

## Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – Year C

**Sunday 2 February 2025**

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Dr Doug Gay, Principal of Trinity College Glasgow and Locum Minister at Kelvinside Hillhead Parish Church, for his thoughts on the fourth 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

Epiphany is a (non-moveable) feast day in the Church Year, marked on 6<sup>th</sup> January, which celebrates the revelation of Christ to ‘the Gentiles’/the world. It is associated with light, revelation and discovery and also, for me, with mission, as we reflect on Jesus being sent to be the Saviour of the World (1 John 4:14). I see it as an ‘extrovert’ season, when the significance of Christ’s coming ripples out from Bethlehem. It is also possible to think of the time between Epiphany and Lent as a kind of ‘season of epiphany’ in which we are progressively unfolding the significance of the incarnation, as we encounter Jesus in the gospels. For this reason, it is a time when I often favour the gospel readings in my preaching and use these weeks in my preaching plan for the year to focus on the life and ministry of Jesus. Easter falls late this year and Lent is still four weeks away.

When preparing for Sunday worship, I always think about Sam Wells saying that “scripture trains us in the skill of naming the presence of God” and hold that alongside a quote from Northern Irish pastor, Derek Poole, who spoke about the importance to his congregation of asking, “What name of God do we cry out in this situation?”

In my preparation for preaching, I am influenced by Tom Long’s book *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* and his call in that book to pay particular attention to the genre of a scripture reading and to its literary features. He encourages us to ask ‘what the text is doing’ and how that relates to ‘what the sermon is doing’ and I find these particularly fruitful and generative questions when I start looking at the week’s readings.

My approach to preparation will be shaped by having a general preaching plan for the year, within which I always try to include: extended time in one gospel (in Year C the featured gospel in the RCL is Luke – although John is woven through all three years); one topical series (often but not always in Lent); extended time in one Old Testament Book (Isaiah and Jeremiah are prominent in Year C) and in one Epistle (1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy all feature this year).

This plan means that I have a sense of what I will be focusing on in different parts of the year and so I will not simply be choosing whichever reading catches my eye to preach on. So on 2 February, I will be in a time focusing on the life and ministry of Jesus, so if I am scheduled to preach within our ministry team, I will be preaching on the gospel passage from Luke 4.

I always have an Old Testament and a New Testament reading in the service (I don't always read the gospel!) and I always try to sing the Psalm set for the day as one of the praise items, if there is a singable version available!

My go-to lectionary website is [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org) and I like to check out visual images associated with the texts via the [Vanderbilt Lectionary](http://Vanderbilt Lectionary) or through the wonderful Visual Commentary on Scripture [www.thevcs.org](http://www.thevcs.org) – check out their 'exhibitions' of art works associated with today's texts.

Any Sunday morning service has an all-purpose quality to it – the liturgy as a whole needs to do a range of things which go beyond the specific thing that the sermon may be doing – but given that, my approach is always to tie the whole together as coherently as possible. I often use verses from one of the readings (very often but not always the Psalm) in a set of Opening Responses and I usually craft a short Dismissal sentence that is closely linked to the theme of the sermon, such as: "Go now to live in faith, hope and love, and the blessing...."

I also look for hymns and songs with close connections to the scripture readings and the theme of the sermon, hoping to create a series verbal, conceptual and emotional echoes and resonances within the service that give it the feel of a designed and integrated whole.

## [Jeremiah 1:4-10](#)

Lectionary preachers are faced with negotiating the selection of verses made by the RCL compilers. I take a flexible approach to the exact range of verses and if the verses before and after their selection (as in this case) were not included in RCL for the previous or following weeks, then I may read and preach on a longer passage. For example, if focusing on Jeremiah this week, I might read and preach from verses 1-13 or read the whole of Chapter 1, as these verses either side of today's selection are not used anywhere else in the RCL in any year.

On Jeremiah, I always read Walter Brueggemann, who has always been a working preacher as well as a biblical scholar.

