

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A

Sunday 19 November 2023

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank the Guild of Health and St Raphael for their thoughts on the 25th Sunday after Pentecost, and Prisoners Week Trust for their prayers and resources for Prisoners Week Scotland 2023.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the Sanctuary First website:
<https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship>

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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Introduction

This is a set of texts that, either taken individually or as a group, presents opportunities to challenge people around their own vocation to be a Christ follower in the reality of uncertain times. We see themes of chaos and uncertain times in the Hebrew bible reading: we see strands of the importance of good leadership; we see an emphasis on taking risks for the Kingdom of God; we are encouraged to love one another and as a community to uplift and be people of light. These are all speaking to the times into which the texts were written, but also (sadly) still speak powerfully into the times we are living in now where people are facing trauma of the pandemic, upheaval caused by changes in the Church structure, and ongoing and increasing global instability. This is a set of texts that can offer hope, and inspiration to remain faithful, find courage and make a real difference in the world around us.

At the Guild of Health and St Raphael we take seriously the call of Jesus to make new disciples and to offer healing into the world. We have a free online lecture exploring trauma on 30 November (see [HERE](#) for details), and we have a free membership until the end of November to experience a season exploring burnout and how to avoid it (sign up [HERE](#) for free). We also have an Advent retreat by email running throughout December. We are here to equip you in the call to follow Christ for the times we are living in, the in-between times as we wait for the Lord, a theme which threads throughout these readings.

[Judges 4:1-7](#)

The book of Judges is part of the Deuteronomistic history of Israel (covered by the Book of Deuteronomy until 2 Kings). It was probably constructed and written in the 7th century BCE. At the time, there were certain key themes that the writers were keen to emphasise: radical monotheism, a condemnation of fertility rites, the centralising worship of YHWH in Jerusalem, YHWH's control of history and a nationalistic pride in their military. We see some of these themes in this week's reading.

But the book of Judges is also a text that contains plenty of chaos and much humanity. Set in the days before regularisation of rituals and holy spaces, this was a time of battles and skirmishes in the land. It is not completely clear whether these battles were about conquest of the land, or a more gradual infiltration, but it does seem that the people of Israel were somewhat outnumbered and ill-equipped, compared to their enemies.

Judges is full of anti-establishment leaders who are described by some as 'swashbuckling bandits', where the story is strewn with victory, losses, disappointments and frustrations.

Judges does not present a linear path to glory for the people of Israel, but rather a fragile and topsy-turvy world. As humans, we tend to like overarching narratives, steady progress and winners winning – but Judges reminds us that it was not like that back then. We might reflect that it is not like that now either.

In the reading today the scenario is that Israel is unable to defeat the enemies once again because of her lack of faithfulness in YHWH. What is more unusual in the reading is our hero, or rather heroine – the female prophet and judge Deborah, who is aided by Barak. Deborah gives military advice about an impending battle situation and a message to Barak, who later refused to go without her. Deborah here is not only a war leader, but an oracle to ensure the military success of Israel in the forthcoming battle.

To us, this might appear to be a violent and bloodthirsty reading and happening in a time and place far removed from our own situation. And this is true, but there are important strands of storytelling that will tie it closer to home – the frequent attention to asking God questions; an ongoing distrust of leadership that might betray inner tensions and doubts concerning human actions. And the timeless themes of good leadership, the struggle to make the best decisions, the need to have people like Deborah to accompany us on difficult quests, and then the need for people to point us to God amidst the chaos of uncertain times. Good leadership, like good decisions, always require courage.

[Psalm 123](#)

‘Songs of Ascents’ are usually psalms sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem in preparation for arriving and meeting God. But this psalm is more likely to be a cry for help from persecuted Jews. It is a short but forceful and perfectly crafted song where honesty and clarity give a clear picture into the heart of the Psalmist.

Let’s break it down into its various movements and questions:

Where is the Psalmist looking? They are looking *up* to the ‘hand’ of God – the hand represents the power of God, and the Psalmist is like a servant looking to obey the hand of a master. Their eyes are not on the things of the earth, or on the condition of this life. But rather, they look beyond, and up to God – indicating that they are trusting not in the things of this earth but rather, trusting in God alone, who is their master.

