

Third Sunday after Epiphany – Year C

Sunday 26 January 2025

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Stuart Davidson, Pioneer Minister and Interim Moderator, Paisley North Church, for his thoughts on the third Sunday after Epiphany.

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

As we journey with the readings of Year C, I wanted to share with you my current practice, which I've grown into for weekly preparation. In preparing for Sunday worship, I've often found it helpful in my activities in the week leading up to the Sunday to read the texts, getting them into my heart and mind first, so that I might recognise what our Lord would want me to focus on. In the week leading up to the Sunday, I often find myself using the same texts for other gatherings: in care homes, home communion visits, the Wednesday Drop-In and the Friday after school club. When the bible texts for these groups are planned in advance, I find insights and illustrations arise from them, as well as my own bible readings and prayers, which can help to reinforce Sunday's message, and vice versa.

I read the texts at least twice at the beginning of the week, allowing them to take root, and once I've chosen two of them, I focus upon the all-age sharing time, which is often the gospel passage introducing the theme, reinforcing and developing it, along with the second passage later in the service. This allows me to use a different method of preaching for the same purpose. Over the course of the years the lectionary can be both thematic in nature whilst also being expository and this offers the best of both worlds as a preacher.

The call to worship, prayers and benediction are based upon what's gone before in the service, as I usually approach these at the end of my all-age and sermon preparation. This gives me space to add in matters relating to current or sudden events, with the Psalms being a good help for these elements as I relate the biblical texts to our worship as a whole.

I usually turn to commentaries after I've gone through the chosen texts, firstly comparing gospels, passages, using the reference verses in my Bible, which sometimes lead me to other passages, especially when focusing upon a particular verse or group of verses. Commentaries seem to solidify the context of the text, giving me some history, insights to places or meanings and understanding that can be shared.

It's important to hear the message for myself first before preaching to others. Then I ask for help to find illustrations and life stories that connect the passage(s) with today. Throughout the service I use spaces of silence as well.

The choosing of hymns and songs sometimes comes easily, sometimes not, especially when an "Order of Service" is wanted earlier in the week. At such times I tend to choose hymns and songs based upon the chosen texts.

[Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10](#)

The first return of the people from captivity in Babylon to rebuild the temple took place in the days of Zerubbabel (Haggai and Zechariah). The second return, in the days of Ezra, involved rebuilding the temple and the community. Nehemiah led the third return of the Jews to rebuild the city walls and to reform and revive the people. Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries.

For context, the chapters leading up to this passage provide us with a snapshot of Nehemiah, God's layman, who took up the burden of prayer and through his actions played his part in bringing to pass the purposes of God. Despite the challenges, Nehemiah was willing to persevere with God's help and in this chapter he works alongside Ezra, who has been called to step out of obscurity for the first time in the book.

Both servants of God had what David Bosch, in his book *Transforming Mission* (1) calls 'creative tension', something we may also describe as 'a holy discomfort'. In their inward wrestling, both knew that God was asking something of them that required faith and action together. In the same book Bosch speaks of 'Mission as Church-with-Others' (2). I'd suggest that both themes could be unpacked whilst reflecting briefly upon the previous seven chapters of the book and focusing upon the content of the earlier part of chapter 8. The walls had been completed, the structure reformed and now it was time for the people to be revived as Ezra steps forward to undertake his part in the purposes of God. The group of the willing also play their part in using their gifts, creativity, and talents in their own places of opportunity to usher in the Kingdom of God in a fresh way.

Ezra brings God's book to the people, who have gathered as "one" (men, women, and children), all gathered to actively listen to God's word being read aloud. The broken walls are repaired, now is the time for broken people to experience the hand of the great physician who, through the reading and hearing of the word, brings spiritual revival to the nation.

Time passes unnoticed 'as a mood of rare responsiveness' (3) comes upon the people as they drink in the word of God, standing just inside the Water Gate. Worship and a 'royal reception' (4) are given to the great God and His word as is it read aloud. All ages weep as their hearts are melted in response, producing the fruit of worship, joy, and the confession of sins in chapter 9, which may be touched on.

Finally, in verse 8, we read of the word of God being explained using 'oral translation, as the law was written in Hebrew and the people in exile had adopted Aramaic as the language of

daily life' (5). How can we, with God's help, unpack the Bible text in everyday language so that we all might understand and apply it to our lives?