We are reading 'Old Testament Prophecy' here. My working definition of 'prophetic' speech and action is saying and doing what God is calling us to say and do in this place and time. Sunday mornings stage 'the prophetic ordinary' – calling the preacher to speak into this time and this place, for these people.

Jeremiah was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah in the late 7<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The verses before our reading identify him as a priest, from a priestly family and locate his ministry politically within the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. This bringing together of religion and politics is important because so much of the work of the prophets involves speaking truth to power.

What drives the work of (authentic) prophets, is the work of God in revealing the word of God. Our reading begins with the coming of 'the word of the Lord' to Jeremiah. Verses 5 and 10 are often described as a 'call vision', they are a way of stating the prophet's credentials and reinforcing the claim that their words are not just theirs, but are also God's. We get to overhear a dialogue between God and Jeremiah. Preaching professor Anna Carter Florence urges preachers to pay attention to 'the verbs' in a passage, what they are and 'who gets which ones?' (1). God opens the dialogue. Look at God's verbs here: I knew you, I formed you, I consecrated you, I appointed you – Jeremiah's ministry is located within the plan and purpose of God. Humility is a good sign in a prophet and Jeremiah feels overwhelmed by the call he is receiving – "Ah Lord" (= No Lord? Surely not Lord!), "I don't know how to speak!" His own words are not enough, he feels too young. Interestingly, before God tells him what to say, he tells him what *not* to say – "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'" – God's call is also a command – "you shall go to all I send you to and you shall speak whatever I command you." That uncompromising instruction is softened by two deeply poignant things: God tells him not to be afraid... "I am with you" and God puts out a hand to touch Jeremiah's mouth – "I have put my words in your mouth." Now his calling is unfolded – it is to be political and history-making – he is being set "over nations and over kingdoms"! It is to be destructive and constructive, speaking against some things and for other things.

If reading on, I love the next verse, which I think helps us understand how prophecy and prophets work – God says to Jeremiah, "What do you see?". Prophets are not just automatons who pass on dictated messages, God uses and shapes their visionary awareness of the world around them.

The passage divides naturally into three movements: God's call, Jeremiah's reluctance (and fear) and God's equipping. What is God calling us (including our young people) to in our time and place? Do we trust that those who God calls, God also equips and enables? Remember in our Reformed tradition, calling is not just for ministers or deacons – it's for everyone – think of other ministries which speak for and against the powers that be – journalists, writers, artists, campaigners...

Any sermon on this passage should recognise the poignancy of God's care for Jeremiah – shown in comforting words – don't be afraid, I am with you – and in empowering touch.

[1] Rehearsing Scripture: discovering God's Word in Community.

## [Psalm 71:1-6](#)

I do believe in preaching from Psalms, but I worry when people denature and desiccate them by turning them into a list of analytical points. If you are preaching Psalm 71, a moving prayer for help and deliverance (which resonates with the accent on 'youth' in Jeremiah), think how the emotion of the Psalm, its poetry and form, can shape and inform your sermon, your hymn choices and the language of the prayers in the service. Look at who God is to this Psalmist: my refuge, my rock, my (strong) fortress, my God, my hope, my trust, my support, my protector...

## [1 Corinthians 13:1-13](#)

And look what's here – often read (at weddings in particular) but perhaps less often preached on (unless briefly at weddings). I often say when people tell me they can't stand Paul, "You don't like 1 Corinthians 13?" "Oh – well, I mean yes, but..."

Perhaps it being so often co-opted as a word to marrying couples (nothing wrong with that) means that Paul's words are less often preached into and received into other relationships – within families, churches, friendships? If so, today is a chance to remedy that. As with the Psalm, the genre and style of this passage – its poetic power and beauty – mean that preachers need to beware of reducing it to a three-point sermon which analyses the content at the expense of the form.

Reading it well, perhaps dividing it between the voices of four people who have rehearsed it, will already be powerful. This might be a time to experiment with a more creative sermon form, perhaps one that tracks some of the literary features of the four main 'moves' of the hymn/poem?