How does the Psalmist look? Like a servant, like a waiter or butler – with attention, intensity and devotion, ready to act.

What does the Psalmist then do? They plead for mercy. They do not passively wait – they beg, intensely repeating the request.

For us hearing this psalm today, the question is – do we look to the things of earth or do we look up to God? Are we looking to God with the intensity of the servant, or as one who thinks that it is not God but they themselves who are in charge? And do we rely on God so much as to beg for God to intervene, without shame?

For the Psalmist is facing a situation of utter contempt (vv3-4), facing ‘more than our fill’ – they are entirely saturated by this situation. Indeed, they face “the scorn of those who are at ease” – the contempt of those who have it easy in life.

Sometimes, we can be having a hard time, and we are able to shrug it off. At other times, we become overwhelmed by the situation and we can do nothing but beg the Lord to help, as we read here. Can we be as confident as the Psalmist evidently is – that God’s mercy will prevail?

[1 Thessalonians 5:1-11](#)

This letter is probably the earliest Christian text in the Bible and therefore gives a fascinating insight into the thoughts of Christ followers less than 20 years after the death of Jesus. Paul is writing here from Corinth a few months after visiting, around 50-51 CE.

Thessalonica was situated at the head of the Thermaic Gulf, in what is now modern day Greece. At the time when Paul was writing, it was a city with sharp divisions between the wealthy elite and aristocrats, and poorer citizens of the Greco-Roman in the world.

In the Greek world, a letter like this was designed to be thought of as an extension of the author, so that the friendship or connection begun in person could be deepened. Paul was communicating with power and presence into this new community, helping to shape its being and identity as a Christian community.

This passage comes in the section of the letter where Paul is describing the coming of the Lord. This was probably prompted by anxiety about Christians who have died before the Parousia. Therefore Paul is taking the time to describe the future to the readers. For any group, including ourselves in the Church today, having an idea about the future helps to orientate themselves in the present, create group cohesion, and helps the group to tell their story with power and passion to themselves and those who might join them. The stories we tell about past, present and future really matter.

In today's reading, the theme is about staying wakeful for the return of Christ. Paul is avoiding discussions about when exactly this might be – He will come when they are not expecting it.

The “day of the Lord” (v2) would have been a familiar phrase in Jewish texts, e.g. in Isaiah 27:13 (where it was expected to be a joyful occurrence) or in Zephaniah 1:14-18 (a more terrifying event). It would be at an unknown time, like when the pains of childbirth begin for pregnant women (v3). In this verse, Paul is probably using the phrase “peace and security” to refer to recent political events in the city; this was a slogan found on Roman coins.

In verses 4-5 we find dark and light imagery to illustrate the differences between the Christ followers and others. This is a clear dualism to encourage a separation of them from the worshippers of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, who was also worshipped in the city, with sensual rituals. Paul encourages them instead to be awake and ready for the Lord. He employs battle images (breastplate), introducing here his famous triad of faith, hope and love (v8), putting visually into action a way of being in the world for those in the light. ‘For a helmet the hope of salvation’ is more battle imagery for the followers for there are allusions to Isaiah 59:17 or Wisdom 5:18, which both talk about righteousness. So here Paul is making points about following Christ being the way to righteousness, and therefore escaping the wrath (v9).

In verse 10 we find for the first time Paul's phrase: “Jesus Christ who died for us”. This is the new state of life that the Christians find and how they must live while they wait for the future – encouraging one another. This is what this waiting, hopeful, light-filled community must do – encourage one another.

To our ears the words “Jesus Christ, who died for us” might be very familiar. They perhaps land in us with a lighter impact. But what would it be like to be amongst the first people to ever hear these words read out loud. What kinds of questions might they have had? What questions might we have, if indeed we were there? Before the text is read out, consider inviting people to try and forget they'd ever heard the words, “Jesus Christ, who died for us”, to put themselves in the shoes of the those who were to hear and respond to them before everyone else – First Responders, if you will. Perhaps we would have questions about the how and the why of His death-for-us? About the morality of the God who allowed it, or the Love of the one who endured it? Also, what changes does it provoke with me or invite from me?

