

Church of Scotland HIV Programme

“Souper Sunday 2023”

elder-led service.

Service theme:

“Keep on keeping on.”

This elder-led (or others who lead worship) act of worship may be used on any Sunday of the year. The order of service is offered as a guide to how worship might be led in your Souper Sunday celebrations. Please feel free to adapt it to your own local situation, or to use it in its entirety.

Preparations:

- *Recruit four elders (or others) to lead worship, plus one reader*

- *Order Gift Aid declaration envelopes* for lunch attenders*
- *Get e-mail campaign details from <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/hiv-programme> (You may want to add this link to your weekly news bulletin).*
- *Prepare a very simple soup and bread lunch for after the service, either in church or (as catering facilities may dictate) at members' homes*

All hymns noted here are taken from the Church Hymnary (fourth edition), although other hymns may be substituted. Both readings printed in this order of service are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. (You may wish to use your own version)

Order of Service

Offering either taken at door on entry, or placed within service at chosen point, if Covid-19 appropriate.

The four elders leading the service enter and sit in the chancel:

- 1) *Worship leader*
- 2) *Speaker A*
- 3) *Speaker B*
- 4) *Speaker C*
- 4) *Reader (one or two)*

Worship leader:

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

Good morning!

[Worship leader gives welcome and intimations, ending with:]

Today, our service is a special act of worship led by elders and members of our congregation, as we celebrate “Souper Sunday”. Since 2010 the Church of Scotland has asked congregations to mark Souper Sunday with a special service on the theme of HIV. This year, we will be considering the pressing need to take a stand against apathy in the on-going struggle against HIV. Throughout this service we will be looking at ways we can play our part as individual Christians and as the Church together, bringing hope to our world and its many people through prayer and action.

At the close of our service, everyone (whether church member or visitor here today) is warmly invited to share in a simple lunch of soup and bread. This will take place in *[INSERT NAME OF LUNCH VENUE HERE]* where there will also be an opportunity to make a donation to benefit the vital work of the Church of Scotland HIV Programme.

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

[A FEW SECONDS OF SILENCE]

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail; they shall be satisfied.”

Let us worship God, singing to his praise

Hymn CH4 449: *Rejoice! the Lord is King*

[ALL SING]

Speaker A:

Please be seated.

The psalmist writes: “Make your paths known to me, Lord; teach me your ways. Lead me by your faithfulness and teach me, for you are God my Saviour.”

Let us pray:

God of all the earth,
you have created this mighty universe by your Word,
uttered in divine power.

You have established this good planet Earth as a dwelling place for all your people, all your creatures, all you have made in your wisdom.

You have entrusted to all your children the joy of loving you and of caring for one another.

So often we look at the world around us, marvelling at the beauty of your handiwork, from snowdrops rising through hard winter soil to daffodils shedding their golden light; from summer fruits which speak of plenty to autumn leaves which declare the turning cycle of life and of death and of life waiting to be renewed once more.

Yet so often we know that we pay little attention to your world in all its need. We are guilty of turning away from your calling to care, choosing instead to seek the satisfaction of our own wants and dreams.

Rather than sharing the Good News of Christ’s liberating love, we keep ourselves to ourselves as though Christmas and Calvary, Easter and Pentecost were only stories for a Sunday.

Forgive us Lord, we pray. Take our wrongs and put them right. Deal with our shortcomings by your grace and mercy, prompting us to lift our eyes to your glorious horizons where, just beyond, fresh new possibilities of faithfulness await us.

Inspire us in this hour, we pray, so that we might rise to meet your challenge for the Church of today and the world of tomorrow, as we step out in the company of Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who taught us when we pray to say:

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

the power, and the glory, for ever.

AMEN.

Worship leader (or reader):

Our first reading today is taken from the Old Testament and the Book of the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 31, verses 31 to 34.

Reading 1: Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Reader)

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of

them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. AMEN.

Speaker B:

Thank you *[INSERT READER'S NAME]* for our first reading.

Once upon a time ...

... there was a little primary school which stood deep in the countryside. There was nothing unusual about it. It had some classrooms, a gym, a playground, a tiny staffroom and some loos. Outside there were trees to climb (if you were careful). Inside there was a pop-up tuckshop that sold fresh fruit and the occasional batch of freshly-baked muffins (blueberry). Oh, and nearby there was a very soggy field that pretended to be a football pitch.

