

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Year A

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – 16 July 2023

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Chris Blackshaw, Farming Minister, for his thoughts on the seventh 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](#).

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.

Introduction.....	3
Genesis 25:19-34.....	3
Psalm 119:105-112.....	4
Isaiah 55:10-13.....	5
Psalm 65:1-8	5
Romans 8:1-11	6
Matthew 13:1-9	7
Sermon ideas	8
Prayers	8
Musical suggestions	10
Reflecting on our worship practice	12
Useful links	13

Introduction

We seem to have special days to celebrate all sorts of things. Today is National Ice Cream Day, World Snake Day, Guinea Pig Appreciation Day, Fresh Spinach Day and much more! But every day is worship God Day.

Preparing to lead worship is neither quick nor easy. It takes time to be inspired and that inspiration can come from many places. Reading the bible passages in different versions, spending time in prayer, meditating on God's word, and seeking God's guidance through the Holy Spirit. Spending time with God throughout the week, in private worship with the songs you will be singing, is important. As you meditate on the words let them impact your life. Sing the songs to God as you personally offer your worship and praise. The more you worship with the songs during the week, the greater your leadership will be.

Try to use approaches to worship that are suitable and relevant to your congregation. I regularly use the internet as there are so many resources on there. Do not be afraid to look at what others have written about the subject you are studying, as you will find it will give you a 'hook' and help you to see the passage from other angles. Use different mediums in your worship, such as poetry or drama – they all add a lovely dimension to it. Of course, commentaries are very important too, enabling you to remain true to God's word. There are also online subscription sites that assist you in preparing to lead worship, specialising in both adult and child worship. Have you considered using the dramatised version of the Bible? This really brings the passage to life. I have generally referred to the New Living Translation (NLT) for these lectionary passages.

[Genesis 25:19-34](#)

Today's passage sets out the conflict between Jacob and Esau that will play out in later passages, it will be the cause of Jacob fleeing to his uncle Laban's house, which in turn will see the establishment of the house of Israel. Esau is the ancestor of the nation of Edom, also called Seir, which is an ongoing antagonist of the nation of Israel later in the Hebrew Bible. Our text explains those names, which are connected to Esau's hairiness (Seir sounds like the Hebrew word for 'hairy') and redness (Edom sounds like the Hebrew word for 'red'). The birthright Esau and Jacob are negotiating involves several linked benefits and obligations. On the plus side, it entails a double share of the inherited property, when it is time for that – the firstborn counts twice for the purposes of divvying up the estate. On the negative side, the birthright entails making sacrifices for the dead and taking on the leadership of the family. After receiving the law at Sinai, it also included being dedicated to God, or else needing to be redeemed. Firstborn male animals were sacrificed to God. So, it

was not quite as simple as having money in the bank. What conflicts occur in our own families and are there arguments today about inheritance? Are there other situations in life where we come into conflict and disagreement with others and is there a way to solve these situations?

Psalm 119:105-112

We journey through a fallen and broken world, where there are many dangerous pitfalls, slippery places, and things seeking to destroy our close relationship with God. In Psalm 119, we are given a beautiful promise and an eternal truth that God's Word is a gleaming lamp to our feet that will guide us through this world and it is a shining light to brighten the pathway we take. Not only are there external difficulties and dangers to face in life's journey, but also there are internal failings and weaknesses, which lurk deep within our souls, which can cause us to walk away from our 'First Love'. God's Word provides a sure foundation upon which to stand in a world that is falling apart.

Scripture is our guidebook to bring us back into a right relationship with the Lord, when we abandon the path of righteousness or stray from the way of peace. The Word of God is an inextinguishable lamp to guide us along the right path, and it is a radiant light that banishes the shadows of uncertainty, by illuminating the next step in this sin-soaked world. Opening the pages of Scripture will brighten the path we take, re-energise our hope in Christ, and provide understanding to the one who walks humbly before the Lord.

