

Third Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

Sunday 9 June 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Dr Murdo Macdonald, Policy Officer for the Society, Religion and Technology project, for his thoughts on the third Sunday after Pentecost.

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

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

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

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

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

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Introduction

This week (9-15 June) is the annual week of prayer for the SRT. The Society, Religion and Technology (SRT) is a project of the Church of Scotland which for more than 50 years has sought to help the Church to engage with ethical issues in relation to science and technology. For a bit more background information, and to download free resources, see [Society, Religion and Technology Week of Prayer 2024 \(churchofscotland.org.uk\)](https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk) As well as highlighting and celebrating many of the benefits and advantages that technology brings, SRT considers some of the dilemmas that advances in science and technology present us with. In all of these considerations and debates, a prayerful understanding of the ultimate lordship of Christ is essential. For this we value the prayers of the people of God – not just this week, but throughout the year.

[1 Samuel 8:4-11 \(12-15\), 16-20 \(11:14-15\)](#)

At the stage in Israel's history when this was recorded, they weren't so much a nation as a loose confederation of tribal states. True, they all gave allegiance to the God who had rescued them from captivity in Egypt and brought them to the promised land, and they recognised the authority of the prophet Samuel, who for many years now had been their spiritual leader, but beyond that there was little sense of nationhood.

Now, feeling threatened by the surrounding nations, and concerned that the ageing Samuel has appointed his dishonest and unjust sons as his successor (8:3), the tribal elders came together to petition Samuel to try a radical new departure. Having seen what was going on in surrounding countries, they asked him to appoint a king to lead them (v5).

We need to note that in all this episode, there is no indication that anyone sought leadership from God – which should have been their first recourse, as it should be ours. Samuel showed allegiance to family, and the elders took their cue from what was going on in the world around them. Most of us probably don't have to look too far to find contemporary examples of these kinds of mistakes being made!

Finally, in verse 6, God is approached – but you get the sense that Samuel does so not so much to seek guidance as to the right way, as to bring before God his complaint that his pride has been hurt! God's response? To tell Samuel: it's not you they have rejected, but me as their [rightful and true] king (v7). A famous chocolate brand had an advertising slogan: "Why have cotton, when you can have silk?" In other words, don't settle for second best! The people of Israel rejected the one who is the true King, and opted for a less reliable, human alternative.

They did so perhaps out of a sense of vulnerability, perhaps to fit in better with the neighbours, perhaps because it seemed logical, perhaps out of a sense that times had moved on, and therefore so should they. We can all recognise such motivations, when we are similarly tempted to make decisions without following God's direction, or properly acknowledging the lordship of God.

We can also draw out the point that succession is often a difficult thing: those in authority sometimes cling to power too long, or may overlook the faults of their favourites. This can be as true in the life of the Church as in any other aspect of our lives. Ultimately, God should be in charge.

[Psalm 138](#)

The theme of praising the lordship of God is prominent in this psalm. While other people around them had gods they paid homage to, the Psalmist was confident that the God who was at the heart of the life of the Israelite community was the one true God (v1).

The first (vv1-3) and last (vv7-8) sections of the psalm are very personal – note the repeated use of the word “I”. For the writer, God isn't just some far-off deity who takes no interest in the affairs and concerns of the individual. See, for example, v3: “When I called you answered **ME**”. A result of this knowledge is that the Psalmist is “emboldened” (v3); given confidence to move forward, knowing that God is with them. Towards the end of the psalm, there is similarly a consequent knowledge that, whatever happens, God will vindicate **ME**, because God is the God who loves (v8).

The middle section of the psalm (vv4-6) is slightly less focused on this personal perspective, and encourages us to also take a broader view. The Psalmist prays that our vision of the lordship and pre-eminence of God will not be limited to our own personal world, but that others – in particular the kings and rulers – would also praise God (v4).

What lessons can we draw from this psalm? Our own personal experience of the lordship of God is important: it can and should be the fulcrum and focus of our lives, the basis on which we build. We too can experience the unfailing love and faithfulness of God described in verse 2. And we are reminded of the importance of not just experiencing the love of the one true God, but also of proclaiming it in a prevailing culture which acknowledges all kinds of other ‘gods’.