And then there were the people. They were the most important thing about the school, and the most important people were the kids, who went from the tiny tots in the nursery all the way up to the big, brave 12-year-olds.

There were class teachers as well: four of them (all very nice). There was Mr Brown the janny (though everyone called him Jim, which he secretly quite liked). And then there was the head teacher Mr Davidson. (And absolutely no-one – not even the teachers – called him Ken.)

Mr Davidson was a very good teacher and a very kind person, but there was something he had which seemed maybe just a wee bit scary. Mr Davidson had authority, and he knew it. If anyone stepped out of line, Mr Davidson made sure they knew all about it. And if anyone REALLY stepped out of line it would be Mr Davidson who solemnly picked up the phone to call home, politely but firmly requesting a meeting at twenty-five past three in his office.

Mr Davidson was a clever person, and he was very thoughtful too. He knew that his little school was a nice little school. But he also knew that one day the Primary 7s would be heading off to the big school in the big town. It was a good school, mind, but it was different. Newcomers could find themselves bullied by the older

kids. There would be peer pressure and all sorts of temptations, but Mr Davidson had a plan to get his Primary 7s ready for the big step they were about to take.

One day he summonsed the entire P7 class (all 11 of them) into the gym and lined them up along the wall. Without saying a word he slowly walked to the far end of the gym before turning to face the bewildered kids. Next, he bellowed his instructions:

“Each one of you,” he said in a voice that echoed off the walls, “will take it in turn to walk the length of this hall, stopping just in front of me. Then, in the biggest, loudest voice you can find inside you, you will look me squarely in the eye and shout the word ... ‘NO!!!’.”

And so it was that each of the classmates did as they were told. Some walked up to their head teacher and shouted their “NO!!!!” very effectively, and then sat down. Others did their best but giggled all the way through the challenge. Two of the class (both boys) turned surprisingly pale and managed barely a whisper. But each one said their “no”.

“Very good,” said Mr Davidson, visibly relaxing before their eyes. “Very good indeed. You are about to leave our lovely wee community and go off to the joys and the pressures of high school. Let me tell you that the older you get, the more you will have to stand up to people in authority – people like me. Today each one of you has seen for yourself exactly what it is like to look someone in the eye and say something that is terribly hard to say. Today was a test. The next time it might be the real thing. So just remember, as of now you know what it’s like to take a stand, to do the right thing, to make your mark when that’s what you know you have to do. Well done, and in time to come just you remember what you have achieved here today.”

Speaker C:

The story of Mr Davidson and the Primary 7 class is based on a true story that really happened, and happened every year with every group of leavers. It might seem a slightly scary story, but here’s the point: it is really important to know you can stand up for what is right and

(when needed) to say “NO!!!” to anything that is wrong or hurtful. But that takes strength and a particular type of determination.

In our Bibles we find that Jesus is someone who knows that wrong things need to be said no to, and as we read his story we find so many times when he has to stand up to authority – he does that all the way through his ministry. We need to keep remembering that the stand which Jesus takes for things that are good (for things that are right ... for things that are special to God) marks Jesus out as someone of true strength and courage ... someone we are called to follow in our own living.

With Jesus coming into our world, we find that we can know God in human form, as “one of us”. In the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “... they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord.”

What a gift we are given in knowing the living Christ, for in him we are able to know God not just from a book or by what others say about him. The Incarnation of Christ

points us to the love of God which is there for us to share, whether near or far. That can be a challenge, it’s true, as often we will need to stand up for what is right, against ways of living that are damaging or unthinking.

Today we need to stand up with real determination for The Way of Jesus and the grace of God in our world, living our lives for God’s truth and God’s justice.

Later in our service we’ll come back to this idea, but now let’s worship God in another hymn, one which reminds us that God is always beside us, helping us in all that we do.

Hymn CH4 213: *Every New Morning*

[ALL SING]

[Children may leave for their activities at this point]

Worship leader (or reader):

Our second reading today is taken from the New Testament and the gospel according to St Luke, chapter 18, reading from verse 1 to 8.