God's Word is the light of truth that is written for our learning to lead us away from each danger that crosses our path and to strengthen our faith in our Saviour, as He gently leads us and straightens every crooked path. God's word not only brightens our pathway, guards us on our journey through life, and warns us of each lurking danger – it is a treasure-trove of precious gemstones to be hidden deep within our heart. The Bible contains words of wisdom to guide our thinking, precious promises to encourage our hearts, godly instruction on how to live as the Lord desires us to live, and it is the perfect pattern for Christian living and our daily conduct. It is the sure Word of our living God, who has told us the end from the beginning, and all God's children would do well to take heed to its precious pages and inwardly digest and guard its words within our hearts. It is God's instrument to lead us into holiness and to guide our feet into the way of truth.

What temptations do we face in our own lives, and can we overcome them through knowing God's guiding and God's word? Have there been moments when you have seen God leading you in a certain direction?

Isaiah 55:10-13

All who listen to God's voice will be blessed beyond imagination, for our eyes have not seen and our ears have not heard the wonderful things prepared for those who love God. God's Word is true and dependable and Peter reminds us "the prophetic Word is an altogether reliable thing. "You would do well if you pay the same attention to God's Word as you would to a light shining in a dark and murky place – until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." [2 Peter 1:19]

Every promise God made to God's people Israel, and every word that is written in Scripture is true and will certainly come to pass at the appointed time, and in the appointed way. "My Word, which goes forth from My mouth will not return to Me empty." This is God's promise to the Church, as well as to Israel. "The message, that proceeded from My mouth will not return to Me without being fulfilled." All that God has promised will come to pass. The Word of God is not void. God's truth is never invalid. God's promises are never empty.

Similarly, every warning that God has given to the ungodly, or those who spurn God's Word, or ignore the warnings, and rejoice in evil, will be fulfilled. This Word will certainly be accomplished in the lives of ALL who rebel against and resist the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. And woe to those who say that evil is good, and good is evil, and who say bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and woe to those who devise iniquity, for God's Word will not return to God empty. A day is coming when God's anger will be poured out on a God-hating, Christ-rejecting, hostile and rebellious world. God's Word is true and will never fail to succeed in fulfilling that for which it was sent, just as God's promises to the Church will never be broken. But also, the promise of wrath and judgement for the ungodly will also come to pass.

The choice of God's blessing is an invitation to believe, it is a godly summons to the lost, to come and trust God for salvation, for it is not God's will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and faith in Christ.

Psalm 65:1-8

David may have written this psalm to be sung annually when the harvest was brought to the Lord. It is a harvest hymn of praise, designed to be sung on an occasion of thanksgiving. The psalm begins with a mention of the people's preparation to praise because God hears prayer. The occasion for the prayer was apparently their overwhelming sins, but God had atoned for their transgressions. This atonement for sin made possible the praise of the people and their entrance into the courts of the tabernacle. It is one thing to approach God;

it is another to really know God. David takes a fresh look at and sees God's power displayed in three ways.

The occasion was perhaps one of the harvest festivals observed by the people of Israel. Various suggestions have included Passover and Pentecost as well as the last harvest festival of the year, the Feast of Tabernacles. It is clearly a psalm that celebrates God's past and present goodness with an anticipation of God's future providential blessings as well.

The dominant theme seems to be God's bountiful care for the people. Such a meditation will go a long way towards encouraging us as we face various challenges, including material ones, in our world. It has been said that, of all the psalms, this one excels in its beautiful description of God's care for creation.

If you pay attention to it, you cannot feel anything but moved to joyful thanksgiving to our God who cares so well for us. When did you last feel so moved by God's love? How did you thank God? How did it change you?

Romans 8:1-11

There is no doubt at all that anyone who is in a relationship with Jesus – through being born again, professing and trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour – is truly loved and forgiven. The judgement that we rightly deserve has already been paid in full with the blood of Jesus. Our judgement took place at the cross and the punishment we deserved was paid in full by Jesus. Our sin was paid for by our Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary, and for the sins of the whole world, so that those that believe would not be placed under condemnation. Therefore, there is now no judgement for those who are in a loving relationship with Jesus, the Anointed son of God.

