

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany – Year C

Sunday 23 February 2025

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Dr MaryAnn Rennie, Minister, the Abbey Church of Dunfermline, for her thoughts on the seventh 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

A good number of people in Scotland complain about February being a bleak month (not me as it's the month I get older in so there is time to celebrate.) The Revised Common Lectionary texts during Epiphany offer a bright contrast to the darker months and instead present moments of light as each week the baby we met in the Nativity grows to offer the revelation of God with us in the presence of Jesus. This week we are at the end of the season and a week from the startling revelation for the disciples of who Jesus is, in the Transfiguration. This week could be viewed as an ordinary week, but instead the readings are preparing us for the fuller understanding of Jesus's place within human life. They invite us to meet the One who encourages humanity towards reconciliation with God and with one another.

When I am preparing for worship, I start with the biblical texts. I like to read them through one by one and write a wee note of what immediately catches my attention in the text. I find it helpful to read the passages out loud on a second reading, because sometimes hearing a passage sparks other thoughts. (As an aside, occasionally during worship when the reader is reading a passage, I hear something that I hadn't noticed before that changes the understanding of what is in the sermon. I don't think we should be shy about mentioning that we heard something in a different way than when we had been preparing.)

Because my music and early ideas on worship preparation are supposed to be with the Master of the Music by Tuesday evening, I then pick hymns noticing the themes that have begun to resonate from the initial readings. This does not mean I can't then change them if later in the week it becomes apparent that another hymn would work better. My current charge is fortunate to have an experienced musician who is willing to offer his own thoughts and reflections, and this can be very helpful if I have an idea, but can't see a hymn that would work.

Part of Thursday (depending on other work) is my fuller preparation day, and I spend time exploring commentaries and considering other material I've been reading. Prayers are also usually prepared. When I am asking others to participate, I try to have almost all words prepared by Thursday evening so that they can be shared and practised. Of course, sometimes good practices don't always happen as you hope.

[Genesis 45:3-11, 15](#)

The story of Joseph is one we consider as being familiar to us. We've watched, heard, or sung the songs from "Joseph and his Technicolour Dreamcoat" and we are confident that

this is a story of an overly confident young man being handed over into slavery, and through the challenge of having to find a new life, being led to a position of power where his visions become his lived experience, and he is able to offer forgiveness and hope to the brothers who had treated him harshly. The lectionary only gives some of chapter 45 to work with but, to gain a better understanding of the full picture being expressed in the verses offered, a little summary of the full story in a sermon could be helpful. Not least because it allows development of other figures within the story, and to explore the relationships between Joseph and his brothers, and importantly between Jacob and his sons.

It is worth reading Richard Clifford's chapter, "Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story or Jacob Story?" found in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception and Interpretation* (1). Clifford challenges the view that chapter 45 is the climax of the story. He also challenges the understanding of the story as being about Joseph.

There is a tendency when considering the story of Joseph only to focus on chapters 37-45 and make a passing comment to the note within the text at 37:2 that it is really a story about Jacob. This narrow emphasis really does draw the story in to only focus on Joseph, his dreams, the outcome of being sold into slavery and his reconciliation. Clifford ponders on whether 37:2 could be an editorial decision, but notices that the story of Jacob, his sons and the return of the family to Canaan begins in chapter 32. The suggestion is that the turning point in the story of Jacob and his sons is in chapter 34, where the sons have reached adulthood, and the reader is invited to notice their behaviours towards their father (2). This earlier entry into the story for our understanding gives a fuller knowledge of Joseph's brothers and reshapes our understanding of their action towards their half-brother and Joseph's actions towards them as we encounter the full group in chapter 45.

In chapters 34-36 eldest sons Reuben, Simeon and Levi have all challenged their father's authority (3). Judah does so in his decision to sell his brother into slavery in chapter 37. Understanding the brothers prior to the encounter with Joseph, we recognise the running theme within the Book of Genesis of sibling rivalry. Rather than an arrogant dreamer, Joseph becomes "God-fearing, charming, and divinely gifted in interpreting dreams" (4). Joseph becomes the one who cares for his father and his younger brother, Benjamin, and his actions in the closing chapters are about ensuring their lives. He reveals who he is to his brothers only after he knows his father is still alive, only after he witnesses his brothers' concerns for their father, should another son be lost to him, and their deep remorse at the hurt they have caused in the past.

[1] Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L Peterson, *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (Brill, 2012); [2] *Ibid*, 216]; [3] *Ibid*, 217; [4] *Ibid*, 222

Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40

This acrostic wisdom psalm shares similarities with the Book of Proverbs. These ‘teaching sermons’ (5) helped to socialise young people into the community, providing examples of behaviour that provided sustainability (6). The contrast between the righteous and the wicked offered guidance on how to live well.