[1] Bosch, David, J. (1996) Transforming Mission, New York: Orbis Books, p82.

[2] Bosch, David, J. (1996) Transforming Mission, New York: Orbis Books, p368.

[3] Kidner, Derek (1979) Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Ezra and Nehemiah Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, p104.

[4] Kidner, Derek (1979) Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Ezra and Nehemiah Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, p105.

[5] Good News Bible, (1976), (Footnoteⁿ), p487.

Psalm 19

David is the author of this psalm, which includes meditations on God's creation, God's word, sinfulness, forgiveness, and God's character.

God's creation

The Psalmist writes that God is to be seen in all the splendour of creation. This psalm is beautiful in its praise of God as revealed in the natural world. David sees God at work, he sees God's glory in the recurring events of each day. He calls out to us to look upwards to the sky and see the delight of the sun, like "a happy bridegroom" and an "eager athlete" as it moves across the sky, with its heat radiating to the ends of the earth. In all of this we see something of the character of God who creates all things.

God's word

David then goes on to speak of God's word, the law of the Lord, that also testifies to God's greatness and majesty. As God's word is spoken of David uses reflective language, for example: (v7) the law of the Lord is perfect (therefore) it gives new strength, the commands of the Lord are trustworthy (therefore) giving wisdom to those who lack it (Good News Translation). This tool continues through to the end of verse 9.

David holds God's word in high esteem: its beauty is also to be praised and cherished, it's more desirable than the finest gold. Just as a miser earnestly desires and covets gold to enrich their pocket, so too the Christian desires the law and word of the Lord. The person who listens to and obeys God's word finds themselves rich beyond words. David shows this in the language and images he uses in these verses: perfect, trustworthy, giving wisdom, right, just, fair, sweeter than honey. Like a light to the soul God's word, like the sun proves that nothing can be hidden from its rays as it causes soul and spirit to reflect upon oneself and one's lifestyle.

David's (and humankind's) sinfulness and God's forgiveness

God's law is also portrayed as something that brings us to repentance, making us aware of our sinfulness. God's law is not just a set of rules to obey. The law of the Lord makes us wise and holy, like the One who declares it. David asks that the Lord deliver him from hidden faults, from blind spots that he cannot see. He's suggesting that we should not just be concerned with wilful transgressions, but also the sins we do without being aware of them. David makes the claim that detecting sin in himself is amazingly difficult to do. "Hidden faults" are lurking unseen, and so David prays a heartfelt cry in verse 13, asking not only for deliverance, but accepting God's invitation to turn from self-reliance towards the one who is characterised as a refuge and a redeemer, who is willing to answer David's prayer and who will lead and direct God's people.

[1 Corinthians 12:12-31a](#)

Having established the Church in Corinth during his second missionary journey, Paul writes again to the mainly gentile believers during his third round of travels. It is believed that three letters were written to the Corinthian Church, with this book being the second of these. Corinth had a seaport and was a major trading centre at this time, with all the problems and questions that a young church might face when faced with the culture and challenges of their setting. Paul writes to the believers, offering solutions and teaching as to how they might live out their faith united as Christ's body. He begins the letter (v10) facing head-on the question of division and unity within the Church. He wants the church body to work out how they might grow in Christ whilst working through the tensions that were arising.

In chapter 11, Paul offers instruction on public worship, dealing with the issue of unity, as it related to the believers acting inappropriately during the worship service. In verses 1-11 of chapter 12, Paul touches on the diversity of spiritual gifts within the Church. However, he continues to speak about unity, demonstrating that it is the same Spirit who gives, the same Lord who is served, the same God who gives gifts for the good of All.

Paul deals with the diversity of gifts in no particular order and continues in today's verses to speak of the diversity of the people who are united in the One body of Christ. As I read the verses from 12 to 31a, various phrases and words leapt out – for example, the purposes of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the body of believers, as well as the role and purpose of the believers playing their "one part", forming "many" and "different parts" in that One body of Christ.

When I reflect on this passage, I find myself thinking of Paul's words to the Church in Rome (Romans 12:3-8) where he says: "We have many parts in the one body, and all have different functions. In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of the body".

When looking at the Body of Christ, I reflect upon other biblical images used to describe the people of God, such as a bride, a building/house, a field, a living temple, and the body of Christ. These images can act like a jigsaw, helping to build up a picture of what the Church of Jesus looks like, with each person having a responsibility within the body. Paul goes on to question the validity of the voices who only want to be heard as saying, "I don't need", instead of caring for each other and selflessly and lovingly playing their part in the body, working towards God's purposes.

