

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – 15 October 2023

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Christopher Rowe, Minister of Glasgow Colston Milton Church, for his thoughts on the 20th 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

The resources for the first four Sundays in October have been written by [Priority Area congregations](#) (those in the 5% most deprived parishes). This is a month with a particular focus on tackling poverty. October 2-8 is [Challenge Poverty Week](#); and October 17 is the United Nations' International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

You will find more resources for Challenge Poverty Week on the [Priority Areas Facebook page](#), including stories about projects tackling poverty in congregations across Scotland. We would encourage you to share these with your congregation as a way of highlighting how the Church is engaging in anti-poverty work at a local level.

October 17 is the [UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty](#). The organisation ATD Fourth World (All Together for Dignity) offers lots of resources and ideas for those wanting to get involved. For those in Glasgow, there is a stone set in George Square (a replica of the original from Paris) with these words written on it: "Wherever men and women are condemned to live in poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty". This is a good place to start if you are wishing to highlight the gospel priority to the poor.

'Filled to the Brim' www.lincolntheologicalinstitute.com/the-embodied-everyday-lti is a new resource researched by Dr Wren Radford, who worked for the Poverty Truth Commission. Working with participants in Glasgow and Manchester, they explore their everyday experiences of inequality and the ordinary ways that people survive, care for one another, and seek to create change.

I usually try to read the scripture passages as early in the week as I am able and let them sit with me, trying to notice any coincidences or overlaps in what is going on in the world around me and the passages of scripture. Instantly, as I prepare these notes, I noticed 17 October, which may be an unknown date for many of you, but for me has significance from years of working with people living in poverty. For me it is a day for remembering – so perhaps remembering and forgetting are themes for this week. There might be one passage that stands out to you, do not be afraid to reduce and narrow your focus – if all the passages speak to you and seem to reinforce each other, use them all, but it is better to have a clear focus than try to squeeze everything in.

There are numerous online commentaries which are available, I like saltproject.org and workingpreacher.org; they usually offer a different perspective, so it can be nice to read both and see how different ideas come through.

I usually use the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible, but will often read alongside it The Message – which although often quite American sounding, usually helps me to understand better what the passages are saying in more everyday language.

www.biblegateway.com allows you to quickly look up a variety of different translations and www.biblehub.com offers Greek and Hebrew texts and a variety of commentaries to choose from. This week we are offered two Old Testament readings and Psalms, so choose one or the other.

Exodus 32:1-14

Understand where this episode takes place in the story of Israel – it is after the tribes of Israel have escaped from slavery in Egypt and are still in the early days of their freedom. Although early on in their journey they have nevertheless begun their moaning and doubting, saying they had better food and conditions in slavery in Egypt. They are still getting used to God and Moses. Now they have arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai, and Moses has gone up the mountain amidst cloud and thunder and lightning to meet with God while the people wait below. Moses will be gone 40 days and 40 nights, which is long enough that the people decide he has disappeared forever and is not coming back – so they decide to make their own god – the golden calf.

What strikes you about this passage? From our vantage point it is easy to judge the Israelites harshly for so quickly losing interest in the God who has just sent 10 plagues, opened a path through the red sea, drowned Pharaoh's army, fed the people manna from heaven and opened springs of water in the desert. But try and stand in their shoes. Forty days is a long time for Moses to have disappeared up the mountain. They have had generations of being among the gods of Egypt, so while the idea of making a golden calf as a god to us sounds crazy, it is in keeping with all that they have grown up with. What ideas do we take for granted as being just the way things are?

Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23

This psalm is a reminder of some of the things that the 12 tribes of Israel did wrong during their wilderness wanderings – a quick jog through the book of Exodus. Read through the whole psalm rather than just the verses given, get a feel for it. It is a pretty damning list –

what would our national list look like? Colonialism, clearances, sectarianism, inequality and poverty – sticking with the idea that the Psalms are songs, what about reading through Burns' *'Such a parcel of rogues in a nation'*. Despite all their failings, which are not hidden, the psalm begins and ends with praise and thanks to God for God's steadfast love that endures forever.