Verses 1-11 start with comfort and encouragement, and an instruction not to burn with anger. The reader is encouraged to put their trust in God and believe in God’s promises. The instruction to refrain from anger returns and offers the suggestion that widely waiting patiently brings God’s promise to fruition.

Running through the psalm is connection with the land. In verse 3, “land” provides a living space and security. In verse 9, “land” is an inheritance for those who trust in God, while in verse 13 it is a place of peace. Land, community, belonging, all provide safety and sustenance for the faithful.

The importance of land is a recurring theme throughout the Old Testament. It is created by God, and humanity is invited to share in the stewardship of it. It presents the kingdom of God on earth, and humanity get thrown out. Abraham is taken on a journey to find a promised land, and so are the Israelites. The Hebrew story is of being cast in and out of land provided by God, to provide for the safe and secure community. The establishment of the Temple creates sacred “land” where heaven again touches the earth. Within Wisdom literature “land” is the space of human existence and the saga of creation (7). Continuing into the Prophets, the “land” is revealed as the “place where God is obeyed and where God’s love is experienced in the gifts of the Land. God provides for the people and the Land offers its fruits. These considerations regarding the basic insights of Torah and wisdom: a person lives life to the fullest when he/she accepts to obey the Creator...” (8)

Our psalm is an invitation to enjoy the fullness of life by valuing the creation offered by God.

[5] J Clinton McCann, Jr., “Commentary on Psalm 37: 1-11, 39-40”, [Working Preacher \(2019\)](#)

[6] Walter Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 122

[7] Alain Marchadour & David Neuhaus, “The Land in the Old Testament”, *The Land, the Bible, and History: Toward the Land that I Will Show You* (Fordham University Press, 2007), 9-62

[8] Ibid, 49

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

In recent years I have grown to love the Paul who writes 1 Corinthians. Through the letter we meet a practical and pastoral man who hopes to help a Christian community offer the best representation of the presence of Christ in their lives. Earlier chapters have dealt with the divisions in the church, offered advice on how to live with others, and discussed how worship is shaped to include the whole community. Each of these leading towards Chapter 13, where love is described, ensuring the community knows what to offer one another and outsiders.

Chapter 15 sets out the importance of the resurrection within the community of faith, and the verses for this week clearly respond to a question that Paul has been asked. It sets out what resurrection life is like. His answer could also be in response to the idea of reincarnation found within the Greek world (9).

In the first section, Paul takes an example from nature of a seed planted in the ground and notices the connection between it and the transformed form of the plant. Death (the planting of the seed) is important if transformation (new life) is to be revealed. Death is not seen as an end point, but instead moving into a new form of living. Paul is daringly describing what resurrection with God may look like, an opportunity to grow in strength towards God, free from the burdens that the world places upon us.

The second section sees Paul compare Jesus with Adam. While the first Adam was connected to the death of the relationship between God and humanity, in Christ's death and then resurrection, the relationship is transformed (10).

[9] Frank B Craddock, John H Hayes, Carl R Holladay, Gene M Tucker, *Preaching Through the Christian Year: Year C: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Lectionary* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1994)

[10] Carla Works, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15: 35-38, 42-50", [Working Preacher](#) (2019)

Luke 6:27-38

In the United Nations Building in New York there is a large mosaic by Norman Rockwell that depicts people of all ages, of different genders, and many nationalities, and embedded within the tiles are the words of "The Golden Rule" – "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (11). These are words that we encounter in the Gospel reading (v31),

and while we encounter them as Jesus' words it should be recognised that they are words found in other cultures and faiths (12).

The chapter is a parallel to Matthew 5, but also a contrast. Matthew 5 took place on a hillside; Luke 6 happens on level ground. Matthew offers "blessings"; Luke offers "blessings and woes".

On the level ground, Jesus levels with those who are hearing about the best way to live as followers of the Way. We get an insight into the kind of world into which the Gospel is first being shared, as the Christian community find themselves at odds with other people. The words may be about how they treat each other, but equally they could be written as an encouragement for how to live in a world of persecution. They are reminded that it is easy to love those who show love towards them. It is more difficult to love when others ill-treat and harm. Jesus urges the patience of God. To live as those who have been shown love and grace so that others are drawn towards the overwhelming generosity of God's forgiveness.

[11] ["Golden Rule" - Norman Rockwell \(USA - 1985\)](#)

[12] Frank B Craddock, John H Hayes, Carl R Holladay, Gene M Tucker, *Preaching Through the Christian Year: Year C: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Lectionary* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1994)

Sermon ideas

There are a few sermon ideas to be found within the readings today.

Genesis 45:3-11, 15 and Luke 6:27-38 offer inspiration for thinking about reconciliation and forgiveness. Rowan Williams offers these words which may be helpful:

"Forgiveness is one of the most radical ways in which we are able to nourish one another's humanity... To forgive and to be forgiven is to allow yourself to be humanised by those whom you may least want to receive signs of God's gift; and this process is deeply connected with the prayer for daily bread... A willingness to forgive is clearly the mark of humanity touched by God – free from anxiety about identity and safety, free to reach out into what is other, as God does in Jesus Christ" (13).