- Part 1 relativizes all other powers and capacities I may have: the first person "I" is important, giving it the sense of a realisation, a testimony. Without love I am noise, I am nothing, I gain *nothing*.

If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels  
but do not have love,

I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge

and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains  
but do not have love,  
I am nothing.

If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast  
but do not have love, I gain nothing.

- Part 2 recognises what love is and is not: with it I can bear, believe, hope, endure all things.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.  
It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs;  
it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth.  
It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

- Part 3 compares what is partial and must come to an end, with what keeps growing to fullness (note the shift to first person plural).

Love never ends.

But as for prophecies, they will come to an end;  
as for tongues, they will cease;  
as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part,  
but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

When I was a child,

I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.

When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face.

Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

- Part 4 declares what is now and what will endure and what is the greatest.

And now

faith, hope, and love remain,  
these three,

and the greatest of these is love.

## [Luke 4:21-30](#)

The Gospel reading makes no sense without the context of the previous verses, in which Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth. If preaching on verses 14-21 the week before, then read them again this week, making the reading Luke 4:14-30.

There are two dramatic movements in this passage, of location and of attitude, which reinforce one another. Jesus moves from the centre of the synagogue to a cliff outside of the town. Attitudes towards Him move from warm approval to murderous rage. The cause of this, around which the whole passage pivots, is His insistence in verses 23-27 on de-centring the hometown setting, drawing on examples from Elijah and Elisha to point to God's grace being directed instead towards foreigners in Sidon and Syria.

This rejection, painful as it must have been at the hands of Jesus' former neighbours and friends, is not to be the moment of His death. But He passes through them and goes on His way. He has further to go. Nazareth is the place of Jesus' beginnings but it will not be the place of His end. This scripture was fulfilled 'today' but there are other scriptures to be fulfilled later in Jerusalem. A look ahead to Luke 13:33 might reinforce this.

A sermon on this passage has these contrasts and dramatic shifts to work with and it has to reckon with this provocative and insistent de-centring of those who think they have first claim on Jesus. The push out beyond Israel to the wider world can be read as an Epiphany theme and a missional theme (note the reference to who Elijah is *sent* to) – God's sending, saving, cleansing love in Jesus is reaching out to those on the margins and challenging us to go where it goes.

## **Sermon ideas**

Sermon ideas are suggested within the exploration of the lectionary passages above.

## **Prayers**

### **Gathering prayer / Call to worship**

The Lord be with you

**And also with you**

Our help is in the name of the Lord

**The maker of heaven and earth**



Let us worship God

**Amen**

**Prayer of approach**

We come to praise You, living God,  
glad to be here together, glad to be here with You.  
We come to give thanks that You are our hope and our trust –  
You have been there for us since the day we were born.  
We come to give thanks for Your power and Your protection.  
You are our rock and our fortress;  
we come to hide in You, to find our safety in You –  
You are our refuge and our strength.

We come to worship You this morning,  
You made us in Your image, You keep us in Your love,  
You sustain us by Your power.

You are our God and we are Your people.

Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You this morning,  
in Your face we see the face of God  
in Your life we meet the life of God  
in Your words we hear the Word of God.

You are our God and we are Your people

Spirit of God, we praise You this morning,  
You give us life, You bring us light.  
We ask You to come and fill this time,  
fill our lives, open our hearts,  
bring Jesus to us and us to Jesus we pray.  
Meet us and transform us in this time.

You are our God and we are Your people.

God of Life, Trinity of love,  
receive our worship, accept our praise we pray  
and hear us as we join to say together,

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

### **Prayer of confession**

Merciful God,  
In love You made us, in love You call us.  
But we confess we do not live as the people  
You made and meant us to be.  
We have not loved You with our whole hearts  
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.  
For the sake of Your Son, our Saviour,  
forgive us our sins we pray.  
Free us from being centred on ourselves  
and give us grace to live our lives in love,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN.