[Isaiah 25:1-9](#)

This song of praise, a psalm or hymn, highlights all the good things that God has in store for God's people, ultimately even the death of death. It reminds the listener that God had planned wonderful things from 'of old.' What are the wonderful things 'of old' that we have inherited and benefited from? The strong people who have oppressed God's people shall turn to God, the city of the terrible nations – the imperial power will acknowledge the power of God.

God has been a refuge to the poor – and God is still. How does our Church continue God's work of being a refuge to the poor? The Church of Scotland has a practical commitment to the poorest communities in Scotland by doubling the staffing ratio (as it also does for remote rural areas) to help ensure that we still have a church presence in areas which otherwise would struggle to afford or sustain a church presence. Poverty has very real effects, which Isaiah poetically describes: "the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm, the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place." He is writing to people who know the hardship of foreign oppression – that is true for many in our world. Here in Scotland the oppression is less from a foreign power, but a domestic one: government policies that have stripped the welfare state, created a hostile environment for those seeking refuge from overseas oppression.

[Psalm 23](#)

A song of confidence in God's good purposes and constant presence. Just as we have different versions to sing this psalm, looking at different translations of this familiar psalm can bring new understanding to these familiar words. You might like the poetry of "The Lord's my shepherd I'll not want", but you might find "God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing." (The Message) brings new understanding, or, "The Lord's my shepherd, I have everything I need."

In our hymn books the psalm is rendered in five verses, of four lines each, but when looked at in the poetry of the Bible it falls obviously into three parts: the first and last sections

slightly longer than the middle section: verses 1-3 picture the loving and skilful shepherd who meets our every need. This is our life's journey, on which we are led.

Verse 4 tells us that even when things are bleak and difficult – as they almost certainly will be at some time, we have nothing to fear. The shepherd's rod and staff comfort us – nothing poetic or ethereal here, these are strong weapons to protect against attack and an extra arm to reach out and guide the sheep in the right direction.

The final two verses tell of a homecoming: food and strength in the face of challenges and enemies, anointing to bring us healing and reassurance, our cup of wine is so full it overflows. There is no escaping from God's goodness – it will follow us all the days of our lives, and we shall live in the God's house forever.

Philippians 4:1-9

Eugene Peterson says of Paul's letter to the Philippians: 'This is Paul's happiest letter. And the happiness is infectious.' Eugene Peterson *The Message//Remix: The Bible in contemporary language* (2003) Introduction to the Philippians p.2133. I recommend you read this passage in [the Message version](#) to get a fresh perspective.

It is easy to let life get you down, to see problems. One of the things I notice most often in my poor, deprived parish, where the statistics are grim, is that people hold onto positive things. A sense of humour is prized. Celebrations are made whole-heartedly. Many people are depressed and hopeless, but many also are somehow able to keep on smiling.

Paul's final exhortation could easily be used at the end of the service before a final blessing.

Matthew 22:1-14

I find this is a tricky parable to understand. What can help us here? It is good to begin by reminding ourselves where in Matthew's gospel it occurs and that the gospels are not just verbatim records of things Jesus said and did, they are gathered stories which an author has put together in a particular way in order to make a particular point. In Chapter 21, Matthew has Jesus tell this parable after entering into Jerusalem at the beginning of what we know as Holy Week – the final week before His crucifixion. Jesus enters the temple and drives out those who are buying and selling in the temple. The blind and the lame came to Him there and He cured them, the children sang His praises – and the chief priests and the scribes were angry.

The next day Jesus curses a fig tree, finding only leaves, and no fruit on it to eat. It withered at once. It is an analogy for the temple – Jesus had visited the temple hoping to find good fruit, but it had none. In a generation it will be gone, the old corrupt religion is on its way out. Jesus’s authority to teach was questioned by the Chief priests and the elders, so Jesus in turn questions them and tells a tiny parable of two sons: both are sent to go to work in the father’s vineyard, the first says no, but later changes his mind; the second says yes, but doesn’t actually go. Which did the will of the father? – the first one, obviously. In the same way Jesus says that the tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the Kingdom of God ahead of the chief priests and elders.

