

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

**Sunday 6 October 2024**

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Liz Johnson Blythe, Minister at St Andrew's & St Nicholas and Cardonald Church – and formerly Assistant Minister at Castlemilk and Carmunnock Parish Churches, for her 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 prepared by [Priority Area congregations](#) (those in the 5% most deprived parishes). This is a month with a particular focus on tackling poverty. October 7-13 is [Challenge Poverty Week](#); and October 17 is the United Nations' International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. We would encourage you to explore ways in which your congregation can engage in anti-poverty issues at a local level.

At first glance, the lectionary readings for this week seem to be at odds with Harvest, which many churches may be celebrating this week. Likewise, Harvest appears at odds with the concerns of a Priority Area. However, there are some clear and important links.

Food insecurity remains an issue in most neighbourhoods in Scotland, but it is more evident and more prevalent in Priority Areas. The proliferation of pantries and food banks indicates this growing problem. Within the issue of food insecurity is the reality that people relying on pantries and food banks have little money or access to decent grocery stores and little choice in what they receive. Fresh fruit and vegetables are at a premium, but so are the tastier, less nutritious crisps and biscuits and ready meals.

Though Harvest is not the overall theme highlighted in this excursus of today's readings, the concerns of farmers' crops and income can be tied to the plight of those who are hungry in our society. Why, when there is enough food for everyone, is anyone hungry? Why, when so much money is made in the food industry, are farmers struggling to survive? These ideas connect with the overarching theme from the readings of suffering and treating one another with dignity, as God has treated us.

Suffering is not a topic we like very much to address. And we certainly do not like to admit that there is suffering in our midst, especially when suffering in Scotland can feel a trifle next to that of war refugees and famine victims. However, all human suffering is a concern, and there is human suffering in every congregation. One of the joys of a Priority Area church is the sense of community that enables people to share their struggles with one another, thus enabling the opportunity to support one another.

We begin with Job at the beginning of his tale of suffering. Hebrews touches on the questionable ground of virtuous suffering. Psalm 8 speaks of the value of human dignity and the wellbeing of every creature, attributing their existence to God's majesty. Mark does not

speaking directly of suffering or the lack thereof, but suffering is the subtext of this challenging passage.

Whenever I prepare a sermon, I try and ask myself some key questions:

- What is the context of this reading? What comes before and after? What did it mean in the historical context in which it was written? (Study Bibles are handy for this last one).
- Who is listening to the sermon? No congregation is homogenous. They are made up of all types of people. How might you speak to them to give hope to them and/or challenge them?
- As you read and prepare, consider: what contemporary stories will illustrate your point? Especially for Hebrews and Psalms, which are not stories but theological expositions, it is integral to have a story to expand and illustrate your point.

## [Job 1:1, 2:1-10](#)

Job is one of the Bible's most well-known but least understood stories. Yet, the idea of God subjecting a child of God's own creation to tests of suffering to prove to a tormentor Job's unwavering faith is theologically troubling.

I also find the personification of 'Satan' as a figure generally unhelpful. In ancient Hebrew 'satan' ('sa-TAN') is not a proper noun, (i.e., it is not a name). Rather, the word 'satan' means 'adversary' or 'opponent'. Most often it is written with the modifier 'ha' meaning 'the' ('ha'sa-TAN'); so that it would read as 'the adversary' or 'the opponent'.

In the book of Job, personifying the adversary is an effective story-telling tool because it allows God to have a conversation with God's antithesis. You can imagine this story unfolding on a stage. However, concentrating on the individual adversary as the personification of all evil can distance us from the causes of suffering. If we blame The Adversary as the sole responsible individual, we ignore broken systems in our country and remove ourselves from personal responsibility for personal and systemic suffering. Just as Job had the choice of faith, we all make choices daily that benefit or harm ourselves and our world.

Yet, it is important not to lean too heavily on the idea of personal responsibility without clarifying that one's suffering is not necessarily one's fault. As Jesus told the parents of the blind man (John 9:1-5), suffering isn't necessarily caused by any one thing. It is not necessarily brought on oneself. And it is not from a singular evil entity wishing us harm.