The interesting thing about an exercise like this is that when we imagine ourselves as someone different, we are often suddenly free to voice the very questions we have just now but might be afraid to admit to. Taking a moment to feel how fresh, exciting, shocking, frightening these words could have been to the first hearers gives us permission to connect with our own shock, fear, excitement without censoring our thoughts about it or suppressing our feelings.

[Matthew 25:14-30](#)

The Parable of the Talents is found at the close of the Olivet discourse and it sets out what is going to happen (the return of the Lord) and advises the followers of Jesus Christ to be vigilant. This parable follows two others about how to wait in the present for the future that we have faith will happen.

This passage may be very familiar to many people. In the parable, the 'Master' is Jesus and the slaves are those in the church He left behind. The master leaves (this is the death and resurrection of Jesus), and the waiting servants are given talents to invest while they wait for the master's return. These servants represent Christian's waiting for Jesus' return.

So here is what the parable is not about – it is not about things that you are good at (in the way that we think about talent today). A talent was a huge amount of money. But nor is this parable about economy or efficiency. It is a parable that challenges each of us to assess our own vocation, and whether or not we are prepared to risk the way we live our lives for the kingdom of God.

Obviously, the master is God, and we are the slaves. To begin with we note that the master entrusts 'his property'. They are not our gifts to give, we are given the stuff of God to work with. The slaves have to then decide how to risk them or invest them – they have to put God's stuff to work in the world. The slaves are asked to take a risk for the benefit of the master, not themselves, in the first instance.

The slaves are given talents "...according to their ability". God gives us a fair test – we all have different gifts and we have the responsibility to assess what our gifts are and how to use them.

Turning now to the slave who buried the talents. I wonder what they were afraid of? Were they fearful of the master, or of failure, or even of success? What had made them so afraid or were they angry about the test that had been set? The sin, it seems, given what

happened when the master returned, was not that they did the wrong thing, but rather that they did nothing at all.

So the question for us today is what is ours to do? Ours alone? What is your role? And will you risk doing it? Some are in full-time ministry, but there are myriad vocations – as many as there are human beings who have been created by God. Some are young, some are old. Some are fit and healthy, others live with chronic or terminal conditions. We *all* have a role to play in using our time for the kingdom of God. Even if it is just to smile, or listen, or pray.

Some may feel that the Lord is very harsh with this person, who at least had a sense of responsibility to see that their master got back what he had given them. But the key to this parable is contained in the phrase, “to him who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” What does Jesus mean by that? This is a revelation of the basic purpose of life. This is why you are here. Fundamentally, God puts people into the world in order that God’s Kingdom of love may increase, may grow. In those words, the Lord makes clear the real problem. The trouble is, this person did not intend to be a servant. They were not at all interested in their master’s interests; they were interested in their own. They were taking the role of a servant, but unwilling to fulfil it. They were pretending to be what they were not.

Sermon ideas

Throughout the passages we see themes of darkness, struggle, trusting God, serving God, receiving gifts and mercy, war, fragility, being awake and ready, watching and waiting.

Some questions that would tie these together:

- Thinking particularly around the Thessalonians passage, what is our ‘armour’ like now? Amidst times of distress, what makes us feel protected? Where do we find security and safety? How can we ‘put on’ these things and ‘put away’ their opposites? What processes do we have to help us actually put this into practice?
- Alternatively, how can we turn our vulnerability into the very thing that makes us strong and safe? How do we turn the tables on aggressors and oppressors? If isolation is our weakness, what does connection do for us in the face of an overwhelming situation?
- Thinking of the psalm, where do we believe God can be seen or found in frightening moments? How do we continue to look for God, even if, and when our eyes are sore

with weeping? What do we believe God will do for us if we ask? What do we think God might NOT do for us when we ask? Do we ask anyway, pouring out our heartfelt and honest prayers to God?