Then Jesus tells another parable about a landowner who does everything to produce a fruitful and productive vineyard, which he lets out to tenants and at harvest time calls for his share. The tenants beat the owner’s messengers, kill another and stone another – finally he sends his son, surely they will respect him? But they kill him, reckoning if they kill the heir to the land, they will get to keep it. Jesus asks the chief priests and the elders what the landowner will do, they presumably don’t see that Jesus is setting them up as the wicked tenants – he will put to death those wretches and lease the vineyard to other more loyal tenants, they say. Jesus then tells them that they are the wicked tenants, that the kingdom of God will be taken from them, the chief priests and elders, and given to people who produce the fruits of the kingdom. They want to arrest Jesus there and then, but they are afraid of the crowd.

So Matthew has Jesus tell another parable. The parable of the wedding banquet – our gospel reading for today. It is similar to a story in Luke (14:15-24) about a banquet and guests who refuse to come, so other guests are welcomed in, but Luke tells the story in a different context and has no guest being kicked out. Luke’s message seems be the opposite to ‘many are called but few are chosen’, highlighting instead how, in the messianic banquet at the end of time, you might be surprised that the poor will be there rather than those who expected a place.

Jesus begins by saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.” But as the story unfolds it is not clear if this is a favourable comparison. In the previous parable it was the chief priests and the elders who suggested that the landowner should put to death the tenants who kill his son. Does Jesus use their harshness against them in this parable – for He now incorporates a king who puts to death those who ignored him and destroys their city.

Some commentators suggest that the badly dressed wedding guest is a separate story that Matthew has joined to the parable. Luke has no mention of this detail, and it certainly seems to jar a bit. Why would he add this detail? What do you think?

Reading from my Priority Area context it is far more likely that the people of my community would identify with the 'good and the bad' who were not the original guests, but who were brought in only after the original (presumably higher status) guests didn't turn up to the royal prince's wedding. Were they prepared for a wedding, they might be able to get themselves dressed up, but fancy clothes cost money and many of the most impoverished in our society simply do not have fancy wedding clothes. So it seems a bit harsh to sweep up the good and the bad into the royal wedding, and then to kick out someone for not being appropriately dressed. Which makes me wonder about the traditional interpretation, that the king is God, and that this is a continuation of the parables that the religious leaders of his day have failed to respond to God as they should and will therefore be superseded by others.

Is this the wedding feast of the Lamb? Is this the feast that Isaiah sings of, where on this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, where God will destroy death for ever? Or is this something else, a bit more subversive? Is this actually a tyrant who is trying to prove their greatness and popularity by staging a wedding feast, which would be a way of binding their subjects in loyalty to them, but they rebel? The provinces do not accept the demand to come to celebrate the prince's wedding, to pay fealty to the heir, they reject them. In return they are destroyed, their city burned. But the king still wants it to appear popular – a deserted wedding banquet is hardly a sign of being powerful – so the ordinary people, the poor are brought in, much as crowds of press-ganged supporters are rounded up to attend rallies in dictatorships around the world.

We should remember in Jesus' time there was no such thing as a constitutional monarch; the rulers of His day were tyrants who ruled by fear and coercion. Does Matthew want us to understand Jesus as apparently comparing God, His loving father, to a tyrant who rules by violence? Maybe ... or maybe not.

Maybe Jesus is trying to criticise the violence of the religious and political authorities who are waiting to arrest and torture Him, to stitch Him up and execute Him. Is Jesus criticising the arbitrary power of a king who can invite you to a wedding feast so there is a decent crowd for the cameras, and in the same instant take a dislike to you and kick you out for being inappropriately dressed? The poor are used to being victims of arbitrary power and teach us to be awake to power dynamics.

