

Souper Sunday 2022

Service theme: New Hope and fresh opportunities.



This elder-led (or member-led) act of worship is offered as a guide for leading worship in your Souper Sunday celebrations. Please feel free to adapt it to your own local situation, or to use it in its entirety.

Welcome to Souper Sunday 2022. This act of worship may be used on any Sunday of the year. This order of service is offered as a guide to how worship might be led in your Souper Sunday celebrations. Souper Sunday is designed to be an elder-led (or member-led) service. You can use it in its entirety, or select parts of it to use – please feel free to adapt it to your own local situation.

We also suggest that you order Gift Aid envelopes from the Church of Scotland HIV Programme for lunch attenders, or for those who wish to give but can't stay for lunch. These resources, along with others, may be ordered by e-mailing hiv@churchofscotland.org.uk

All hymns noted here are taken from the Church Hymnary Fourth edition (CH4), although other hymns may be substituted. The Bible readings printed in this order of service are taken from the New International Version.

Preparation

Before the service you need to:

- Recruit your participants. Identify roles for each – e.g. worship leader, someone to deliver the all-age talk, people to read and to pray. You may wish to have different people reading different sections of the talk – e.g. one to read the parts about the passage and one to read the parts about projects funded by the programme.
- Gather what you need for the all-age talk.
- Prepare a very simple soup and bread lunch for after the service, either in church or at home (as catering facilities or Covid-19 may dictate)

Order of Service

The participants leading the service enter and sit in the chancel.

Worship leader:

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

Good morning!

Worship leader gives welcome and intimations, ending with:

Today in Church we are celebrating “Souper Sunday”, when the Church of Scotland invites congregations to set aside a Sunday morning service to think about HIV in our world, and to remember in our worship and our prayers those people and communities whose lives have been affected by this virus.

This year, Souper Sunday’s theme is “New Hope and Fresh Opportunities”.

Because social gatherings have been hit hard by the current pandemic, the Church of Scotland HIV Programme is aware that a soup-and-bread lunch may not be appropriate at this time. However, please feel free to make a donation towards the important work being done by the Programme, both here in our own country and around the world. Information can be found on the Church of Scotland website.

And now, let us take a moment of silence as we prepare to worship almighty God.

[A FEW SECONDS OF SILENCE]

*Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.
For God is the king of all the earth
[Psalm 47: 6-7a]*

Let us worship God as we sing to his praise,

HYMN 172: *Sing for God’s glory that colours the dawn of creation.*

[ALL SING]

Speaker A:

Please be seated.

The psalmist writes:

“In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. [Psalm 71: 1-2]

Let us pray:

Loving God, we thank you for all your gifts, and especially for your love shown to all humankind through Jesus Christ, your Son. We thank you for your constant compassion, for your caring, guiding, protecting and forgiving. We thank you for loving all of us, despite our lack of love for you and our failure to love our neighbours.

Loving God, forgive us our feeble faith, our willingness to exclude people from our circles of concern through prejudice, self-centredness or lack of understanding. Forgive us for failing to respond appropriately to the concerns of people who are marginalised in life.

Loving God, as we rejoice in your love for all, and appreciate the transforming power of your pardon, we ask you to help us recognize our responsibility towards you and the world you have given us.

Encourage us to learn from Jesus as we try to live and love like him.

And now we join together in the words of the prayer which Jesus taught, saying:

All:

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
for ever.
AMEN.*

Speaker B:

All-age talk: "Do not be afraid – I am with you!"

Here's a question for everyone: Just what is God like? Is God young, or old? Is God stern, or kind? Is God a long way off, or very close? What do you think? What is God like? Let's get some ideas ...

[Ideas hopefully flood in!]

We'll come back to that in just a moment, but first, a very famous story.

I don't know if you've read the Narnia books of C.S. Lewis. Or maybe you've seen the films about that cold, wintry land of Narnia, which was ruled by a cruel witch. At the beginning of the most famous Narnia story, a girl called Lucy hides in a wardrobe on a warm summer's day. She goes all the way through this wardrobe, and soon Lucy comes out the other side, finding herself transported into the snow and ice of Narnia. Before long she meets a talking faun, named Tumnus, who tells her that Narnia has become a terrible place because of the witch: "It's she that makes it always winter," he tells Lucy. "Always winter and never Christmas; think of that!"

Always winter and never Christmas. Sometimes that's how we can feel too, especially in difficult times such as these. And sometimes in life, we might even feel as though we are far away from the warmth of God's love.