Psalm 37 could provide a good basis for exploring Wisdom literature and how it was used to shape communities that valued one another. In conjunction with the Gospel, the words of Jesus could be viewed as drawing on embedded knowledge to call people back to God's purpose for them as they encounter God within one another.

The psalm also provides a good basis for exploring the theme of “Land” within the Old Testament. A helpful book to explore if choosing this option is *Longing for Home: Forced Displacement and Postures of Hospitality* by M Jan Holton. Following her personal engagement with displaced people she offers thoughts on how displacement disrupts understandings of home, identity and longing.

[13] Rowan Williams, *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life*, 39.

Prayers

Gathering Prayer/Call to Worship

Be still before God and wait patiently
for our hearts are offered safe space to wonder.
Be still before God, our harbour secure
as God’s love calls us to worship.

Confession/Repentance

Reconciling God,
hear us as we recall the fraught words and resentments
that we harbour in our minds.
Forgive us for the harshness of our responses
and the unkindness of inaction.
Draw us close to the fire of the Holy Spirit,
where the light transforms the hidden darkness of our lives,
and sparks our activities with renewed energy
for serving Christ.
Amen

Thanksgiving/Gratitude

Maker of heaven and earth,
Creator of relationships,
we praise You for the land
where we place our feet
and build our homes and communities.
We praise You for the seeds You plant,
that root us in Your grace,
and encourage us to create relationships
that encourage growth and support.
As we create and develop thriving networks,

may we find our faith sustained,
and the inspiration
to be creative in the ways we share our faith in Jesus Christ,
and respond to world around.

Amen

Prayers for others/Intercession

“Be still and know that I am God” is listed in the hymns below. This could be used as a responsive hymn sung through the Prayers of the People.

God of relationship,
we cannot ignore the brokenness
of our lives,
of our world,
of our Church.
We declare ourselves “fine”
with how things are
and long for the encouragement of Your presence
as we long to see the transformation
of new creation taking place
in the communities of our world.

We pray for human relationships,
for spouses, partners, and ‘bidie’-ins,
parents and children,
working encounters and friendships.
We give thanks where sharing life with others is supportive,
and allows the other to thrive.

We remember those whose lives are fraught,
frantic,
and abusive.

Where those of any gender feel their worth questioned
by cruel words and threatening hands,
may they be led to the support
that keeps them safe.

We pray for the relationships of our world.
In testing times of war and conflict,
communities are tested

as those who have been displaced seek new homes
and places to shelter.

We give thanks for those many communities across the world
who have offered refuge to the outsider,
offering hospitality that allows stories to blend
and develop new ways to live in harmony with another.

We long for the discordant voices of our world to pause
and listen to the songs of others.

In what they hear,
may politicians and tyrants be offered wisdom
that seeks the best for all people and not power for themselves.

We pray for Christ's Church,
in all its vibrant colour,
and celebrate the many ways in which the story of Jesus is revealed.
Help us to value one another,
and to cherish our diversity.

In these days when churches unite and close,
may the Spirit's comfort be a balm to the pain of life,
and the Spirit's inventiveness inspire us
in sharing and shaping stories within our new communities.

God of relationship,
still our hearts,
as we patiently wait
for the Holy Spirit to lead us
in our sharing of Christ's story.
Amen

Blessing/Closing prayer

God sows the seed of love, hope, peace mercy and justice.
May they be found growing
in our words and actions,
this day and always.
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.

- GWA 193 – “Come and find rest in Christ” – this functions as an opening hymn that offers a gentle but prompting beginning to reflective worship. Alternatively, it would lead into a reflection or sermon.
- CH4 124 – “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation” – also a good opening hymn, that on the dark mornings of winter can bring a little lightness and brightness.
- CH4 526 – “This is a day of new beginnings” – following a reflection or sermon on a theme of reconciliation and forgiveness, this hymn encourages us to step into the new life we are offered in Jesus Christ.
- CH4 528 – “Make me a channel of your peace” – the Prayer of St Francis of Assisi. A reminder of our participation in creating a just and kind world.
- CH4 690 – “When the bonds of love are breaking” – a hymn that encourages us to invite or notice God’s presence within the broken experiences of human life.

- CH4 692 – “Jesus put this song into our hearts” – a light reflection on how our lives can be transformed by the presence of Christ.
- CH4 755 – “Be still and know that I am God” – could be used to provide focus prior to the reading of Scripture or alternatively a response within an intercessory prayer.

A suggested playlist of songs from CH4 throughout Epiphany can be found on the Church of Scotland website [here](#).

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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