Rather, suffering arises from a variety of places, which could include a singular bad actor or personal choices, as well as societal faults and systemic failures. When we assign fault to a disembodied adversary or an individual's failings, it removes any sense of responsibility for finding out how we are all complicit in the suffering of the world ... and how we can change things. This is especially clear when Job's wife comes in to talk to him, because she is also an adversary, as are Job's friends when they stop by later. All of them are creating stumbling blocks for Job, trying to woo and reason him away from faith. They might be even bigger tempters than THE Adversary because of their personal relationships with Job.

Some questions to ask yourself as you prepare:

- Who is suffering in your community, and how might this story sound to their ears?
- In a Priority Area, what hope arises from the text?
- In a more affluent area, what challenge arises from the text?
- What adversaries create stumbling blocks for your personal or communal action?

### **[Hebrews. 1:1-4, 2:5-12](#)**

Unlike other letters directly attributed to the apostle Paul, Hebrews' authorship and audience are unknown. Through context clues within the book, it appears that it was compiled over three decades in the late 1st century. The letter appears to have been written to second-generation Christians (see 2:3) who had experienced persecution (10:32-34) and "had perhaps become disappointed that God's promised Kingdom had not yet come." [1]

It can shock new converts to Christianity that their way is not suddenly made clear of suffering and headed toward success. That is perhaps attributed to human nature, but also to false gospel ideas that wrongly tie depth of faith to worldly success. On the other hand, this reading could possibly do the exact opposite. I worry that someone could read it, especially with little experience of the Bible, and come to the conclusion that God glorifies suffering. The idea that God subjected "all things" under the feet of the angels sounds perilously close to the tale of Job's temptation, with God's permission, at the hand of an adversary bent on his destruction. When we buy into the idea that God 'doesn't give us more than we can handle', or that God 'tests us to prove our faith', we begin to romanticise suffering as though it is holy. Throughout history, this very tactic has been used by the rich and powerful to persuade the poor and powerless to revel in their subjection as an act of holiness (for example, sermons from white people to American enslaved people).

The author is not trying to glorify suffering, rather they are trying to bolster the faith and focus of a community enduring great difficulties. Nor is the author trying to reinforce human power structures, which create hierarchies of power and wealth. Instead, the author is saying that it was Jesus' suffering that brought sanctification (holiness) to all people, regardless of their financial or social status. The author assures their Christian readers that they are not meant to be subjected to those who are more powerful. They are subject to Jesus. And being subject to Jesus is not like human subjection – it is meant to evoke care and compassion, wellbeing and love, just like anyone would care for their sisters or brothers.

Some questions to ask yourself as you prepare (in addition to the questions above):

- Hebrews (2:6-8) references Psalm 8 (vv4-6). What differences do you see between the two texts? What difference do you think those word choices make? Why do you think the author of Hebrews chose that language (e.g., subject vs dominion)?
- Where do you see the perpetuation of the idea of 'holy suffering' in our world today? Is it overall helpful or harmful? Who benefits?
- What would it look like to live subject to Jesus?

[1] Attridge, Harold W. 'Introduction to The Letter to the Hebrews'. The Harper Collins Study Bible. 1993, p2251.

## Psalm 8

Psalm 8 ties in with Hebrews, and evokes the great song of God to Job (Job 38-39). Likewise, verse 2 ties in with the second part of the gospel reading (Mark 10:12-16); so it could easily be used as a supporting text for any of the other readings.

Of its own accord, Psalm 8 would be the most natural connection to Harvest. It is a Psalm of Praise to God. Its soaring language gives glory not only to God but also to God's creation. It also acknowledges the role of humanity in maintaining creation.

The subtitle to the psalm reads: 'Divine Majesty and Human Dignity', which is at the heart of Harvest celebrations. Verse 3 speaks of how vast God's creation is, and how specific. God created the plants and the seasons, the stars and the moon. God created all the earth's creatures, the wild and beautiful ones, the work animals and humans. Giving thanks for God's hand in creation is an integral aspect of Harvest.

