

Second Sunday after Epiphany – Year B

Sunday 14 January 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Suzi Farrant, Church of Scotland Young People and Young Adults Development Worker, and Darren Philip, Church of Scotland Stewardship Consultant, for their thoughts on the second Sunday after Epiphany.

Suzi and Darren's new book, "*Being an Intergenerational Church – Practices to Bring the Generations Back Together*" can be purchased from [Saint Andrew Press](#)

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

Two weeks into a new year is a time when many people are enthusiastically living out New Year's resolutions such as eating more healthily or keeping fit. It is also around the time when others will be beginning to lose that enthusiasm, or giving up on their resolutions altogether. We've tried to read this week's passages with that in mind. They all contain a running theme of bodies, body parts and senses, encouraging us to explore what it means to live an embodied faith, and early in the new year might be a good time to explore what it means to honour God with our bodies.

The passage from 1 Samuel tells the story of an old man and a young boy: an encounter between two very different generations. Eli (the older generation) helps Samuel (the younger generation) notice God, but Samuel (the younger generation) is the one who brings God's word to Eli (the older generation). There is a mutuality to their encounter where each is able to learn from the faith of the other. This offers a perfect opportunity to explore how the different generations in your congregation interact. As you read what we have to offer relating to these passages, it would be worth thinking about how you might create space within this worship for different generations to interact and share faith with one another. If children or young people are usually in a separate space, could they be fully involved in the whole service? Could you meet café style and offer the opportunity for conversation across generations? Are there ways you could invite people of different generations to share a story of a time they have been aware of God's presence in their life? Can your worship include [all four Spiritual Styles](#) to enable all generations to participate fully?

[1 Samuel 3:1-10, \(11-20\)](#)

On the face of it, this passage is a case of mistaken identity: Samuel hears a voice calling his name and presumes that it is the priest Eli, so rushes to see what it is that he wants, yet finds, over a number of interactions with Eli, that it is not in fact him calling out, but the Lord. On the one hand this case of mistaken identity is easy to understand; Samuel has been working in the temple under the instruction of Eli since from a very young age and now that Eli's eyesight is failing, needs help fulfilling everyday tasks and might call out at all times of day and night. On the other hand, one might expect that anyone who had spent their formative years ministering in the temple under the instruction of the high priest, would know God and therefore be able to recognise the difference between God and Eli.

On a deeper level, perhaps this passage is more about the young prophet Samuel having an encounter with God that leads to him coming to understand that he is known by God and can know God. In a time when God's word was rare (v1), Samuel hears God calling to him by

name and then in a vision receives God's word. A privilege to hear directly from God, yet also a burden, as the word given to Samuel was not pleasant to share with Eli. Interesting to note that this encounter with God happened during the night in the place where Samuel slept – God chose to speak to Samuel within the normality of life rather than on a special occasion or on a mountain top. How many times have we missed hearing God's word as we only intentionally seek it where and when we expect to encounter it: during worship, when on retreat, at a summer festival etc?

We don't know how old Samuel was at the time of this encounter, but tradition would lead us to naturally expect that if God's word was to be revealed to anyone, it would be to the priest – someone with a proper position, the wisdom of age and experience – rather than to the young Samuel. Yet it was to Samuel that God chose to appear, and Samuel that God continued to be with. Knowing God and being known by God was transformational for Samuel and something that continued – as verses 19 to 21 show us, Samuel continued to receive revelations of God as he grew up, with the whole of Israel coming to know Samuel as a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.

- How do we know God?
- How has God revealed Godself to us?
- How do we invite others (children, young people, those not yet in our congregations) to be open to an encounter with God?
- How do we discern God's word to us today?

[Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18](#)

This psalm, written by David, is a prayer for God to search and know us, examining our hearts. It comes after a psalm of praise and before a psalm of prayer for deliverance. The psalm is written in four paragraphs of six verses each (vv1-6, 7-12, 13-18, 19-24) with each paragraph concluding with a couplet that elaborates on its central theme. The psalm is topped and tailed by references to searching and knowing. The first and third paragraphs form part of the readings for today. The first paragraph focuses on how much God knows us; a knowledge that is beyond our human capacity. The third paragraph focuses on God's creation of us (the verb used in verse 13 for created is "being brought forth"), with another reminder that we are therefore known by God but, as humans, we cannot comprehend the fullness of God. Despite all this the end of verse 18 prompts us to know that we can be with God.

- What does it feel like to be fully known by God?