[SHOW CONGREGATION A PAIR OF BINOCULARS]

I've brought a pair of binoculars with me today. And if I look through the big end of the binoculars, everything looks to me like it's miles and miles away. That's sometimes how we feel we are with God. When things are going badly in our lives, and things get hard for us, that can be when we feel as though God has to be a long, long way off from us.

But here's something to remember: if I turn my binoculars the right way round, suddenly the binoculars work as they should and everything comes very, very close. Get things right and it's fine. Sometimes it certainly seems like God is a long way off. Yet the truth is that God is not far away at all. He's really, really close, even when times are hard for us.

Someone named Isaiah gives us a message of hope in the Bible. It's a message of hope for all those times of our life when it feels like it's always winter and never Christmas. Isaiah tells the people that God is someone who comes close to us: "Do not be afraid – I will save you. I have called you by name – you are mine. ... Do not be afraid – I am with you!"

As Christians, we know that there is more to winter than just the cold and the dark. We know the light and the joy that are brought into the world with the arrival of Jesus Christ. And that means that even in the darkest, dreariest, dankest days, when the wind howls through us and our noses turn

blue – even on these days, we can have the warmth of God’s love in our lives. God, who is with us in Jesus.

So let’s do our very best to remember that God offers his love and his peace and his joy to everyone, always:

“Do not be afraid – I am with you!”

Let us pray:

God, whose love encircles all the world,

We thank you that in your Son you show us how to live our lives. Help us to be open to your love, and lead us in all that we think, in all that we say, in all that we do, so that we might show other people the love that we have within us – love which comes from you and which is big enough to cover all the world.

In Jesus’ Name we pray. AMEN.

Reader:

Our reading this morning is taken from the New Testament and the Second Letter to the Corinthians chapter 4 reading from verse 1 to verse 15:

Therefore, since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practise cunning or to falsify God’s word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—‘I believed, and so I spoke’—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. Amen.

Speaker C:

The experience of the Christian is one which is lived out with one foot placed in “now” and the other stepping on towards “eternity”. With the eyes of faith looking towards Scripture’s promises we find that our own frailties can never be the entire story. Yes, we might suffer exactly the same aches and pains as anyone else. We might be laid low with illness just like our neighbours. And we will probably find ourselves needing hospital treatment or social care of one sort or another as the years go by.

Yet, our human state is in no way a reason for dismay, for we find our hope rooted in God who was and is and always will be the Rock of Ages, spanning all of time ... and beyond.

The message of the Christian faith down across the ages is one of divine love being made visible – made real – in the lives of the faithful. Just as Christ was made Incarnate through his human birth in Bethlehem, so too God works through his Church and its all-too-human members in our own day.

And so, generation by generation, the Church of Christ moves ever onward. As self-effacing Presbyterians, we might not warm to the idea of God working with us (who, us???) in the divine mission to change the world. But here is the reality of our calling, as found in the words of Paul to

the Church in Corinth:

"... since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart."

God's guiding of our lives makes it possible – indeed, necessary – for us to play our part in God's work. Imagine what this means both for us and for those around us, whether near or far. In the company of God, our lives can become heavenly beacons of hope in a world which so often seems to find itself mired in shadow. As Christ-followers, it is our role to wait for the Holy Spirit to show us how we should live, where we should go, how we should step out in the light of the Gospel of love.

"Hang on," you might say. "Just hang on just a minute. I have all the same limitations and failings as the next person. So how could it possibly be that the God of all time and eternity could use me in big, inspiring, world-changing ways? I'm so insignificant!"

Now perhaps that is sounding altogether more like the Presbyterian mindset with which we are so deeply familiar. We are just not up to the job. Or that is how we so often feel.

Let's go back to our reading and to its writer, the apostle Paul. He has seen a lot of life and has suffered in many ways throughout his energetic and often dramatic ministry. Opposition and oppression, arrest and punishment, illness and shipwreck – Paul has seen it all. He knows better than most that human beings have human frailties, and he acknowledges what it means to live our lives in full view of our stark, unavoidable limitations.

He speaks about "treasure in clay pots", pointing to the fact that the Good News of Christ is carried in the life and in the living of each believer. Like a clay pot, each one of us is anything but durable, and we know that we are all too likely to crumple on impact. Still, into our brittle, fragile beings God places the gift not only of life but of new life in Christ. Surely God could have found a bearer of faith more fit for purpose, more resilient to knocks and bumps. Of course he could! But God chooses us to be the ones who will carry Christ's love across our neighbourhood and far round the globe. Not them ... but us.