Reading: Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming."' And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?' **AMEN.**

Speaker A:

This world in which we live has become very complicated very quickly. Thinking back to March 2020 (a mere three years ago) everything seemed a whole lot

more straightforward in our world. True, I'm sure we can all recall troubles and conflicts, disputes and concerns in those pre-Covid days, but on nowhere near the scale we know in 2023.

At various times in human history, times get to be particularly tough, and this is certainly one such time. Looking across the age range of today's Scotland we find many a crisis of confidence in our land:

- Many children and young people who through the pandemic had to face up to terrible disruption in their education, are still finding life challenging. There are some who are deeply troubled by what they have been through and are finding it hard to engage with life;
- Young adults have seen such change in society with jobs less and less secure, while mortgages prove hard to obtain, and harder to pay for;

- With so many people the workplace is in a state of chaos as bosses try to balance the books while predicting hard times ahead;
- And older people: many live in fear of more ill health, social isolation, and huge uncertainty all around.

When we look at our world with all its warring and all its deceit of one kind or another, it can be easy to give in to despair. But at times such as these it can be very good to pause and to reflect on the fact that Jesus of Nazareth experienced the same kind of tensions and uncertainties some 2000 years ago. Jesus saw the oppression of the Roman Empire and the pain of his people, but he didn't give in. He took action. And, above all, Jesus knew deep inside that God's message from heaven above to an earth so very far below was a message of real, life-changing hope: a powerful, liberating message which needed to be lived out joyfully – energetically – speaking truth to power, no matter the costs, no matter the consequences.

Jesus, as we know, didn't hold back in speaking out against the powers that were so very self-serving. He was ready to take on the big issues of the day, challenging those in authority to repent and turn back to God so that they might relearn the ways of righteousness and justice for a people in pain.

One day he told a story about praying and staying strong in God's company. This parable was about a poor widow who wanted justice, so she kept coming back to the powerful judge to get what she knew was rightfully hers. At first the judge did nothing, but the woman continued to make her case. She decided to keep on keeping on, bothering that fed-up judge until finally he caved in, saying: "... because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out ...".

In the end, this woman got what she needed. Why? Because she had firmly and resolutely decided to keep on keeping on with her ambitious and impressive line of "bothering".

In the world of today there are so many things that are wrong, not least in the area of HIV. It is so easy to forget about this virus, especially when in recent years we have been so pre-occupied with another virus which has caused so much illness and fear and death. But now, after a long and draining pandemic, there is sadly a low level of public awareness of HIV. In these conditions it is all the more important that we do some serious “bothering” of policy-makers who could make things happen and make things better, just like the woman who bothered and *bothered* and **BOTHERED** the judge until she received the justice she so badly needed.

As Christians we need to “live in the moment”, sharply recalling in our thinking and in our praying the harsh fact that people are suffering right now all around the world because they simply don’t have access to reliable supplies of cheap and effective medication which they could and should be able to use to curb the HIV virus. At this moment, many thousands of people are dying needlessly each day. And it’s just as simple as that.

In a moment we’ll hear some startling truths about HIV in our world, but first let’s praise God, singing hymn number 484 which shows us just how close to us God truly is in this world of pain:

Hymn CH4 484: *Great God, your love has called us here*

[ALL SING]

Speaker B:

The United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS publishes regular “Update” documents. The sombre two-word title of its recent update is, ***In Danger***, reflecting the crisis which the world is currently facing in the field of HIV.

This UN report makes clear that we live in a world in which 4000 people become infected with HIV every day. Even more disturbingly, 650,000 people died of HIV-related causes in 2021 – this despite years of action to get life-saving medication to people in every corner of

the globe. Prior to the pandemic the record of success was considerable, yet now the statistics are starting to tell a different story altogether. However, this can be reversed if governments keep their promises in terms of funding for this vital work.

And yet consider this: finance cuts hang over public health programmes around the world, threatening to undermine all the decades of good work which have made such huge advances in the battle against HIV and AIDS. Already, the post-Covid world is seeing major donors reducing their international investment in this field, which will surely result in more infection, more suffering and more death.