- Thinking more about the Gospel passage, what *can* we contribute to the work?
- Even if, alone, we feel too small, not enough, ill equipped (or less equipped) for the challenges that face us in our lives – what *can* we do?
- Even if, as a whole church, we feel too small, not enough, ill equipped (or less equipped) for the challenges that face us in our nation – what *can* we do together?
- How do we identify the smaller and more manageable things we *can* do? Or the smaller gifts we have and start from there? **Instead of a talent, what if this was the parable of the denarii?** Would that be a more useful starting place for people who find this passage daunting? In the Gorbals Parish Church of Scotland, the phrase ‘Small steps, big successes’ became the mantra upon which a life-giving project for the whole community was built.

But amidst all of that, remember that some of us are pretty broken. And sometimes we are more broken than we are at other times. If the weight of the world overwhelms us and causes us to retreat from our responsibility, perhaps focusing on being given a valued gift by God might help to heal us. Stay with that thought and feeling for a time. Enjoy being blessed and loved and trusted – and try not to be drawn into a ‘use it or lose it’ guilt trip. Stay with the middle of the passage for a while. Do not rush to the end. Enjoy being trusted, enjoy the gift given. Again, some of us are pretty broken and we might need to be blessed and to heal, before we can “trust and obey.”

Prayers

Gathering prayer and Call to worship

The gathering prayer has been written in such a way as to help folk arrive into worship. It is to encourage folk to slow down, to reflect on the week that has just been and to bring all of it – the joys and sorrows – into the place of worship. Take your time with this one as you read it, pause between the stanzas, giving folk enough time to bring to mind and heart what they want to bring to God.

Constant God,
as we gather together

and gather our thoughts
we bring to mind and to our hearts
something that has filled us with praise
with wonder and with awe this week –

Maybe the hope of a sunrise
or the glow of a sunset
Maybe the comfort of a cuppa
or the sound of a friendly voice
Whatever has caught our eye and even our breath
we allow it to fill our hearts with praise
with gratitude and adoration
for You, Ever-present, God.

We also allow those things
that have filled us with worry,
with sadness and with frustration
to come to our minds and our hearts
The events or incidents that have depleted our joy,
drained our hearts of praise
We bring those to You, too,
knowing that You meet us here
in the reality of life
And for that we are also grateful,
Ever-present God.

We ask for Your blessing
on this time of worship
Thank You that You are present
Meet us each at our point of need
Creator, Son and Holy Spirit,
the same, yesterday, today and forever
Amen

Confession

For the confession I've wrestled with the unease that surfaces while reading the Matthew 25 passage for this week. I've wondered whether it is the master or the one who buried the talents that is the righteous figure to be followed. That is, the one who determines or who subverts the system? This is a passage that has been used by some to justify the rampant

growth that has in effect led to the climate change catastrophe and ecological crisis we are living through. Reading it through that lens, and influenced by the interpretations by Ched Myers and others, has made me reconsider the traditional reading. I've also noticed the Psalmist's gaze in Psalm 123 – lifting up their eyes to a gracious God, rather than hanging their head. Would that all our confessing rid us of shame.

Merciful God,
we come before You
trusting in Your kindness
hoping in Your faithfulness
abiding in Your love
Knowing You,
not as harsh and fearful master,
but as a caring, guiding parent.

Our hearts are heavy with regret
for what we have left undone
and for what we have left done
For when we have been harsh and dismissive
hoarding and ungenerous
perpetually focused on growth
at the cost of Creation
and the flourishing of all of life.

We ask for Your courage to live another way
to sow and plant that which will flourish
to give generously without seeking return
to share hospitality with strangers
to care for the vulnerable
and be humble to receive care
in our own times of need.