[Luke 4:14-21](#)

In the preceding chapters Luke has led his listeners through Jesus' birth narratives and his baptism whilst affirming Jesus' lineage, traced beyond King David to Adam, to show his readers that Jesus is related to all human beings.

Unlike this weekend's celebrations around Robert Burns and his words, here we're given more reason to celebrate the identity and works of Jesus. He has overcome the temptations of the devil, unlike Adam and Eve, who fell to temptation through that first sin. Jesus, however, defeats the enemy, quoting the word of God and returns to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus returns to His boyhood home of Nazareth, where it was His custom to go to synagogue. He returned to what was a well-known place amongst well-known people. For Him things had changed, for them, as Mark points out in his account (Mark 6:1-6), they thought of Him as the same old, same old, carpenter and son of Mary, whose brothers and sisters they knew. Jesus, however, invited those in the synagogue that day to have eyes to see and ears to hear: He wasn't, and things weren't, the same.

As Jesus attended the synagogue for worship, He 'offered to read and to expound and signified this intention by standing up' (1). He's given the Isaiah scroll, and finding the beginning of Isaiah 61, reads aloud His Messianic sermon. We might describe His message as a keynote speech, given as an indication of what was to come and of what would take shape in the rest of chapter 4 and beyond.

Those listening that day would have ‘regarded Isaiah 61:1,2 as one of three passages, in which the Holy Ghost was connected with the promised redemption’ (2) – the other two being Isaiah 32:14,15: “Even the palace will be abandoned and the capital city totally deserted. Homes and the forts that guarded them will be in ruins for ever. Wild donkeys will roam there, and sheep will find pasture there. “But once more God will send us his Spirit. The wasteland will become fertile, and fields will produce rich crops” (v15, GNB); and Lamentations 3:50: “Until the LORD looks down from heaven and sees us.” (GNB)

As God said: “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3), Jesus’ words shine out as He proclaims that He’s been chosen and been sent to proclaim (announce, declare, assert, decree) in word and action, the “time when the Lord will save his people.” We see the significance of God’s timing and the immanence involved as Jesus invites those who were present that day to see him differently, to hear the word differently, to see him as the living Word, which is coming true as it is being read (Luke 4:21, GNB).

[1] Edersheim, Alfred (1993) The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, USA, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 298.

[2] Edersheim, Alfred (1993) The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, USA, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 315.

Sermon ideas

I see a lot of overlaps in this week’s passages.

Nehemiah

Having already given some sermon ideas above, let me expand upon these, using some questions that you may wish to explore further.

There may be some reflections on the surrounding context and content of this week’s passage in Nehemiah that you wish to flesh out further, for example:

- The spiritual health of the people of God, and of the wider community and culture in which we live.
- How the various gifts, talents and workings of leaders and lay people work together to help to build the Church of God, while also fulfilling the mission of God.
- What calling and burden does the passage invite us to pray and act from?

- Are there other people in biblical history who seem to arise in the purposes of God as if from nowhere?
- What if it were God's purpose that you, or I, or God's Church, remain hidden like Ezra, until the right time?
- What would Bosch's 'creative tension' look like in your situation, while bearing in mind the phrase. 'necessity is the mother of invention'? How might God's mission be worked out where you and I have been placed by our Lord as individuals and as the Church of God in our day?

Nehemiah provides many examples of how the people of God, the leaders and the lay people all united to work willingly as one in the church to rebuild the walls, reform the structure and then in chapter 8 comes the time, under the providence of God, for renewal and revival of God's people and the nation.

Each person has a role to play, using their creative gifts and talents in their places of opportunity under God to usher in the Kingdom of God in a fresh way. The broken walls have been built, is it now time to go to the broken people that they might in word and action experience the healing and forgiveness of God?

Finally, thinking about verse 8, how might we on Sundays and during the week see the message of the good news of God made more accessible to those we're sent to be alongside?

As I'm sure you'll have seen by now, by allowing the Word to have its application, using questions at times, each of us knows our audience and our own place. "Creative tension" isn't always fun but it does help us rely upon our Lord on the journey from here to there.