This is the second important lesson to be drawn: that what we learn about God isn't just for ourselves, but is to be shared – and shared widely! The Psalmists' sights are set high, and so should ours be, praying that kings (and others who carry the burden of authority) should be made aware of just how important and worthy of praise God is. We are reminded that, in the New Testament, Paul writes to Timothy, encouraging him to pray for all people, including kings and those with authority (1 Tim 2:1-2). With a general election looming, now might be an especially good time to pray for those who lead us politically, although of course this needs to be done sensitively, and without descending into party politics.

[Genesis 3:8-15](#)

This passage forms part of what has become known as 'the fall' narrative. Humanity, having been created in the image of God (1:27), has been living in fellowship and harmony with God. However, into this situation, seeds of doubt begin to be sown, and in 3:1, the question is posed, "Did God REALLY say...?"

From this point on, things take a distinct turn for the worse: previously unshakeable, the authority and lordship of God is called into question. The ultimate consequence is disobedience. The relationship between humans and their Creator becomes fractured, and the trust between them is (quite literally) fatally interrupted. This is graphically illustrated by the scene in this reading, where humans are portrayed as attempting to hide from God (v8).

There then follows the kind of blame-game that we are all familiar with in our own lives, as each tries to pass on responsibility for what has gone wrong to somebody else further along the chain. It may not be quite at the level of "the big boys made me do it, and ran away!", but it's a similar scenario, one that has been played out countless times since, and which all will recognise. Perhaps some contemporary examples, e.g. in the political sphere, can be pointed to at this stage.

One of the fundamental lessons to be learned is that we are all vulnerable to being (at the very least) tempted to doubt what God has said. To act on that temptation has consequences for our relationship: not only with God, but also with other humans (e.g. we blame them for things going wrong). Ultimately our relationship with the whole created order is affected. The consequences of this disobedience are still being felt today – as Paul reminds us in Romans, "the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now" (Rom 8:22). There is of course ample opportunity to point to examples of where the creation has been affected by our human activity and selfishness.

God's commands and call on our lives are as important today as ever they were. As Paul says just a few verses later in Romans, we need to be reminded that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom 8:28, NIV). Even in our fractured, broken world, God remains lord of all.

Psalm 130

This short psalm, one of a group known as the Songs of Ascent, was originally designed to be sung by the Jewish community as they processed uphill (ascended) on their annual pilgrimage to the city of Jerusalem. As such, it is almost a direct counterpoint to the Genesis passage. Rather than fearfully hiding, here the people declare that their hope is in the Lord (vv4, 7). Rather than waiting anxiously for an encounter with a God whose lordship has been doubted and whose command has been disobeyed, to the Psalmist this waiting for the Lord (vv 5, 6) is portrayed in a much more positive light. Anticipation rather than apprehension is the prevailing emotion in this psalm.

It's not all plain sailing, though. At the beginning of the psalm, the cry is uttered "out of the depths" (v1), and there is a recognition that God doesn't always answer immediately – many of us will be familiar with the image of having had to wait through the night for dawn to finally break (v6). So it isn't always sweetness and light, the path wasn't always smooth; something that we will recognise from our own lives.

So, what makes the difference between these two contrasting scenarios? The difference is that here the lordship of God is properly acknowledged by the Psalmist. Rather than a broken relationship and a sense of shame at having been persuaded to doubt and disobey, here we see the right kind of relationship between God and humans. A relationship where people bring joyous praises to the God who supplies all their needs. There is also an honest acknowledgement of the reality of sin and wrongdoing (v3), but at the same time a realisation that God is willing and able to forgive.

In contrast to what was said about God's word in the Genesis story ("did God REALLY say...?"), here the Psalmist doesn't doubt what God has said, but rather puts their HOPE in God's word (v5). We live in a world of unreliable sources and fake news, so it is good to have a solid foundation on which to build our hopes and lives.

Forgiveness, redemption, hope. All of these come as a consequence of a willingness to cry out to God. To put right our relationship with God; to acknowledge sinfulness and wrongdoing, rather than to try to hide or deny it. This right relationship is built on the realisation that God's love is unfailing (v7).

[2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1](#)

As we have seen in the other passages that we have looked at, there is a constant competition going on for our attention, for primacy in our lives. Our tendency is to be distracted from the ways of God rather than relying on and acknowledging God's lordship in all areas of our lives.

