.
We remember those who have lost loved ones
for whom they have cared,
whose needs they have met,
whose lives have been so intertwined
that they still listen for a voice
they will not hear again.

We remember wives who have lost husbands
and husbands who have lost wives;
parents who have lost children,
who find their homes strangely silent and empty now
and children who have lost parents,
who are confused by a world that seems
less secure and more frightening than before
and all who for whom
familiar places, and sounds and smells
awaken memories that bring tears in their wake.
Thank You for our faith.
May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

Let us turn to God in trust
and recommit ourselves to God.
Send us forth this day
with the joy that no-one can take from us,
the life which is Your life
and the hope that gives strength to our actions.
Help us to sing of our faith

and in that singing find our strength to go on,
trusting in Jesus who lived among us,
died for us and rose again
and who prays for us today,
even as we pray to Him.
In His name we pray
Amen

Musical suggestions

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.

Psalms

- CH4 87 Psalm 130 – “Lord from the depths to thee I cried”
- CH4 97 Psalm 139 – “O God you search me and you know me”

Acts

- CH4 132 – “Immortal, Invisible God only wise”
- CH4 143 – “Who put the colours in the rainbow”
- CH4 181 – “For the beauty of the earth”
- CH4 694 – “Brother, Sister, let me serve you”

John

- CH4 586 – “Come Holy Ghost our hearts inspire”
- CH4 593 – “She sits like a bird”
- CH4 595 – “O Breath of life”
- CH4 596 – “Breathe on me, breath of God”
- Mission Praise 50 – “Be still”
- Mission Praise 664 – “The Spirit lives to set us free”

Peter

- CH4 147 – “All creatures of our God and King”
- CH4 512 – “To God be the glory”
- CH4 634 – “Word of the Father”
- CH4 710 – “I have a dream”

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’.
- While singing in our congregations is still 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

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 can be found [here](#)

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](#)

You are free to download, project, print and circulate multiple copies of any of this material for use in worship services, bible studies, parish magazines, etc., but reproduction for commercial purposes is not permitted.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.