Psalm

The passage seems to fit roughly into four sections, giving the possibility of making four main points:

- **Verses 1-6:** God's glory is seen in creation. With David we worship the One who creates and re-creates. (Romans 1:20 further elaborates on the lack of justification for any denial of God's existence.) This section could be accompanied by visuals of God's creation (e.g. in the form of slides). "Sun, moon and stars are God's travelling preachers" (1). Although God is seen in creation, the gospel message like the sun on its daily travels, needs to be shared to the ends of the earth while we hear the heart of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whose desire is that the good news be carried to all of creation.

- **Verses 7-11:** God's Word, the Bible, is indispensable in the life of faith as it gives direction, sustenance and an opportunity to draw closer to God and learn more of our Lord's character. Wisdom is on offer in God's word and its praise could trigger in us a heart like David's, who desired to be familiar with it, to be blessed and helped by its many benefits. Many are the good rewards of listening to and obeying God's word. David discusses the practicalities of what this would look like. While people often say reading the Bible is difficult, there are many aids to be recommended as people start small, beginning a daily habit of morning and evening, sunrise and sunset reading and meditating. We could offer insights into how we have entered into reading God's Word; some people might like to share how they have been blessed or challenged or rebuked by the Word of God, as an illustration to our listeners, of all ages. Reference could also be made to the many who work so hard to make the Bible available and accessible to others, i.e., Bible Societies, Bible translators, etc.
- **Verses 12-13:** Forgiveness is available and necessary for sins of commission and omission. This is now available through the death of Jesus on the cross for all humankind. Christians must be ever-alert to the sinfulness of our own hearts and the temptations to sin. "Wilful" is translated "presumptuous" by Charles H. Spurgeon and seems to mean a determination to do something even when it is clearly wrong. David makes clear that he doesn't want to be ruled by sin, with the implication that sin can become both overwhelming and uncontrollable. David's heart's cry to his Lord is for deliverance, that he might be pure and free from the evil of sin.
- **Verse 14:** The psalm finishes with a prayer commonly used in worship, perhaps often by the preacher. It's a strong exclamation about the character of his Lord as David describes the Lord who "is *my* refuge and *my* redeemer." Refuge can also be translated "rock", emphasising a sense of protection and strength, with "rock" also being used elsewhere in the Bible to describe Jesus.

[1] Spurgeon, Charles (© Watermark, 1993) Psalms volume 1, Spurgeon, The Crossway Classic Commentaries, Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway Books, 66/67.

1 Corinthians 12

As mentioned above, one might use this passage and the various biblical images of the Church of Christ to speak more on what the Body of Christ is rather than what it isn't. I find it useful to introduce the message through the children's/all age address (1) delivered earlier in the service while developing it further during the reflection/sermon. How might the Church of God be like a house, a building, a field, a living temple and a body, to name a

few. The texts from Nehemiah and the Psalms and Luke provide us with images and applications for the Body of Christ and links with this passage.

Other areas worth exploring might be the gifts God has given, the diversity of Christ's body, the purposes and expressions of unity within the local and universal Body of Christ. What does our local context tell us about how we might be Jesus' body? While thinking of these things, I cannot help considering the links between the Corinthian church's story and the Church of Christ in our day. In exploring this further we may want to consider where division and unity exist, where ignorance and the undervaluing of each other exist, including the tensions from within and without which are bringing doubt and confusion to the Body as we face the challenges of the near and distant future.

How might we truly live and serve together as one body, aware that what we've known is changing, while accepting that the best way to live is close to our God? Paul encourages the spiritually proud in Corinth to live their lives under Christ the head, inviting everyone to play their part for the benefit and growth of everyone, especially the weaker brother or sister.

Jesus spoke directly to His disciples when they argued with one another about who would be the greatest. He directed them towards children and towards having a servant heart that learned to imitate Him (Matthew 20:26-28). Here Paul touches on the same theme, while challenging his readers to consider how they treat the weaker parts of the body. Do they see them as indispensable? How might that challenge us, as often we focus upon the 'upfront gifts', while discounting the contribution of everyone to the functioning and health of the wider body? Does our culture influence us negatively in this regard?

Paul calls out those whose focus seems to be upon themselves whilst voicing their own negative views of others. "I don't need you," they say, causing some to feel they don't belong, as the weaker sister and brother, considered to be unimportant and of no value.