Judgement is a punishment that comes from a judicial sentence, and everyone that does not believe in Jesus as Saviour is already condemned, simply because they choose not to believe in the Son of God. This is how Jesus put it: "God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus goes on: "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." This is the crux of the matter: "Whoever believes in Him," whoever is in a relationship with Christ, whoever has been placed in Christ at rebirth, whoever has been born again, whoever has been sealed by the Spirit, whoever has trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour are not condemned. Condemnation before God or justification by God comes from the choices we make about the Lord Jesus Christ. If we

trust Him as Saviour, there is no condemnation. If we do not trust Him as Saviour, there is condemnation.

[Matthew 13:1-9](#)

The story Jesus tells is about a sower who went out to sow seeds. A sower is someone who plants seeds that will later grow and reap a harvest. In this parable the sower sows the same type of seeds, but as they scatter, the seeds fall on four different types of ground. These four grounds provide four different results.

The four different types of ground are

- By the roadside
- On rocky ground, where the soil was of poor quality
- Amongst the thorns
- The good soil

The first three types of ground are not good for seeds to germinate and grow in. The fourth however is good ground in which to plant seeds, so that they germinate and prosper.

The results of the sowing are

- The birds came and ate them up
- As soon as they started to grow, they began to wither and die, because they had no depth of soil
- The thorns came up and choked the seeds and starved them of nutrients
- The good soil yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty

The first three results are 'not good', but the fourth and last result is very good. In a predominantly agricultural society like Judea, Jesus's audience would have been familiar with all these actions and outcomes. Jesus ends this parable with a striking message. Those who have ears, let them hear. The moral of this message is an invitation for all to listen and to hear.

What seeds have you sown for God? Do you unrealistically expect everything to grow? Have you had failures in growing seeds in your garden or has everything grown? Do you set yourself unrealistic goals?

Sermon ideas

When I considered how to link all these passages, I wrote a list of key words for each passage and the key words I came up with were conflict, sin, temptation, believe, flourish, and grow. Praise, trust God and be saved. Sow seeds of God and some will grow.

I work in a pioneer role ministering to the farming community and I find that some of the conversations I have are unexpected and surprising: from a poultry farmer who got his Bible out and started asking me questions for two hours, to a lady who serves in a canteen and wanted to talk about spirits of those who have gone before. Of course, not all conversations are as deep as this, but it is probably the first opportunity they have had of interacting with a minister. The sower who sowed their seed saw that some seeds took hold and produced a rich harvest, whilst others died. You must at least sow seed and then leave it up to God to grow them.

Having Godly conversations with unchurched people can be daunting but do not be put off. You may be surprised at what they ask you. Some people are inquisitive, and others may be challenging. Conflict in life is inevitable, and sadly it happens regularly within families. In the farming community it usually revolves around inheritance and land! So, when we read of Esau and Jacob's wrangling, we see that our lives today are the same as they were thousands of years ago.

We are tempted to do wrong and to satisfy our own needs, making gain for ourselves. This sort of conflict can put us in a struggle with God and each other. But concentrating on our relationship with God and trying to live our lives in accordance with God's will can lead us into a great and loving relationship where we will flourish and grow. During this relationship we will naturally praise and trust God. From that trusting and loving relationship we will see great rewards and happiness. What relationships have you struggled with? How have you overcome these difficulties? How is your relationship with God?

Prayers

Gathering prayer / Call to worship

As we gather to worship, I sometimes use a few verses from the psalms instead of a prayer. An example of this from Psalm 65 would be:

You formed the mountains by Your power and armed Yourself with mighty strength.
You quieted the raging oceans with their pounding waves
and silenced the shouting of the nations.

Those who live at the ends of the earth stand in awe of Your wonders.
From where the sun rises to where it sets, You inspire shouts of joy.