The text also speaks to the work of human hands (v6). Farmers put in incredible amounts of work, in all sorts of weather that I'd rather not spend my day out in. They do not simply raise animals for meat and dairy, but care for them, concerned not just about the product the animals will make, but for their wellbeing. Likewise, farmers must look after the land, treating it with respect and nourishing it so that it will continue to yield fruit for the harvest.

One could get into troubled waters by focusing too much on the idea of humanity's dominion over God's creation (v6). When most people moved off of the land into towns and cities – especially once growing vegetable gardens became the purview of those with land, time, and money enough to tend them – the idea of having dominion over the land changed from being an idea of care-taking to one of power to use and deplete as we wish. A farmer cannot deplete the land, or their crops will suffer. As we can see in the climate crisis, humanity cannot continue to take from creation, or we will suffer – the poorest and least powerful most of all.

When we talk about caring for creation, we can forget that we are part of it and that humanity needs care, too. All of humanity deserves dignity – the asylum seeker as much as the politician, the drug dealer as much as the doctor, and the farmer as much as the grocery store that sells their produce.

Some questions to ask yourself as you prepare:

- What synonyms of 'dominion' and 'subject to' can you think of for verse 6? How does substituting them change the reading? Does it improve your understanding or detract from it?
- In your community, whose sense of dignity is compromised? What could your church do to help?

## [Mark 10:2-16](#)

I would start by reading what comes before and after this passage. Chapter 9 ends with a section on the temptation to sin, suggesting that we concern ourselves with our own sin and "be at peace with one another" (9:49). After the bit about divorce comes Jesus calling the little children to Him and then a story about a rich man leaving, rather than giving up his wealth for the benefit of the poor (10:17-22). You'll note that none of what surrounds our reading has anything to do with marriage, but it has everything to do with relationships. Chapters 9 and 10 link devotion to God with care for the other's wellbeing. Jesus was using marriage as an illustration of that.

What is not inherent in the text but will have been readily evident to its contemporary listeners was the incredible stand Jesus was taking for women. Previously a man could sign a divorce warrant whenever he liked, but a woman could not. That gave women no protection. If her husband divorced her, she would be deemed a failure and have to go back to her parent's house and hope that they would take her back. Within a difficult marriage, a woman would have to put up with any manner of treatment from her husband with no recourse. Suggesting that it was bad whether a man or a woman petitioned for divorce was a huge step forward for women's rights (though obviously it was not perpetuated as such through the centuries). It gave power to both of them.

What is more broadly applicable than the marriage between two people, is Jesus' emphasis on the commitment made to one another based on equality and mutuality. "A man shall ... be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (vv7-8). This echoes Adam's joy at discovering his companion: "This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). It is as if Adam is saying, "Here at last is a true equal. A companion. A friend. Here is someone I instinctively recognise" for humanity equal to my own. [2] In these brief words, Jesus is not only befuddling the Pharisees' intent to discredit Him, but also calling forth a community built on mutuality and empathy. "We human beings are hard of heart. We trade partnership for power. Mutuality for manipulation. Empathy for egoism." [2] And Jesus is calling us, as ever, to not commit sins against one another, but to mutually support one another, value one another, recognise within one another the flesh of our flesh ... the imago Dei.

This message preaches no matter the context because as humans, though we are bone of one another's bone, we create categories and draw lines between ourselves and others.

Some questions to ask yourself as you prepare:

- What group do you view as other, different, strange? The people of your congregation? (No, don't tell yourself that they're so warm and welcoming that there is no one: it could be the poor or the wealthy, immigrants or incomers, drug users or government officials.)
- From what or from whom are you separating yourself? Why? How might admitting this help your congregation to recognise the same in themselves?

[2] Thomas, Debie. 'Bone of my Bone'. JourneyWithJesus.net. 7 Oct 2018.