With a lifespan of no more than a few score years at most, each one of us will come and go in next to no time, but while we are here and while we have life within us, we can live that life – as we should live that life – appreciating the treasure that has been lovingly bestowed, more glittering than gold, more sparkling than diamond: God's gracious presence in us.

Seen in that light, the relationship between God and the Church's members takes on a remarkable new appearance. Not through our feeble abilities, but through the eternal grace of God, great things can happen. As if to keep the real message firmly in mind, Paul himself tells those Christians of Corinth: "... this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us."

If, then, God's Spirit brings new-found strength to our perishable "clay pots", should we not seek to pass on that same strength to others? Should we not encourage resilience-building in those who are weighed down in their own lives, equipping those who are struggling with strength to meet each day? This is very much on the mind of the Church of Scotland HIV Programme as it works with partner denominations all around the world. One of the biggest challenges in this whole field has been identified as the need to equip young people with the health education that they simply must have if they are to understand how the HIV virus works and if they are to overcome the dangers which it can pose. Tragically, many young people contract HIV because they cannot grasp the risks that may be surrounding them in their everyday living. But money from Church of Scotland members is making a difference all round the world:

Caribbean: The “Campaign for Life Project” in Cuba is working to build a space where people living with HIV will feel welcomed. Workshops on HIV topics will be on offer, along with a variety of health-related resources.

Middle East: A project in Egypt is aimed at awareness-raising on Hepatitis C and HIV. Organisers plan to reach out to the community to educate people in the reality of blood-transmitted diseases and to change negative attitudes and stigma within the community.

Africa: Nine denominations spread across all ten provinces of Zambia are working ecumenically as they plan to empower women and children through capacity development, sustainable care, support and prevention. In addition, educational opportunities will be made available through the scheme.

Asia: The Church of Christ in Thailand operates an emergency shelter providing holistic care for those who are temporarily homeless or who need to be near medical services. It also provides respite care and training for income-generation projects.

We are only clay pots, but within us is a power that is not our own. Through God working in and through his Church, Good News is sent out in the most practical of ways for the building up of those who are downtrodden. The Church of Scotland HIV Programme can point to so many examples of lives being turned around by the committed Christian care of partner projects which gain so much by our support, whether through prayer or donation. This work builds resilience and offers bright hope to so many people.

On this Souper Sunday, don't just spare a thought for those whose lives have been dragged down by the ill health, the private isolation and the public stigma which HIV so often brings. Play your part in bringing new hope and fresh opportunities of faith and life to so many people around the world. As Paul wrote to Christians in the midst of challenge:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. Amen.

Worship leader:

And now our Music in Worship. (Or sing another hymn)

[ALL LISTEN TO REFLECTIVE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC, PERHAPS A SOFT HYMN TUNE]

Speaker A:

Our prayers for a world in which HIV still causes such suffering and stigma.

Let us pray:

God of life ... and death ... and life restored,

in a world where HIV has caused such suffering and heartache, may your Church raise up hope for those whose lives are in such turmoil:

for those who are ill, may effective treatments be available and affordable;

for those who are stigmatised in their communities, may your peace be known;

for those whose family members have died, may love and care be on hand.

On this day when we recall the fight against this virus, we give thanks for the decades of frontline research which has brought such unimagined progress towards limiting suffering.

Bless the scientists, the medical staff and the policy-makers whose working lives are dedicated to making the world a place where life can be lived positively by people of all ages.

And lastly, we bring before you the partner projects of the Church of Scotland HIV Programme, working in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean and right here in Scotland.

Thank you for their dedication and for your love lived out in their deep and inspiring Christian commitment.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Worship Leader:

Thank you to everyone who has played their part in our Souper Sunday service this morning. Having heard about the Church of Scotland HIV Programme and its wide range of work undertaken in the field of HIV, please feel free to make a donation to its life-changing work.

And now we close our time of worship by singing a great hymn of thanksgiving and praise.

Hymn number 123, sung to tune 519: *God is love; let heaven adore him.*

[ALL SING]

Worship leader:

Let us go now to love God and serve our neighbour; to serve God and love our neighbour.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, this day and for ever more.

AMEN.

Some additional hymns:

192: *All my hope on God is founded*

736: *Give thanks for life, the measure of our days*

123: *God is love: let heaven adore him*

484: *Great God, your love has called here*

153: *Great is thy faithfulness*

198: *Let us build a house where love can dwell*

519: *Love divine, all loves excelling*

152: *Praise the Lord, his glories show*

124: *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*

721: *We lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet*

568: *When I'm feeling down and sad*

258: *When the hungry who have nothing*