Are we to believe that arbitrary power over us is the way Jesus wants us to understand God? It would seem at odds with Jesus's life and message.

One way we should try to read scriptures is through the eyes of the poor – Jesus says He has come to bring good news to the poor – therefore, when read through their eyes and the news is not good, then it is perhaps not the news that Jesus came to bring.

Sermon ideas

I usually try to prepare a short, five-minute reflection with a single takeaway point, and to get people involved with questions and answers and discussion. I like our worship to be interactive, where all ages can contribute their ideas, and I often use the Old Testament story as the children's story, telling it as if I were telling a late night story around a camp fire:

"The tale I have told you,
That tale is a lie.
But listen to me,
Bright maiden, proud youth
The tale is a lie;
What it tells is the truth." (Trad.)

The pattern of worship I usually follow is to try to begin where people are at, so even before we have had any readings from the Bible, I will ask a question for small group discussion – people turning to their neighbours, or if we are very small in number, joining in as a whole congregation, or often a combination of the two, starting off in twos and threes, and then feeding back into a bigger group. I call this reading the Big Book of God, based on the idea that there are two 'books' of God: the little book of God is scripture and the big book of God is the whole of 'life, the universe and everything'! This is not to be disrespectful to the Bible, but to acknowledge that even by its own testimony it does not contain all the words of Jesus, let alone all that God has done. Reading the Big Book of God is based on the idea that, as the writer Paula D'Arcy says, 'God comes to you disguised as your life.' God is as present in the everyday experiences of ordinary people as in the stories of the Bible (which are often the stories of ordinary people).

For today's readings, where you are being asked to consider these things through the lens of those living in poverty – both in this country and globally – I would try to think of a question that might relate to the aspect of the scripture readings you want to focus on. The questions should be open, to encourage people to speak.

Some examples of questions I would ask:

Gospel:

Have you ever felt out of your depth socially?

Talk about a time you felt underdressed for an occasion?

Have you ever been invited to an event where you didn't really feel you'd fit in?

Have you ever thrown a party and no-one has turned up?

Isaiah:

What was the best party you've ever been to?

Exodus:

Focusing on the idea that Moses was gone 40 days – a long time:

Talk about a time when you were left waiting for someone – how did it leave you feeling?

Or, thinking about the desire of the Israelites to make a golden 'god': have you ever experienced not having something that everyone else has?

Enjoy and accept whatever comes out of these conversations – it might be waiting in all day for the housing to fix a leak, or waiting for a bus that never came, or the fun of people talking about memorably good or bad parties. More than likely people will not join the dots and explain or understand how God was involved in that situation, God is usually well disguised in our lives, but hopefully it will get them talking, probably laughing and means that when you come to further discussion, people might get more involved and make some connections – perhaps linking their patience (or impatience) and the people of Israel in the wilderness, or perhaps the badly dressed wedding guest and their own experience of being underdressed – they may feel sorry for the man instead of judgmental (which has perhaps been the traditional understanding of the story), or be able to really enter into the future joy that God has planned for us.

As I've suggested, try to read the stories from the perspective of the poor, the ones on the edges – and if you're not poor, then try to imagine. Imagine that at the end of a fortnight period, you actually have no money in the bank, not even enough for a bus fare. That is normal for many people. I know people who have missed a job interview because they did not have the money to get a bus. Can you imagine having to choose between heating the house and buying food?

So in the Exodus reading, what do the ordinary Israelites experience? Liberation from slavery, but also being cast into the unknown, being asked to resist the peer pressure of

having 'gods' like the Egyptians; visible, shiny, precious, consumable gods. False idols, but nevertheless attractive, like flash cars, new phones, foreign holidays, expensive trainers and handbags. How are the poorest in our society most oppressed and taken in by the promises of consumerism? Consumerism is hard to resist, so why do we so often judge unfavourably the poorest who get sucked in? We expect that those who are least educated, most oppressed, most exhausted and crushed by society to be the ones most able to say that it doesn't matter if you have branded trainers. If you can afford them, you are allowed consumer goods, but if you are poor you should just have enough self-confidence to say these things are unnecessary. You will doubtless have heard some sort of tabloid stereotype about a poor family who have no carpets in their house but still have a big flat screen telly on the wall, or a child with expensive tracksuit and trainers, or the latest mobile phone. 'They who have put out the people's eyes reproach them of their blindness.' [John Milton].