## Sermon ideas

Before you go any further, look at the lectionary for the weeks to come. Today's selections offer the start of two books – Job and Hebrews. Read through the texts to come in the next few weeks, and see if you might want to consider doing a series on one of them. If you immediately react against one of them, that might be just the one to choose! If you want to do a sermon series, work on the multiple readings together so you are clear on what you want to say about each one. It is all too easy to accidentally repeat yourself ... or use the best hymn for the Sunday ahead on the Sunday just past.

As I write a sermon, I always have the text visible for reference. I use an online Bible and have it beside my open sermon document.

I also begin by writing a focus statement (a clear, concise thesis statement) and a function statement (what I want my sermon to accomplish, using active verbs, and avoiding cognitive goals). I refer to them as I write. Sometimes they change as the sermon flows, but mostly they keep me from going off-piste.

### Job

Though it may seem too pedantic to some, I would begin a sermon on this text with an exploration of 'satan'. First, it's worth asking people for their understanding of satan (not asking whether or not they believe satan to be an actual, evil entity, because that would put them on the spot and no doubt lead to strife for the preacher). Someone may well reply with the exact content of your sermon (as often happens with children in children's talks), but then you can call them clever and segue into your sermon.

Next, it would be worth discussing the word itself and its various translations (e.g., adversary, opponent, etc.; let the thesaurus be your friend).

If you are bold, ask people if that information changes their understanding of the reading. If so, how?

Then you could move on to exploring the various adversaries we have in our lives – specific people, systems, at times social media and questionable 'news' organisations, things that interrupt our focus like phones and TV ... ourselves. Be creative, but be constantly aware of walking the line between challenging people to look at themselves and blaming them for their suffering. It's a tenuous but essential line.

When discussing suffering within the realm of faith, it is worthwhile to include hope. One can suffer and have hope; they are not mutually exclusive, as Job demonstrates throughout the book with his continued faith in God.

### **Hebrews**

As we prepare and write sermons, it is essential to acknowledge suffering. If we ignore it we exclude a part of who we are, who we all are, from worship. If we respond to suffering with trite responses (e.g., ‘God doesn’t give us more than we can handle’ and the like) we minimise not only the suffering, but the very real pain of people experiencing it.

In a sermon on Hebrews, one could set up straw men, (e.g., ‘What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger’, ‘Everything happens for a reason’, ‘God helps those who help themselves’, etc.), then dismantle or disprove them with the recognition that they are not biblical or accurate. Suffering is, at least partially (if not primarily), due to humanity’s unwillingness to be subject to God and subject to one another. Our God is a God of unity and calls us into relationship with Godself and one another – again and again and again, if necessary.

### **Psalm**

As you prepare for harvest, if you have any farmers in your congregation, consider talking with them about their concerns, their joys, and the aspects of their jobs that people might be unaware of. You could ask a farmer or crofter to come and talk about their work and how they see God’s hand in it. If not farmers, what about avid gardeners? Other helpful resources are Christian Aid, Farming Community Network, and The Trussell Trust.

Whether your congregation is landlocked by city blocks or sits atop a moor overlooking the sea, surrounded by houses or sheep, consider how your community recognises and celebrates God’s hand in creation.

Harvest is a great Sunday to highlight diversity, the diversity of creation – how God called it all equally good: the land, the sea, the sky, and the creatures. You could highlight the diversity of humanity by having people bring in different types of bread from their family traditions, as part of the offering (that everyone gets to sample over tea afterwards).

The first Sunday of October is also World Communion Sunday, on which World Council of Churches member churches celebrate the Lord’s Supper, recognise the church’s oneness, and rejoice in its variety of expressions around the world.

All of these aspects of Harvest Sunday highlight the fact that God's dominion differs from human dominion and that there is no place for domination in the body of Christ or the world.

### **Mark**

In my nearly 20 years of ordained ministry, I have never once preached on this reading (10:2-11), always preferring the little children or one of the other readings.

Divorce is complex. It happens for a wide variety of reasons, including abuse, and I do not believe that Jesus would say that someone should stay in an abusive relationship. Perhaps He might have even said the whole thing differently today. So we have to figure out what this archaic reading has to say to us today.