It is to Your caring and compassionate gaze
that we lift up our eyes,
no longer hanging our heads
under the weight of guilt and shame
We choose to abide in Your amazing grace
We enter into the joy of Your deep mercy,
trusting that You will never expel us

from your presence. Amen

Thanksgiving and Intercession (*Concerning the times and the seasons – Thessalonians 5:1 while reflecting on Matthew 25*)

November 19th is just over a week from the next round of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 28) in the United Arab Emirates. When I read the phrase ‘concerning the times and seasons’ in Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians it made me consider how we as the people of God, present on Earth today, should respond to the times and seasons facing this fragile and incredible planet.

I’ve intentionally blended prayers of thanksgiving with intercession since the theme of ecological breakdown and climate change chaos can feel overwhelming to face – approaching such enormous concepts and realities with gratitude can help us retain a sense of empowerment and remind us that faith, hope and love do remain.

Concerning the times and the seasons
we give thanks for these darkening days of winter
Choosing to enter into a more restful pattern of life
following the wisdom and rhythms of the seasons
Avoiding the tendency to rush and be frantic
Choosing hibernation and hygge
over being harassed and hassled
Taking time to watch and wait and discern

On this threshold of another round of climate change talks
we give thanks for the willingness of nations
to gather and discuss, debate and work together.
We choose not to be complacent or complicit
Grateful for the abundance of this amazing planet
and for the true wealth of wonder
at the meticulous detail of it all
Grateful even for the sense of urgency and the gift of hope
concerning these challenging times and
the upending of the seasons

And in the face of a year of
more forest fires,
more extreme flooding,

more powerful than ever hurricanes,
more people on the move
because their harvests have failed again
and their homes have become inhospitable

We pray for an awakening
to what is of real worth
For a seismic shift in the hearts and minds
of decision makers and influencers
that will shake us from
complacency, denial or despair

We join our voices
with siblings across the world
and with all of Creation
crying out for systemic change

To have the courage and humility
to live respectfully within the planet's limits
To hope and work for harmony and unity
between each other and with the Earth

For the flourishing of all
The healing of Creation
and the Glory of God –
Parent, Sibling, Spirit. Amen

Blessing and Sending (*1 Thessalonians 5:8-11*)

This blessing and sending prayer is inspired by 1 Thessalonians – and perhaps presumes that may have been the passage chosen for the sermon, but the themes are fairly universal.

Blessings on you as you now go
into this day and week
that you belong to.

May your heart be guarded
from all that causes it to ache
with the breastplate
of faith and love.

May your mind be calmed
from all that causes anxious thoughts
as you put on the helmet of hope.

Whether you are awake or asleep
may you know you are living with and in Him,
who loves you so much
He died to save you.

May we encourage one another at every turn
May we build each other up at every opportunity
May we live into the salvation that is ours
through our Lord Jesus Christ.
Go in peace to love and serve our God.
Amen.

Resources for Prisoners Week Scotland 19-25 November 2023

“Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them.” (*Heb 13:3*)

Prisoners Week Scotland primarily exists as an opportunity to remind the community, especially those in the Church, about prisoners. It is an encouragement to all to remember to pray for prisoners, victims, families of prisoners and for those who work in our prisons.

Everyone is welcome to the national launch service on Sunday 19 November in Perth Letham St Marks church from 3-5pm, with special musical guest, Barbara Dickson, who is the patron of the Prisoners Week Trust. The event will include coffee and the opportunity for a chat and to view the stalls in the Marketplace, where Christian groups and others who work with prisoners and their families will be able to provide information and resources.

Further information and resources can be found on our website:
<https://www.prisonersweek.org.uk/> including the [Charter](#), which congregations can sign up to as a symbol of their commitment to welcoming people returning to the community after a prison sentence.

This year's theme is **“Strength for the Journey.”** What gives us strength and resilience along the weary road? Who can come alongside us? Are there tools that can help us? Or does it just feel like “the baw’s burst”? Where do we find our Strength? Who believes in us, despite

all our failings and misgivings? Our family? Friends? God? The prophet Elijah suffered hardship and exhaustion too, but when he felt alone and helpless and did not understand what was going on around him, God provided what he needed most: a gentle touch, food, water and rest.

The Prisoners Week Prayer

We pray this prayer each year and invite the Church to do so too. We are very grateful for the very many ways in which God answers this prayer between Prisoners Weeks!