In the last verse of Chapter 4, Paul urges the readers to get things in the right perspective. Rather than being focused on what we see around us, and taking our cue from the world, the apostle urges us to: "fix your eyes on what is unseen, what is eternal" (4:18, NIV). He knows as well as we do that its always easier, always more tempting, to put our faith in the tangible, the easy, the accessible – the kinds of things that everyone else relies on. It is much more challenging to "live by faith, not by sight" as he says a few verses later (2 Cor 5:7, NIV)

In a few weeks we will approach the centenary of a very remarkable example of someone who got their perspective right, much to the amazement of those round about him. In July 1924, Eric Liddell was to run in the 100m at the Paris Olympics – an event he was almost certain to win. However, Liddell, who was known as the "Flying Scotsman", was a committed Christian, and as a result of his Christian convictions, he had always refused to compete on a Sunday. As one of the qualifying heats for the 100m was on a Sunday, this meant that Liddell forfeited the opportunity to win a gold medal in this event. As later portrayed in the Oscar winning film, *Chariots of Fire*, Liddell instead competed in the 400m event. Despite not being the favourite, he scored a memorable victory. Just before the race, Liddell was handed a piece of paper with the message: "In the Bible it says: 'He that honours me I will honour'", a reference to 1 Samuel 2:30.

Even more remarkably, Liddell subsequently remained true to his conviction that he had been called by God not to pursue a career in athletics, but rather to return to China, the land of his birth, as a missionary. He died there, in a Japanese concentration camp in 1945.

All in all, a very inspiring story: perhaps you might want to arrange a screening of "Chariots of Fire" in your local area.

We may not be called to make such a remarkable, high profile stand for our faith, but God still calls each of us to be faithful.

Mark 3:20-35

“He’s out of his mind” (v21). This was the assessment of Jesus’ own family of the success of His ministry. The religious leaders went even further: their conclusion was (perhaps inevitably) couched in more spiritual terms, but was significantly more condemnatory. Their assessment of the situation was that he was possessed by the devil (vv22, 30).

How did Jesus react to experiencing this opposition to His work? His response wasn’t to back down: Jesus was robust in defence of His ministry, and of those who followed Him. Jesus made it clear that the battle in which He was engaged was a spiritual one, and that He was on the side of righteousness and truth (vv23- 29). When those close to Jesus tried to use family ties to get Him to behave more in line with expectations (v32, 33), Jesus made it clear that that approach wouldn’t work either. Jesus insisted that what was important was to persevere in following the ways of God rather than conforming to what was expected by everyone else: “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother” (v35).

Jesus wasn’t just doggedly sticking to His guns, as we tend to do. He reminds people that to do God’s will is what is most important – in other words, God is the Lord of His life, and should be in ours.

In the well-known passage in Ephesians, Paul reminds us that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Eph 6:12), and then goes on to encourage readers to put on the full armour of God (Eph 6:10-20).

Sermon ideas

The common thread which runs through all these readings is a question of lordship. All of us face competition for our attention: who calls the shots, who or what makes the rules that we follow in our lives, what voice do we listen to when making decisions? This is true for us as individuals, and also corporately – as communities or as churches.

Each of the sections of Scripture we have considered this week illustrate this in different ways: whether it’s the nation of Israel saying “we want to be like other nations”, Adam and Eve facing the consequences of having made the wrong choice when challenged with the question “did God REALLY say?”, or Jesus being accused by the legalists of His day of not properly following the rules (as interpreted by them), we keep coming back to the question of who is ultimately lord in our lives.

As we have seen in many of these passages, and as we will all know from personal experience, there is often pressure to conform to what is expected of us, and to what the world round about us is doing. We might find ourselves ridiculed, we might be deserted by friends or family, or we might be condemned by those in authority. However, we are called to stick to our convictions, and to keep God at the forefront of what we do. Ultimately, the lordship of God, even in the face of all kinds of opposition, is what is important.

Prayers

Call to worship *(Based on Psalm 138)*

I will praise You, Lord, with all my heart;
I will bow down toward Your holy temple.

I will praise Your name
For Your unfailing love and Your faithfulness,

You have exalted Your solemn decree;
When I called, You answered me;

May all the kings of the earth praise You, Lord,
When they hear what You have decreed.

May they sing of the ways of the Lord,
For the glory of the Lord is great.

Though the Lord is exalted, God looks kindly on the lowly;
Though lofty, God sees them from afar.