Divorce is very much a sensitive subject, even today, and it might be worth starting with an acknowledgement to that effect.

It would be crucial to set up the context for the congregation. Although the switch to talking about divorce seems out of the blue, it aligns with the theme of the conversations surrounding this text.

A sermon focus could be personal, church-wide, community-wide, or global. For a personal or church-wide focused sermon, you could talk about the strain of complex relationships – between siblings, parents and children, neighbours, and pew-mates. Then, detail how God intended unity and mutuality for us and how to move towards that healthfully.

Given the recent Far Right marches in the UK (in August), it is clear that some people focus solely on the differences between us, rather than the similarities. There is a deep feeling of brokenness in many communities. People are suffering and are not sure where to focus their sorrow and are looking for someone ... anyone to blame. As ever, it is easier to blame a person you perceive as different from you than someone like yourself and someone nearer and more vulnerable than one who is distant and steeped in power and wealth.

Conversely, beginning with the members and leaders of Abdulla Quilliam mosque in Liverpool, who lovingly prepared food and bravely went out to offer it to the far-right mob, and continuing with the enormous counter-demonstrations held for peace and diversity, you could illustrate the concept of being joined together, the flesh of one another's flesh, in real-life contemporary actions.

## Prayers

**Call to Worship** (*Paraphrase of Psalm 8 v1, 3-4, 9*)

O God, Most High,

**how majestic is Your name in all the earth!**

You set Your glory above the heavens!

**When we look into the heavens, we marvel at Your creation.**

When we see the moon and the stars,

**we wonder, what are humans, that You are mindful of us?**

O God, Most High,

**how majestic is Your name in all the earth!**

Come, let us worship God!

## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

O God, Our God,

We marvel at the works of Your creation!

You called the planets and the stars into being,  
creating orbits and seasons for each.

You made the moon to pull at our oceans,

and the storms on the sun to paint our night skies in splendid colour.

Our world abounds with the evidence of Your creativity, O God,  
and the joy You have taken in creating.

We marvel that You have created such majestic bodies,  
and that You have also created each of us,  
so utterly the same and so very different.

As we celebrate the splendour of Your creation – vibrant, colourful, and diverse –  
we are reminded that You have created humanity that way, too.

Your creativity continued when,  
after judges, kings, and prophets did not turn us back to You,  
You came to us, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh,  
to live as an example of faith and discipleship.

And even when we did not understand  
and crucified Your Love for us,

You creatively refused to let that be the end,  
raising Jesus to new life and us with Him.

O Christ, our Saviour,  
Forgive us when we  
want everyone and everything to be unchanging ... and just like us.  
Forgive us when we  
look upon the diversity of humanity as an obstacle rather than a gift.  
Forgive us when we  
view the wonders of creation as resources to deplete rather than protect.  
Forgive us when we  
do not embrace the new life You offer.  
Forgive us for the ways we wound our lives, the lives of others, and the life of the world,  
which we lay before You in the silence of our hearts:

*[Silence is kept]*

God forgive us, Christ renew us, Spirit enable us to grow in love.

O God, Our God,  
We are grateful that You do not allow our worst selves to define our relationship with You,  
but extend grace upon grace to us.

In gratitude,  
we lift our singing and our silence, our praying and our proclamation, to You.

O Spirit, Our Spirit,  
rest upon us and guide us  
so that throughout this time,  
we will be drawn closer to You,  
and closer to one another.

We pray all these things in the name  
of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.

### **Prayer of Dedication**

You have given us all we have, O God,  
and made us all we are.  
In gratitude, we offer You these gifts.

May they be used  
in our church, community, and world.  
In the name of our triune God,  
Amen.

### **Harvest Prayer for Others**

God of all the Earth,  
every day, we remember the works of Your hands.  
Today, we recognise the work of those who  
grow the crops we rely on every day for food and clothing.

Creator God,  
we lift to You farmers, crofters,  
and all those who devote their lives and work to the land and cultivating our food.  
We thank You for their persistence and their knowledge.  
We thank You for the care they give the animals who graze their land.  
We thank You for the care they provide to the land itself  
to ensure the ground will yield crops enough for the world.