In our changing times how might the local and the universal body of Christ work across boundaries and differences to be all that our Lord intends? How might Paul's words: unity, equality, diversity of gifting, valuing each other, sharing in one another's suffering, rejoicing in one another's happiness, help Christ's Church to focus on our Lord's pattern and example? No wonder Paul goes on to focus upon the importance of love in chapter 13.

[1] <https://sermons4kids.com/sermons/key-ingredients>

Luke

As your people think about how they might be celebrating Burns night, many do so by reciting the works of the man or by using the date to celebrate at home or with friends. There are a host of online guides as to how one might celebrate, e.g.

www.scotland.org/events/burns-night

Unlike the celebrations around Robert Burns, the man, and his words, here we're given more reason to celebrate the identity, works and wonders of the words of Jesus. In today's scripture Jesus declares His works, in a sense He speaks them forth before they take place.

You may wish to explore this alongside the readings from Nehemiah or 1 Corinthians: the works of the Holy Spirit through the living Jesus, unpacking things further next week's in the readings from Luke.

I was struck by various points in this reading that could be developed. For example, how Jesus, reading Isaiah 62, owns what He reads, as Messiah is described as chosen and sent, speaking of the fulfilment of the Messianic scriptures, particularly in Isaiah 62, which spoke not only about the freedom and return from slavery and exile in Babylon. Here Jesus declares that the word prophesied so long ago is coming true as it is being read.

As Jesus reads from Isaiah, we see the fulfilment of "Immanuel" – God with us in the person of Christ Jesus, the Messiah, the Saviour whose purpose is to bring good news not only to the affluent of the day, but to the poor and broken. He will bring liberty to the prisoners, sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed. Jesus came for the whole world and the time has arrived, the waiting is over and it's the Jubilee year of the Lord's favour.

Reading from Isaiah, Jesus spells out His future role, His manifesto, His mission statement if you like, and the mission statement of His body the Church, who would also be partners with the Father, Son and Spirit in living out the coming of the Kingdom of God in our day.

Saddened by the familiarity of those who saw and heard Him that day, Jesus understood the need for 'new seeing and new hearing' and the people's inability to see the new thing that God was doing. I also find myself seeing things through the familiar lenses rather than daily connecting with God and His word, to hear our Lord's plans and purposes. Looking at the reform that took place in Nehemiah, reflecting upon the reorganisation within the spaces and places we go on to see, the people of His day hearing a word for the time that brought new life.

I can see overlaps in all of today's readings that can be explored and are dependent upon your people and their own moments. How might we keep looking to Jesus' mission statement, owning it also as our own? Jesus gave those listening that day a living vision, where our living Saviour would invite the broken to be restored, chosen and sent to be a part of God's eternal purposes.

Prayers

Call to worship *(based on Psalm 19)*

The heavens reveal the glory of God,
the Lord is perfect.

As certain as day follows day,
the Lord is trustworthy.

As the sun moves across the heavens, creation declares,
the Lord is right and just.

O Lord! We worship You, our Refuge and Redeemer.

Opening prayer and Lord's prayer

Creator God,

As we look to the heavens, all of creation declares to us God's glory and majesty.

Praise the name of the Lord our God.

The heavens act as Your travelling preachers, encouraging us to spread the good news of Christ Jesus to the ends of the earth.

Today, we humble ourselves before You, Lord,

acknowledging and not hiding our sins from the spotlight of the Holy Spirit.

In Your light, we accept that there have been times we have thought of others as less important and of less worth than ourselves.

Times when we've not reached out to others in need because of our misperceptions,
because we didn't want to know them,
preferring to keep our distance,
preferring to build a wall of separation rather than a door of welcome and opportunity.

Lord, our refuge and redeemer,

in whose love and through whose redeeming word of forgiveness broken people are being made whole.

We are being made whole, in and through the saving love and power of Christ Jesus,
who laid down His life for us all.

Turn our eyes towards You this day, Lord, that attentively,
with open ears and open hearts that we might hear from the Living Word,
hear from the One who has called us to follow Him and to live in community with one
another and in the partnership of the gospel, in the grace of God.

In Your forgiveness, in Your enabling, in Your grace,
we receive Your love and offer up our worship this day
as we gather together in this place.

Lord, hear our prayers, as in this moment we approach Your throne of grace...

[Hold a time of silence]

God, You are still at work through the Body of Christ,
in whose name we join in the prayer that Jesus gave us as an example,
saying together...

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

Offering / Thanksgiving

What can I give to the One who has saved my feet from stumbling and who gives me breath
every morning?