Instead of judging harshly, think a little about the effect of advertising and the pressure exerted by consumer culture that means people who can scarcely afford such things nevertheless go to great lengths to get them.

Do such stories of those oppressed by consumerism offer any insights to the journey of the Israelites out from a multi-generational period of oppression and slavery into a new life of simple trust in God?

The traditional reading of Matthew's parable of the wedding banquet has the king as God; the banquet being heaven; the badly dressed guest an exhortation to us to make sure that we do not try to get in to heaven without clothing ourselves in righteousness or at least repentance; 'many are called but few are chosen' – a warning to us not to take things for granted. Maybe that works for you, but is this good news for the poor? The poor are used to versions of the phrase, 'many are called but few are chosen' – they are used to not being the chosen ones, and phrases about equality of opportunity ring hollow when you know that most people from your neighbourhood will not get to where most people from a more affluent neighbourhood will get to. When male life expectancy in Milton is 64.5 years and over 80 in Milngavie, just a few miles away, 'many are called but few are chosen' has a ring of truth for all the wrong reasons. It sounds like the lottery, 'you've got to be in it to win it'. Statistically you will not win at the lottery, but that does not stop people trying, especially the poor, who long for the chance of financial security.

So, is it possible to read the story differently, building on the insights of the poor, even if it means imagining some of those insights? Imagine that the King is not God, but a tyrant like Vladimir Putin, or Kim Jong Un (or in a post-war housing scheme context, a local drug Lord), who would not dream of inviting the great unwashed to any wedding banquet they were

hosting, unless of course it suited them – like when they want to prove their popularity to everyone.

And maybe it is enough just to throw the cat among the pigeons and ask some of these questions and see what God's spirit is doing among your people. Wrestle with the implications of the story, rather than presenting a neat answer.

Prayers

I always begin our worship with opening responses – these could be based on the themes, lines from the psalms often work well, or the Isaiah reading – but my habit has been to use a fixed opening response.

Based initially on a paraphrase of Psalm 24 – “The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it: The world, and those who live in it.” I try to make this more specific – we need to see that our particular context is where we meet God, God comes disguised as *our* lives, not only the lives of people from the Bible.

So we (in Milton, a housing scheme in north Glasgow) always begin

Milton belongs to God
Glasgow and all its people

Whether we know it or not
God is present

For we are made in God's image
And gather in God's name.

You could adapt these for your place, or you could do something totally different, but I encourage you to try to make it particular to your context, God does not just generally love everywhere, God specifically loves you in your place. So affirm that Thornhill belongs to God, or Dornoch, or Comrie – see how it makes your people feel.

Gathering prayer/Call to worship

Most Gracious God,
open us up to a sense of Your presence with us now,
for we believe that You are always here,
always present,

that there is no place where You are not.

And yet so often we go through life unaware of You;
so help us now to become aware of Your presence with us,
and within us,
and in the space between.

Help us to realise that there are no unsacred spaces,
only sacred places and desecrated places,
and that by our attention to You,
we make this a sacred space.

For we come to meet with You,
trusting that knowing You will bring us all that we need
to face what life has in store for us.
We long for the day when things will be done Your way
on earth as they are in heaven,
so hear us as we pray together, saying

Our Father...

Confession/Repentance

I have generally stopped using prayers of confession; most people in my community are acutely aware of their own shortcomings and don't need to be reminded, and God knows about them too and has already forgotten about them. I think we live in a time where we need to be reassured and encouraged and not reminded of our faults and failings, so rather than confession, I ensure that we have some words of affirmation and a reminder that no matter what we have done, God is with us and God loves us. But if you feel it is important, then again, try to be specific. Psalm 106 gives a reasonably full and detailed list of the faults of Israel, what would our national list of sins look like?