Giver of Life,  
we surrender to You our romantic notions of farm life,  
of getting to work outside and being one's own boss.  
We know that the work is hard, the weather is often horrible,  
and the animals and the land are the ones really in charge of a farmer's time.

Bread of Life,  
we lift our frustration at the price of produce.  
The cost of bread and milk, veg and fruit keep climbing  
while our income and budgets remain the same.  
Help us not to blame farmers for the increases  
but to recognise that the cost of everything is going up,  
including supplies for the farmer.  
Help us also to recognise the role of corporate farms and grocery corporations,  
in driving up the costs for everyone.

Love Incarnate,  
we lift to You those who live in priority areas, urban and rural,  
where there are food deserts or few options for buying food.  
We especially lift those relying on food pantries and food banks.

Help us to change our system;  
so that everyone can provide good food for their family.  
We are grateful for churches and other organisations  
banding together in communities  
to ensure low-cost lunches are available throughout the week.  
We are grateful for all who work to support those in need of food,  
especially the paid and volunteer staff  
who make soup and sandwiches, bake scones, pour teas and coffees,  
stock shelves, and generally extend welcome to those who need it most.

Good Shepherd,  
we are grateful for farmers and activists who are consigning land to rewilding  
and using more natural production methods.  
We recognise the sacrifice it takes to use these methods,  
as well as their necessity.  
To honour their work and sacrifice,  
help us be more willing to try greener products,  
and help us be thoughtful about our overall consumption.

Life of the World,  
we lift to You farmers worldwide.  
We especially lift to You farmers in countries at war who struggle to produce,  
risking their lives to feed their struggling nations.  
Be with them, and keep them safe.  
We also lift to You farmers in places struck by famine and drought.  
Be with them as they watch their livelihoods, families, and neighbours  
decline to almost nothing.

God of our lives,  
we lift to You farmers everywhere  
who are already feeling the effects of the climate crisis.  
Help them adjust their crops and methods to the new climate realities  
and eliminate any practices that might contribute to climate change.  
Help us all make these changes ourselves for the world's benefit.

Spirit of all Creation,  
we lift all these prayers to You.  
We are grateful that You listen and confident that You care.  
With confidence, we join our voices together

to pray for ourselves and our world,  
as Jesus taught us, saying:

*(The Lord's Prayer may be said according to your tradition)*

### **Benediction**

Go out into the world  
to live your hopes and not your fears  
be bold to put your faith into action  
knowing that you are held in holy hands  
that will never let you go.

### **Musical suggestions**

*God Welcomes All* is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music version is now available; and the words-only book, digital resources including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from

<https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

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

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 181 – “For the beauty of the earth”
- CH4 196 – “Come, now is the time to worship”
- CH4 253 – “Inspired by love and anger”
- CH4 256 – “May the God of hope go with us every day”
- CH4 533 – “Will you come and follow me”
- CH4 564 – “Jesus loves me!”
- CH4 623 – “Here in this place new light is streaming”



- CH4 685 – “For everyone born” (omitting v4)
- CH4 721 – “We lay our broken world”
- CH4 770 – “I love you, Lord”

From [Glory to God: Presbyterian Hymnal](#) PC(USA)

- GTG 37 – “Let All things now living”
- GTG 749 – “Come! Live in the light!”
- GTG 757 – “Today we all are called to be disciples”

### Harvest

- CH4 165 – “Praise to the Lord for the joys of the earth”
- GTG 612 – “We praise you, O God” – this is a rewriting of a hymn commonly used to celebrate Thanksgiving.
- A playlist of possible songs for harvest can be found on CH4 online: <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me/playlist/harvest>

## Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord’s Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of ‘holy chaos’.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.

- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?  
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/  
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different “Spiritual Styles”?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?  
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?  
Did it function well as a whole?  
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?  
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?  
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/  
community?  
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?  
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

## Useful links

*God Welcomes All* can be ordered from [Hymns Ancient & Modern](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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