God, who is both power and love,  
forgive us and free us from our sins,  
heal and strengthen us by the Holy Spirit,  
and raise us to new life in Christ Our Lord. Amen.

**Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.**

### **Thanksgiving and intercession**

Loving and Gracious God  
we thank You today for every sign of Your love and goodness in our lives.  
Thank You for those who know us and still love us.  
Thank You for this place and these people.  
Thank You for Your love, which calls us out and into the world You love.

Lord in Your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer**

God of Jeremiah, we thank You that You are Lord of our history.  
You call us to faithful and prophetic witness.  
We ask You to confirm us in our callings.  
Give us faith that You are with us,  
give us hope for what You are building and planting in our world,  
give us love for all those You love.

Lord in Your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer**

We pray today for all who are discerning Your call in their lives –  
give them faith to believe Your love can overcome their fears  
give them hope that Your power can overcome their weaknesses.  
We pray for those who work to nurture and support vocations in our church –  
we pray that You would call people to serve as ministers and deacons and elders.

Lord in Your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer**

God of Elijah and Elisha,  
we thank You that Your love knows no borders and no boundaries.  
We pray that You would lead us beyond our fears and our prejudices.  
We pray for all who work with those pushed to the edges of our communities.  
Especially today we pray for...

*[name, or hold space for people to bring to mind those who are on, and those who work on,  
the edge of our communities]*

Lord in Your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer**

Now we give You the week that lies ahead –  
You know what we are hopeful about and what we are dreading.  
We ask that You will walk with us and help us in all we do.  
In a moment of quietness, we bring to Your love, some person or situation  
that we should pray for this morning...

*[hold a time of silence]*

Thank You for hearing our prayers,  
which we bring to You in the name of Jesus our Lord, 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.

I am of course going to recommend you consult the excellent Songs for Sunday resource commissioned from Iain McLarty by Trinity College – you can find it at [www.trinitycollegeglasgow.co.uk/lectionary-year-c](http://www.trinitycollegeglasgow.co.uk/lectionary-year-c) (although he is still filling in all the Sundays and as I write this is one of the few not yet done).

Also Natalie Sims Lectionary Singer site has a wealth of resources, you can find the entry for this week here:

<http://lectionarysong.blogspot.com/2016/01/songs-hymns-music-for-epiphany-4c.html>

### Jeremiah 1:4-10

- GWA 58 – “Speak, O Lord, as we come to you”
- GWA 82 – “Here and now we’re bound together”
- GWA 111 – “God, come now to explore my heart”
- CH4 533 – “Will you come and follow me”
- CH4 542 – “Lord, speak to me, that I may speak” – God’s words in our mouths
- CH4 800 – “Send Me Jesus” (Thuma Mina)
- Don’t be Afraid, My Love Is Stronger (John Bell) – simple, moving song of God’s comfort and promised presence – works well with the Jeremiah reading and the Psalm. CCLI song # 1531247

### Psalm 71

- GWA 173 – “I love you, Lord, for your mercy never fails me”

- CH4 182 – “Now thank we all our God”
- CH4 554 – “Rock of Ages, cleft for me”
- A Mighty Fortress is our God (EINE FEST BURG)  
[https://hymnary.org/tune/ein\\_feste\\_burg\\_luther](https://hymnary.org/tune/ein_feste_burg_luther)

### **1 Corinthians 13**

- GWA 39 – “Love is patient, love is kind”
- GWA 42 – “God welcomes all
- GWA 148 – “I will sing a song of love”
- CH4 801 – “Ubi Caritas” (Taizé)

### **Luke 4**

- GWA 59 – “Listen for God who speaks within our hearts”
- GWA 216 – “Build a longer table, not a higher wall”
- CH4 187 – “There’s a wideness to God’s mercy”
- CH4 624 – “In Christ there is no East or West”
- “Oceans” (Where Feet May Fail) – Hillsong music CCLI #6428767

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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