- A quarter of a million Scottish children living in poverty, nearly a quarter of our children?
www.cpag.org.uk/scotland/child-poverty/facts
- The UK has a very high level of income inequality compared to other developed countries. The majority of households in the UK have disposable incomes below the mean income (£32,300 as of 2022). This includes wages and cash benefits, and is after direct taxes like income tax and council tax, but not indirect taxes like VAT. The median income was rising by 2.2% on average for the last five years before the pandemic.

However, in 2022, incomes for the poorest 14 million people fell by 7.5%, whilst incomes for the richest fifth saw a 7.8% increase. www.equalitytrust.org.uk/scale-economic-inequality-uk

- October is Black History Month. In 1796, Scots owned nearly 30% of the estates in Jamaica and by 1817, a staggering 32% of the slaves. At any given time there were only about 70 or 80 slaves in Scotland but the country reaped the fruits of their labour in the colonies in the sugar, cotton and tobacco plantations. Many Scots masters were considered among the most brutal, with life expectancy on their plantations averaging a mere four years. www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/history-of-slavery/scotland-and-slavery/

Thanksgiving/Gratitude

There are so many things to be thankful for and I have listed a few things that may spark some ideas that can be formed into prayers for your context:

For life itself – we always ask if there are any birthdays in our congregation to celebrate, every life is worth singing about.

For God's immense creative love, which holds all things in being.

For God's immense patience that means God's loving kindness endures forever. No matter what we say or do, believe or think, goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life.

For Jesus the human and divine One, who came to live among us, to show a human face to God and to burnish the face of God in humanity.

The Lord is near – Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayers and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

In our church we have a prayer book, and before the service people are invited to write down names, or more proactively someone goes round asking people.

News headlines will often show some of the situations around the world that people are concerned about.

You could also look at websites, such as [ATD Fourth World](#) for suggestions of particular people and places – try to be specific.

Blessing

Close with Paul's words:

Finally, beloved,
whatever is true,
whatever is honourable,
whatever is just,
whatever is pure,
whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.

Or you could turn it into a set of closing responses:

Finally, beloved,
whatever is true,
Whatever is honourable,
whatever is just,

Whatever is pure,
Whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable,

If there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise,
Think about these things.

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.

Often we will listen to a version of the Psalm. Search on YouTube for the Psalm number – there are usually some brilliant versions out there that can really enhance your worship. For example, add ‘psalms project’ or ‘Poor Bishop Hooper’ to your search term. When you find one band or artist performing a version you love, the chances are they have recorded other Psalms for you to use another time

- CH4 14 – “The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want” – Psalm 23. See also CH4 14, 15 16 or
- CH4 462 – “The King of Love my shepherd is”
Look on YouTube for alternative versions, e.g. the Vicar of Dibley theme tune, or “The King of Love”, Stuart Townend’s version
- CH4 70 – “Give praise and thanks unto the Lord” – the opening verses of Psalm 106. I will often sing the lectionary Psalm rather than read it, so singing unaccompanied often works well with the Psalms, an old practice but sitting quite happily alongside more contemporary music or praise bands
- CH4 167 – “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah”
or
CH4 268 – “O God of Bethel!” – picks up the wilderness references from Exodus and the death of death in Isaiah
- CH4 198 – “Let us build a house” – (All are welcome) – taking the theme of the banquet in Isaiah and Matthew, but making it a more positive experience than Matthew’s
- CH4 561 – “Blessed assurance”
or
CH4 565 – “My life flows on in endless song” (How can I keep from singing) – picks up the positivity and encouragement of Philippians
- “10,000 Reasons” – Matt Redman’s more contemporary song we have come to love singing. CCLI Song Number 6016351.

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

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 can be found [here](#)

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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