- Are there bits of ourselves that we'd prefer were hidden from God?
- Our society puts a great deal of emphasis on knowledge; is this simply a human trait or a godly one too – does God think?
- How do we enable people, as a church community, to see that they are fearfully and wonderfully made?

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

This letter was written by Paul near the end of his three-year ministry in Ephesus, to the Corinthian church, with the purpose of identifying problems within it and offering solutions, teaching the believers how to live for Christ in a corrupt society. Corinth was a major cosmopolitan city, a port and an important trade centre. It was widely known as a place filled with idolatry and immorality. The Corinthian church, established by Paul on his second missionary journey, was struggling within their environment. Like a chameleon changing its skin colour to match its surroundings, the believers in Corinth had begun to be camouflaged within the corrupt city. Today's passage comes at the end of Paul's first section of the letter, which addresses the divisions and disorders within this church.

Paul makes it clear that our bodies are an integral part of who we are as Christians. Ours is an embodied faith, so we cannot treat our bodies as if they weren't created by and do not belong to God. Our bodies are not to be considered our own, but a temple of the Holy Spirit within us. The passage ends with a call for us to glorify God in our bodies. What could this mean for how we worship together? What does this have to say and what could be learned from those with physical disabilities? What should this mean for the food we eat at congregational events – should it always be cake and biscuits or would fruit sometimes be more appropriate?

Parts of this passage are not necessarily easy to explore within a worship setting, particularly where all ages are gathered together, as it deals with sexual immorality, fornication and prostitution. We certainly took time to see how it linked with the other passages, but it was this exploration that ultimately led us towards the theme of an embodied faith.

- Do we see our bodies as a gift?
- Can we recognise an interdependence with God around the use of our bodies?
- Does seeing our bodies as a temple of the Holy Spirit change how we view and use them?
- How can we embody our faith in the bodies that God has made for us?

[John 1:43-51](#)

The gospel reading takes place at the start of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee and sees the calling of some of the first disciples. Jesus finds Philip and says to him: "Follow me". It appears that Philip's response is an enthusiastic and immediate one, for the next thing we hear of him doing is finding Nathanael and telling him about this Jesus whom he has just met and understands to be the one promised by Moses and the prophets. Philip has seen who Jesus is and wants to share that knowledge with others. Nathanael's initial response is one of scepticism, asking: "how can anything good come out of Nazareth?" At the time, Nazareth was unpopular with the Jews, for a Roman army garrison was stationed there and the people in the town had a poor reputation in morals and religion, which perhaps goes some way to understanding Nathanael's reaction. Philip wasn't perturbed however, and offers Nathanael an invitation, saying: "Come and see".

What follows is a description of the brief encounter between Jesus and Nathanael. Nathanael appears to do a complete 180-degree shift from disdain to acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God. This comes after Jesus shows that He sees and knows Nathanael, and it is here therefore that we have links to the other passages. On discovering that he was known completely by Jesus, Nathanael could not help but see who Jesus was and his life was therefore transformed.

- Who are we following?
- Who are we seeing?
- Who are we inviting to come and see Jesus?
- Who are we willing to encounter across difference?

Sermon ideas

Here, we suggest two themes that link these scripture passages together:

Knowing and being known by God

The texts all speak of different ways of knowing God: Samuel hears God speak; Nathaniel sees Jesus and recognises Him as the Messiah; the Psalmist praises God and is aware of God's presence; Paul recognises the Holy Spirit within. So too, the texts speak of how intimately we are known by God: the Psalm speaks of God knowing every part of our body, every thought, every word we say before it is even formed; God calls Samuel by name; Paul writes of becoming "one spirit" with the Lord; Jesus 'sees' Nathanael with such depth it causes him to wonder, "Where did you get to know me?" The contrast between Eli's

encouragement to Samuel to “go and listen” and Philip’s invitation to Nathaniel to “come and see” highlights that the ways we can know and be known by God are many and varied. This week offers an opportunity to celebrate and give thanks for all of them. It could also be an opportunity to encourage people to try a new or different practice to draw close to God.

Alongside, or in place of a sermon, how might you encourage your community to explore and celebrate how they know and are known by God? Are there some members of the congregation who might share a short story of a time they have felt known by God or a practice that helps them get to know God? Could you provide an opportunity for people to speak in small groups to share their experience of God? (The resource [Conversations in Worship](#) provides a useful starter. Could you provide several stations around the worship space, each with a different way of engaging with God, e.g. something to read, something to listen to, a contemplative prayer practice, something to do or make?