To the One who hears and answers prayer,
to the One who is closer to us than our own breath
and whose love, like the sun's warmth, embraces us.

How might we thank You Lord?

All that we've been given comes to us from Your generous hand and from Your heavenly
storehouse.

We are confident in You, for in You
good news is declared to the poor,
liberty is proclaimed to the captives,
the recovery of sight to the blind,
and the oppressed are set free.

The Lord who saves also assures us that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

May all our words, Lord and all the service that we offer,
all that we give and all we lay down, please You
and be a cause for much thanksgiving to God and to the praise of Your wonderful name.

And all God’s people say together – so be it and Amen.

Prayer for others/Intercession

You might want to print off pictures of building blocks and images of people in your church community, leaving space for folks to write their prayers (nothing that’s confidential, only what you have permission to share), which could be attached to the building blocks over the next few weeks as we pray for others. These ‘people bricks’ could be placed in a prominent place for all to see and pray over.

As Your beloved children,
we come to You, Lord in this moment,
and bring all that has touched and burdened our hearts this past week.
Whether it’s something we’ve heard at the bus stop, read on social media or watched on television,
whatever it might be – help us, Lord,
that by Your Spirit we might not only recognise the need
but weep for it and choose to be a part of Your answer.

Help us to be done with indifference as we bring others before You now in this moment –

[Hold a time of silence – for people to bring and place their people bricks as indicated. This may take time, so adapt the length of your prayer as you see fit.]

Heavenly Father,
we give thanks today that people can be so tenacious in their thinking about ways to survive,
ways to work and ways to provide for their families,
despite the hindrances that arise from without and within.

Give wisdom and discernment, we ask, to those who travel far to help others in need,
those who face the struggles of war, in Europe, Israel, across central Africa and beyond,
give discernment and wisdom to those who seek to provide medical help,

the provision of food and shelter and much more to those in need.

Lord, we pray for those whose lives are crumbling,
those whose lives and futures are being stolen before their very eyes.
Those who find hope diminished by the unending circuit of debt and the ripple effects of
drugs, alcohol and other life-controlling issues.

Lord our God, there is so much to be overcome, however,
with You all things are possible, all things can be redeemed.

Bless us, Your people and may we be open doors to those we know locally who need help,
as we go out and connect, however simply, with those whose hearts seem filled with shame
and regret.

Lord, bless Your Church
as she sheds the light of hope, freedom and recovery before the faces of those who've
experienced pain and hurt
and who may be facing seemingly impossible odds in their lives.

This day, we pray for those we know who are concerned about the economy, their jobs and
their future,
people we know of whatever age who are struggling with a sense of panic and concern over
their future.

God of yesterday, today and tomorrow,
we lift up to You those known to us locally, in our families, in our communities,
for whom life seems without hope and a future.

For Your people we pray,
having faced so much uncertainty over recent years,
seemingly living more in confusion than in faith and hope.
Our Lord and Saviour, keep hope alive as we pray for all that burdens us and keep us always
leaning and relying upon You.

Closer to home Lord, we pray now in this moment for

[Pray for the needs of your people, place, city, town, village, community and church]

We thank You, loving Lord,

that You are the One whose plans and purposes never fail,
whose ways can be hard to fathom and yet under whose loving, watchful eye
we are never left alone or in despair.

Build up Your people, Lord,
make the way straight, that the streams of Your grace
might reach out into the dry parts of our communities and our people,
bringing life, to the praise and glory of the God who creates,
the One who unites and gifts and the Spirit who walks alongside us.
Glory be to God. Amen

Blessing/Closing prayer

Body of our Lord Jesus,
never forget that you are valued, loved and gifted.
And as you go from this place,
do so knowing that God is your refuge, Christ Jesus is your Redeemer.
And may the Holy Spirit revive and renew us all,
to the glory and praise of God,
both today and forever more. 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 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.