The time has come for us to act like that determined woman, the widow who kept on bothering an uncaring judge. Why? Because when it comes to campaigning, that is precisely what it takes to keep a big issue in the public eye, rather than becoming a small issue ... before vanishing from policy-makers' agendas altogether. If change is to happen, it will take guts to stand up to the

powerful and shout that word, "No!!!" until they hear, and until they change their ways.

Right now, the Church of Scotland HIV Programme is engaged in a campaign to bother His Majesty's Government with plain-talking words of wisdom on the topic of HIV in our world. What's involved? Nothing more than everyone in church sending an e-mail to *[your MP]* to let them know:

- that HIV is still a major public health threat all around the globe;
- that we in the Church of Scotland are determined to keep HIV in the minds of our members and in the thinking of policy-makers; and
- that UK investment on HIV-related measures need to be maintained at a time when the world might be tempted to cut back on international development spending.

The link for this template is on the Church of Scotland website [and also here in our news bulletin](#). (or [appropriate place for your congregations](#))

After that, think and pray, then think and pray some more, seeking God's guidance. As Jesus himself tells us, if we are ready to bother people in the name of God's justice, amazing things can happen ... so let's get bothering.

We'll close with a few words from the American Christian thinker and writer, Matt Laney, who has kindly allowed us to share his take on the parable which we have thought about together today. Here is what Matt says:

Bothering: persistence, constant, relentless, skilful attention to what's happening in the moment—the political moment, the social moment, the interpersonal moment, the environmental moment, the inner moment—that, Jesus says, is the essence of prayer. That is what prepares the way for justice.

In other words, when we bother to give prayerful attention to what's happening in the world and respond with just love, we reveal and release holy power. We are both prayer and the response.

Now is always the time for holy bothering.

Let us pray:

A prayer of Matt Laney:

God, if I don't bother to pay attention to what's happening in this moment, send someone to bother me. Amen.

Now let us continue our worship by singing

Hymn CH4 716: *Come and find the quiet centre*

[ALL SING]

Speaker C:

Let us come before God with our prayers for the world.

Let us pray:

God of heaven and God of earth,

All is not well with our world, from war and suffering to illness and death, from global poverty to a local cost of living crisis, from misuse of power to no power at all for those who lack a voice loud enough to be heeded.

Into this world of selfishness and sin you sent your Son to show us what kind of justice – what kind of peace – you stand for.

Help us to be bothered enough to listen to Jesus.

Speaker A:

We recall before you all those people who are living with HIV today, whether close to home or on the other side of the world. We remember:

- so many children whose bodies have been infected by the virus and those whose lives have been affected in any way;
- so many adults who live each day in the midst of discrimination and stigma;
- so many people, all across the age ranges, who are waiting anxiously for test results which will show their HIV status.

Help us to be bothered enough to care for those who know the true meaning of HIV in their personal experience.

Speaker C:

We thank you for the skill, the wisdom, the tenacity of so many front-line scientists and clinicians, nurses and carers who are passionate about tackling HIV head on, through ground-breaking research, the development of new and effective drugs, or simply by “being there” with

those who are fearful for tomorrow and who need a hand to hold in a time of personal crisis.

Help us to be bothered enough to support those tenacious professionals in their life-changing, world-challenging work.

Speaker A:

Gentle God,

In the living presence of Jesus Christ in our world of sorrow, we know that we are not alone and that we are anything but powerless. Guide your Church across the nations, through the liberating power of your Holy Spirit, we pray. Then may Christians near and far be alive to the task of changing this world as together we walk in the Way of your Son who gave up his life to show us all the depth of love which you have for your wonderful creation.

May we serve you with passion and integrity as we seek to live out the Good News of the Gospel here and now ... for one and all.

These our prayers we offer in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Worship leader:

Thank you to everyone who has played their part in our Souper Sunday service today. I would like to remind you that after the benediction all are warmly invited to stay on for a simple lunch of soup and bread, and a chance to chat together.

And please remember to go to the Church of Scotland web pages to find wording for your e-mail, highlighting the pressing need for urgent action on HIV. It would be great if were all able to take on that simple task ... and see where it might lead!

And now we close our time of worship by singing

Hymn CH4 500: *Lord of creation, to you be all praise!*

[ALL SING]

Worship leader:

Go in peace, resolved to live your life in company with
the God whose Word is truth, whose Way is peace, whose
Love is supreme.

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

AMEN.