An embodied faith

This week’s texts all involve an aspect of the human body: the psalm reflects on God’s knowledge of the whole of our bodies, from our outward frame to our inward parts; Samuel relies on the sense of hearing and Nathanael the sense of sight; while 1 Corinthians 6 reflects on how we use our bodies in the living out of our faith. Christianity is very much an embodied faith: we believe in the Word made flesh; Jesus experienced birth, growth, hunger, thirst, grief, pain and death; we welcome new believers to faith through the bodily act of baptism; and remember the body and blood of Jesus by consuming bread and wine into our own bodies. This can serve as a reminder that our spirituality is not divorced from our physicality: in the texts this week, we have both a celebration of God’s gift of our bodies and a challenge to use our bodies in such a way as to honour God.

In exploring this theme, it’s important to remember that no two people experience their bodies in the same way. Some may feel positive about the body they inhabit, others may find their body a struggle or feel that they have the wrong body entirely. It is also important to think about how those with a different bodily experience to your own would respond to each of the texts. For example, how would the invitation “come and see” in John 1:46 be understood by someone who is blind, or the encouragement “go and listen” in Samuel 3:9 by someone who is d/Deaf? Care needs to be taken around the words we use and the hymns we sing. It would also be a good opportunity to consider how your physical worship space can be shaped to be more inclusive of everyone’s bodily needs. Whatever our bodies look and feel like, this week’s texts invite us to consider how we take the body we have and embody our faith within it.

The 'Body Stories' resource in [A Narrative of Generosity](#) provides a simple guided conversation that could be used in small groups or in café-style worship to help the congregation explore this theme and how they will respond.

Prayers

Particularly if you use the embodied faith theme, consider how you might engage people's bodies through prayer. Might it be appropriate to encourage people to use certain hand gestures during a prayer, such as clasp hands, open hands, make a fist with hands? Or maybe people could be encouraged to kneel during the prayer of confession as a bodily sign of bowing before God. If all ages are present, perhaps you could use/rewrite the Hokey-Cokey as a call to worship, as a symbol of bringing our whole selves to worship. Perhaps you could have some creative prayer activities such as providing playdough and inviting people to create something they are thankful for as you offer prayers of thanksgiving, or providing paper and pens and inviting people to draw a situation they have seen that they wish to pray for.

Gathering/Call to worship

Come and see that the Lord is good.
Come and see all the Lord has done.

Speak, Lord, for Your servants are listening.

Come and know that You are fearfully and wonderfully made.
Come and know that Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Speak, Lord, for Your servants are listening.

Come and hear all the Lord is doing.
Come and hear that you are known and loved by God.
Come and hear the word of the Lord.

Speak, Lord, for Your servants are listening.

Confession/Repentance

Loving God,
We come before You now, acknowledging that over the last week,
we have failed to love others as You love us,
we have not seen others in the way that You see them,

we have not followed You in the way You have called us to,
we have not invited others to come and see Your glorious deeds,
we have not sought to know You more deeply.

Forgive us God,
for those times that we have failed to live as You would have us live,
for those times we have not embodied our faith,
for those times that we have not glorified You with our bodies,
for those times we have thought everything is about us,
for those times we have not recognised You calling to us.

Forgive us God,
and make us whole once again,
renew us to be a community that sees the beauty in the world and people around us,
a community that is known by You and seeks to make You known in the world,
call to us afresh this day.
Amen

Thanksgiving/Gratitude

Creator God,
You created us,
You knit us together in our mother's wombs,
You search our innermost thoughts and are acquainted with all our ways.
We praise You,

For we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful God,
You know us by name,
You choose to call to us, sometimes in ways we do not initially recognise or understand,
such knowledge is too wonderful for us.
We praise You,

For we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

All-knowing God,
You know all of us, from the inside out,
You have made our bodies a temple of the Holy Spirit,
and joined us together in unity.

We praise You,

For we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Invitational God,
You invite us to come and follow You,
You invite us to be seen and fully known,
You invite us to see and be a part of greater things.
We praise You,

For we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Amen

Prayers for others/Intercession

You could invite people to point to the parts of their body in turn (similar to the song 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toe's) as you join together in the following prayer:

Head

Thank You, God, for giving us minds with which to think.
We pray now for those in our families, in our communities and in the world,
who use their minds to help us understand things –
teachers, researchers, scientists, engineers,
those who use their minds to write and create –
authors, actors, builders, artists, musicians, inventors,
and those who use their minds to help us tackle difficult questions –
strategists, politicians, professors, community development workers.
We pray that You will enable them and us all to use our heads wisely.