**Your love, Lord, endures forever –
Do not abandon the works of Your hands.
Amen.**

Prayers of confession/repentance

Compassionate and ever-loving Lord,
we thank You that in Your mercy
You have brought us together today to worship You, the one true, holy and everlasting
Lord.

We ask that You would give us the grace to grow in knowledge of You.

Loving, Heavenly Father,
we come and bow in Your presence, offering our prayers and worship to You.
We acknowledge that You are the one who has created all things,
and to who we all owe our existence, our life.

We seek to live in Your light and Your strength,
but we confess that there are times when our steps are faltering, times when our trust in
You wavers.

Lord we would ask that You give us a deeper trust,
that You would give us a deeper knowledge of Yourself as our Saviour, Master, Lord, and
King.

Give us, we pray, deeper power in private prayer,
a greater devotion to Your holy word,
and a more steadfast grip on its truth.

Give us, we pray,
a deeper holiness in speech, thought, and action,
and let our lives more fully reflect Your grace and beauty,
so that our lives would overflow with the living water of Your Holy Spirit.

Accept our prayers we ask,
as they are offered on the strong name of Your precious Son, our Lord Jesus Christ
Amen.

Prayers of thanksgiving/gratitude

Lord of immortality,
before whom all creation bows,
we would ask that You would enable us to serve You with reverence and godly fear.
You who are Spirit, help us to worship You in spirit and in truth.
You who are righteous, help us not to harbour sin in our hearts,
or to seek satisfaction in the things of this world, which ultimately fail.

We give You thanks, O Lord,
for the many ways in which You provide for us.
The material blessings we enjoy, and which we too often take for granted.
For the company and fellowship we enjoy,
for the people who bless and enrich our lives beyond measure.
Lord, we are conscious that for many in our communities, in our world,

these are not blessings that are available to them.

We are conscious that there are people who lack resources,
those who feel lonely and isolated,
those to whom the future seems bleak.

Give all, we pray, the resources they need.

We give You thanks for the many people who work to support others in our communities,
and without whom all our lives would be much poorer.

Lord, we would ask that we would always be thankful to You, the source of all of our needs.
We would ask that You would aid us to love and serve You supremely,
to serve You more fully, and in Your grace to respond to Your glory.

All of these prayers we offer in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ,
Amen.

Prayers for others/ intercessions

O Lord, in prayer we launch far out into the world.
In prayer we place all our concerns in Your hands,
trusting that You are the God who hears and answers our prayers.

We come in prayer to intercede for those whom we love,
and for those whom we struggle to love.
We pray for Your Church around the world, and for Your kingdom to come.

Lord God, as we particularly remember the work of the Society, Religion and Technology
Project this week,
we give You thanks for the gift of science.
We give You thanks for the ways in which it has helped us to comprehend the natural world
and the universe that You have created.
We appreciate the wonder and awe that science instils in us.
We are humbled and grateful for the beauty and complexity of the world around us as we
gain more understanding of Your magnificent handiwork.

We give thanks, O Lord, for hard work, integrity, and dedication to the truth.
Lord, we humbly pray that the discoveries and inventions might unite us more closely with
You and with one another.
May we wisely use the information and tools produced to improve the world and the lives
of all our fellow creatures.

Lord, we humbly implore You to keep our scientists inspired and encouraged so that their effort will ultimately bring honour to Your name.
Bless the work of their hands.
May they always have You as their source of inspiration and the goal of their work.

We ask all these through Your Son and our Saviour, Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing/ closing prayer

Lord God, we know that You are the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, and from whom all blessings ultimately flow.

As we go from this place, give us courage we pray.
Help us not to lose heart, but rather to be renewed day by day.
Give us strength, O God, to fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen,
as we seek to share the glorious good news of the Gospel of God.
For in Christ's name we pray,
Amen.

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All – the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition launches on 19 May 2024. The book is available to order from <https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

It will be released as full music version and words only books; and in due course digital resources including expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website; streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos.

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 88 – “Up from the depths I cry to God” (a more contemporary version of Ps 130)
- CH4 125 – “Lord of all being, throned afar”
- CH4 255 – “Father, hear the prayer we offer”
- CH4 284 – “Hope is a candle”
- CH4 378 – “Praise to the Holiest in the height”
- CH4 472 – “Come, thou long-expected Jesus”
- CH4 624 – “In Christ there is no east or west”

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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