Confession / Repentance

God of grace and compassion
we draw close to You in our time of worship
knowing that we are unworthy of Your love and forgiveness,
and yet You freely forgive us.

Hear us now as we tell You of the wrongs we have done this week.
Help us to see the error of our ways and to put right the wrong we have done.
Give us wisdom and understanding to go forward into the world
as Your forgiven and restored people. Amen

Thanksgiving / Gratitude

God of creation
we give You thanks for the world that we live in.
For its beauty and resourcefulness,
for the life that it sustains and the food it provides.

We thank You for the farmers and producers who work long hours for little reward,
ensuring we have food on our tables.
Give us joy in our lives as we live them for You,
this we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen

Prayer for others / Intercession

It is important to be up to date with the news and immediately before I lead worship, I always have a quick glance at my news feed apps to see if anything has happened that we need to pray over. As I pray, I begin by praying for the world, then our own country and then our own locality and church. It is also a good idea to ask the congregation if there are any concerns that they would like to pray for. Also consider leaving a time of silence so people can offer their own prayers to God, in a moment of quiet and stillness.

Loving God

we pray for our world and the sadness that exists within it.
Especially we pray for the atrocities of war that Russia is inflicting on the Ukrainian people.
Bring peace to this conflict and all conflicts that are happening in Your world.
For those who seek to destroy
give them a desire to change

and to become people of peace and not war.

We pray for our own country and those who are in positions of power.
All too often we see corruption and arrogance from some leaders,
who seek to belittle their opponents.
Give to them a new focus that centres on respect,
which values others they serve.

We pray for those who are close to us.
Those who are sick and those who are suffering the loss of a loved one.
Be their comforter and their rock to lean upon.
You hear all prayers
Lord hear us now as we raise our concerns to You in a moment of silence

Silence

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen

Blessing / Closing prayer

As we go forward from this place of worship
send us out as Your commissioned people
to bring love and hope to all we meet.
Be in our thoughts words and actions
for this we ask in Jesus name, 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.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

Over many years churches from all denominations have introduced new hymn books and all too often they put the new hymn books out and abandon the old books to some dark recess in a cupboard. Why do we do this? New hymn books are not instead of but as well as. This then gives us a lovely rich selection of hymns and tunes that may not have been sung for

many years. It keeps our heritage alive and embraces our future, without turning our backs on our history.

The hymns I have chosen all contain a reference to the bible reading in some way. There are also hymns of praise and thanksgiving. Ensure the tunes are singable and do not be afraid to try out new hymns. Use other denominations hymn books or online sites. The Methodist Church has Singing the Faith plus where you have suggested hymns and can hear the tunes. Also Hymn quest and we are worship.

Psalm 65

- CH4 44 – “Praise waits for thee in Zion, Lord” (Psalm 65)
- CH4 147 – “All creatures of our God and King”
- CH4 623 – “Here in this place new light is streaming”

Psalm 119

- CH4 500 – “Lord of creation, to you be all praise!”

Matthew

- CH4 349 – “In our lives plant seeds of hope”

Romans

- CH4 211 – “Today I awake and God is before me”
- CH4 352 – “O for a thousand tongues to sing”
- CH4 396 – “And can it be”
- CH4 466 – “Before the throne of God above”
- CH4 483 – “Father of heaven, whose love profound”
- CH4 495 – “Spirit of God, descend upon my heart”
- CH4 500 – “Lord of creation, to you be all praise!”
- CH4 571 – “O Lord Jesus, enfold me in your arms”
- CH4 596 – “Breathe on me, Breath of God”
- CH4 603 – “For your gift of God the Spirit”
- CH4 605 – “Thanks to God whose Word was spoken”
- CH4 610 – “Love of the Father, love of God the Son”

- CH4 721 – “We lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet”
- CH4 722 – “Spirit of God, come dwell within me”

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’.
- While singing in our congregations is still 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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