Nehemiah

- CH4 174 – “God of great and God of small” – a hymn declaring, God of great and small, silence and sound, lost and found. God whose love turns wrong to right.
- CH4 251 – “I, the Lord of sea and sky” – a hymn responding to God’s call to go, to reach out to those who dwell in dark and sin, breaking hearts of stone, speaking God’s word to them; who will respond to God’s burden and say yes to his sending?
- CH4 469 – “Restore, O Lord, the honour of your name!” – a song that seeks personal restoration in the Church of Christ.
- CH4 608 – “Spirit of truth and grace” – a well-known hymn imparting a spirit of humility, repentance, a heart’s call to be stirred to serve with God’s compassion.
- CH4 608-627 – Any of the hymns in this section could be used, especially relating to the reading from Nehemiah.
- CH4 721 – “We lay our broken world” – this hymn can be a plea, a prayer to God as we bring our broken world and our broken selves to the One whose healing grace brings new purpose (v5).
- CH4 756 – “Bless the Lord” – a short song inviting us all to bless the Lord.
- CH4 765 – “God’s love is for everybody” – a short song declaring God’s character.
- CH4 779 – “Listen now for the Gospel!” – a rousing congregational song that speaks of hearts melting, being rooted in God’s word, binding the broken and finding the lost.
- MP 1321 – “Kyrie Eleison, have mercy (As we come before you with the needs of our broken world)”
- MP 1373 – “Who breaks the power of sin and darkness? King of glory who rules the nations.”

Psalm

- CH4 467 – “All my days I will sing this song of gladness” – (Beautiful Saviour) a song declaring our eternal desire to praise our Lord in response to all our Redeemer, Saviour, Counsellor, Lord of history and heaven’s champion is and has been for these countless worshippers who will one day share one song.
- CH4 500 – “Lord of Creation, to you be all praise!” – a hymn of dedication with expressions of God’s character, our response lifting our eyes upwards to the Lord of creation.

- CH4 522 – “The Church is wherever God’s people are praising” – a melody folk tune bringing out the purposes of God’s Church where God’s people are seen through a variety of kaleidoscopic images.
- CH4 770 – “I love you, Lord” – a short song expressing our love and worship to our Lord and King to prepare hearts for worship or during the uptake of offering.
- CH4 802 – “We are here to praise you” – a short song that could be used as people gather and prepare their hearts for worship.
- MP 673 – “There is a Redeemer” – a praise song that helps us thank Lord Jesus for all the Son has given, looking towards that day when we will see His face.
- MP 1259 – “Bless the Lord, O my soul” – it’s time to sing that song again from the dawn of day to the dark of night. A song of praise to the Lord whose character is displayed in our living and in the Lord’s character from sunrise to that day when my time has come but my praise will be never ending.
- “The law of the Lord is perfect” – a version of Psalm 19 (Joanne Roberts Graham) CCLI song #25716 [“Scriptures for Singing”](#)

1 Corinthians 12

- CH4 204 – “I am the church!” – a great song to again focus upon the Church of Jesus.
- CH4 679 – “One is the body” – a song that features the themes of today’s scripture.
- CH4 739 – “The Church’s one foundation” – a hymn that speaks of the bride of Christ, called from every nation in union with the “Three in One” and in mystical communion with those whose rest is won.
- MP 442 – “Lord of the Church” – a hymn which longs for our uniting, true to one calling, by one vision stirred, Christ overall, our undivided aim, in Christ to live and love and serve and care.
- MP 1354 – “The Church of God shall stand” – a hymn declaring the standing of the Church of God in Christ, reminding us of who we are rather than focusing upon splits and divisions.

Luke 4

- GWA 146 – “You are here, moving in our midst” – (Way maker) Declaring Christ Jesus who is here still doing as He declared all those years ago.
- CH4 235 – “God is working his purpose out” – a song that encourages our faith in God who is working towards that time when the “earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.”

- CH4 253 – “Inspired by love and anger” – a song that digs into the words of Jesus giving them echoes in our day.
- CH4 279 – “Make way, make way” – a song of worship for the Incarnate Christ.
- MP 320 – “I’ll praise my maker while I have breath” – a hymn by Isaac Watts, speaking of Isaiah 62 in verse 2 and 3 (Tune – Monmouth)
- MP 795 – “You laid aside Your majesty” – short worship song of praise to the One “who gave your life to set me free.”
- “Christ you came for all” – a modern song diving deep into the “life laid down and love poured out” by our Saviour, who reaches out to the ends of the earth for the whole world. (Saddleback Music) CCLI song #7148642
- A suggested playlist of songs from CH4 throughout Epiphany can be found on the [Church of Scotland website](#).
- GWA 105 – “Christe, lux mundi”
- GWA 106 – “God Incarnate, living presence”
- GWA 107 – “A voice was heard in Ramah”

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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