Shoulders

God, we know that there are many people in our families and communities
that feel as if they are carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders.
Those who are constantly worrying about
whether they will be able to feed their family this week,
or if they have enough money to keep the heating on this winter.
Those who are making the difficult decisions
as to which employees to make redundant,
or which church buildings to close,
or how to tackle the climate crisis.
We pray that You will be with them as they carry those burdens on their shoulders,

that they may feel seen and known by You in their time of struggle,
and that we too may come alongside them, offering what support we can.

Knees

God, it can sometimes seem as if the NHS is on its knees,
struggling to care for its staff as well as the people in need of its care and expertise.
We pray for all those who are on their knees caring for others,
for carers, nurses, doctors, and paramedics,
and in particular for all those who are feeling unseen
by those making decisions about how services are run.
God, equip them in their roles of service,
giving them the capacity to really see and know their patients
and the strength to get through the difficult days.

Toes

God, sometimes we think our toes are not an important part of our body,
but without them our lives would be much harder.
We pray now for those who bring us joy through their use of the toes –
for dancers, sports people and gardeners –
and for those who keep our society moving by using their toes –
for bus drivers, taxi drivers, train drivers and lorry drivers.
We pray that You will nurture them
and that we will become better at not taking them for granted.
Be with us too, as we seek to walk alongside people,
bringing beauty into unexpected places
and sharing something of our knowledge of You with them.

Eyes, ears, mouth, nose

God, we pray for all those who use their gifts of the eyes, ears, mouth and nose.
We pray for those who see the world through eyes of compassion
and compel others to do likewise –
we pray for the work of Christian Aid and other aid agencies
as they seek to respond to the situations they see around the world of trauma and injustice.
We pray for those who lend a listening ear
and give space for people to share their stories –
for chaplains in our schools, universities, prisons, hospitals and workplaces,
and for those in our own pastoral care teams.
We pray for those who speak words of truth and kindness –
for parents, foster carers and newsreaders.

We pray for those who smell the freshness of each new day –
for children, chefs, flower arrangers.

Be with us all as we seek to embody our faith over the coming days,
sharing Your love with those whom we meet.
Amen

Offering prayer

However you uplift an offering, why not consider creative ways for people to offer their whole selves to God, for example by writing or drawing a way they will honour God with their bodies and placing this in the offering plate. More ideas for enhancing a time of offering can be found on the [Church of Scotland Stewardship YouTube channel](#).

Generous God,
All that we have comes from You,
and all that we offer You is Your own.
We ask that You accept and bless these our gifts of money,
but also the gifts of ourselves:
our bodies, our minds, our hearts,
that we may know You more closely
and invite others to 'come and see'.
Amen

Blessing/Closing prayer

Go forth from this place to be known completely by God
and to come to know God more deeply.
Go forth and see God in action and call others to see it too.
Go forth and embody God's love to all those you meet.
Amen

Musical suggestions

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

A suggested [playlist of songs from CH4 throughout Epiphany](#) can be found on the Church of Scotland website.

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 97 – “O God, you search me and you know me” – a reflective paraphrase of Psalm 139 which could be sung as an alternative to reading the passage.
- CH4 251 – “I, the Lord of sea and sky” – a well-known hymn which echoes the call of God in 1 Samuel. Younger children and those who don’t read English can be engaged by adding some simple signs or actions to the chorus, e.g. cupping an ear for ‘heard’, clasping hands on heart for ‘hold’ etc.
- CH4 713 – “Come, all who look to God today” – this hymn evokes the sense of ‘Come and see’ from John 1:46, with the second verse also picking up on the theme of intergenerationality.
- “When hands reach out and fingers trace” – a hymn in celebration of different bodies and abilities which can be set to well-known tunes such as ‘O Waly Waly’ or ‘Tallis’ Cannon’. It can be found at 136 in *More Voices*, 302 in *Glory to God* or on the hymnwriter’s website at:
https://www.carolynshymns.com/when_hands_reach_out.html

There are several short songs that can be sung without needing to read the words: one person or a choir/group can start singing and people of all ages will soon join in. These are ideal for use as a prayer response or to bring the congregation back together after an activity. The following examples fit the themes outlined above:

- CH4 755 – “Be still and know that I am God”
- CH4 756 – “Bless the Lord”
- CH4 757 – “Uyai mose (Come all you people)”
- CH4 795 – “Take, oh, take me as I am”
- “Take these words to heart” – (John L. Bell) in *We Walk His Way*, Wild Goose Publications.

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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