This prayer can be [found online](#), or could be printed out for all the congregation (or added to orders of service), so that they may be taken home and used throughout Prisoners Week. There are also cards which can be ordered from Prisoners Week Scotland with the prayer printed on them.

Lord, You offer freedom to all people.
We pray for those who are held in prison.
Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist.
Support with Your love:
prisoners, their families and friends, prison staff,
chaplains and all who care.
Heal those who have been wounded by the activities of others,
especially the victims of crime.
Help us to forgive one another,
to act justly, to love mercy
and walk humbly together with Christ
in His strength and in His Spirit.
Now and every day. Amen.

Below is an expanded version as an alternative for use in a Sunday service where this has been a main theme of the service:

Prayer of Intercession *(expanded version of the Prisoners Week Prayer)*

Loving God, we want to thank You for Your gracious love,
no matter who we are or what we have done.
Thank You that You hear us when we cry to You.
We pray for all those who feel stuck in a place they don't want to be –
in a place of imprisonment, or of unforgiveness,
or of despair, or of isolation, or of injustice.

Come, Lord Jesus, and by Your grace,
grab outstretched hands and set fallen feet on solid ground.

We pray for all who have been harmed.
For victims of violence and crime, of abuse and neglect,
of prejudice and marginalisation.
We pray especially for those who feel that their voice is not heard
or justice has not been done.

May justice be restored through grace-filled conversation,
forgiveness and understanding.
Let those who have harmed see what pain they have caused –
and may those who have been harmed find the grace to forgive.

We pray for all who support people on release –
for organisations and faith communities who journey with people
as they seek to resettle in the community
and for the families of people in prison and all who support them.
May we as a Church in Scotland be communities of grace,
where people feel welcomed, whoever they are.

Loving God, You sent Your Son Jesus to live among us
and to show us Your infinite grace.
We thank You for all those who make themselves present in Your name in our prisons.
For the chaplains who provide pastoral and spiritual care,
in Your strength and through Your Spirit.
For the volunteers who regularly go in to support chaplains and show God's love
as they journey with those on remand, on short-term and on long-term sentences,
and all those who visit or write letters.

Faithful God, we give thanks today for all who have experienced Your transforming grace
in and out of prison.
Our hearts are filled with joy when we read the stories of lives transformed,
of brokenness healed,
of lives restored.
We could not survive without Your grace.

God of justice,
we pray for all those involved in our justice system –

for the police,
for those in the courts who make those big decisions,
for all prison staff who care for those sent to prison,
for the press who report on cases
and for the public as they form their own attitudes to some of the most vulnerable in our society.

Help us all to see things through Your eyes,
ministering each day to bring Your kingdom here on Earth.
In Your 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.

- CH4 81 – “I to the hills will lift mine eyes”
- CH4 289 – “Lift up your heads eternal gates” – works well for the themes in Psalm 123 and might offer some uplifting balance to some difficult themes present in many of the passages.
- CH4 513 – “Courage brother do not stumble” – as we reflect on our calling, vocation to serve one another and help those around us flourish.
- CH4 694 – “Brother, Sister let me serve you”
- CH4 217 – “God of day and darkness”
- CH4 348 – “Praise the one who breaks the darkness”
- CH4 412 – “The strife is o’er, the battle done”

- CH4 729 – “Hear me dear Lord in this my time of sorrow”

Many of the passages and themes above deal with difficult, frightening and overwhelming situations. The following three songs provide a way to pray in such moments.

- CH4 95 – “I shall praise you O God from my soul” – this song can offer reassurance that living for God is a wonderful and powerful choice, despite anything in the world that might shake that belief. It is especially poignant if questions about power and poverty are being explored in relation to the passage from 1 Thessalonians.

CH4 543 – “Christ be our light” – a fabulous song that picks up many of the themes from Thessalonians, allowing cheerful proclamation alongside honest confession of the state of the world and the part we’ve played in that.

- CH4 673 – “Let us tongues and talents employ” – this would be useful if service and vocation themes emerge

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

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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