

Third Sunday of Easter – Year A

Third Sunday of Easter – 23 April 2023

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Rev Peter Wood, Interim Moderator and Locum Minister for St Clements and St Ninians, Wallyford, for his thoughts on the third Sunday of Easter.

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.

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Introduction

As Christians we are still in a time of celebration. A season of resurrection – Christ has risen! Our gardens are reminding us of the hope of the earth as we enjoy spring flowers bursting forth after pushing through the dark, hard earth.

What additional signs of resurrection and new life do we see in our world or in our community around us? Can stories of resurrection be shared in worship? These stories – like our flowers – are likely to be small but beautiful and inspiring.

With Earth Day, the anniversary of the birth of the modern environmental movement in 1970, falling on 22 April, the material this week also has an emphasis on the outdoors. As Christians we are called into a relationship with God, with one another and with the Earth.

Themes that suggest themselves to me from the passages today are resurrection, liberation and encountering God in the outdoors.

[Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19](#)

This psalm is a devout and radiant song of thanksgiving. Singing offers a means of expressing and deepening joy. It touches our soul. At other times the act of singing can stir us to rediscover a posture of gratitude.

This psalm was composed in order to be used in communal worship alongside words of testimony and answered prayer. Are there any songs that resonate and carry the particular story of your community that you currently use in worship? Is there anyone in your community who writes such songs?

God has inclined his ear to me (verse 2)

What a beautiful phrase conjuring a delightful image of an almighty God bending and listening to the heartbeat of God's creation.

After a devastating earthquake, such as the recent tragedy in Turkey and Syria, rescue teams frequently ask people nearby to stop and be silent so that in the silence the desperate and often faint cry of the buried might just be picked up. Not only has God listened but God has focused on that cry and moves towards the plaintiff.

The particular circumstances in which this psalm was written are not evident, but clearly the life of the Psalmist was in danger. Things were dark and looked hopeless. So much so

that when things changed for the better he now feels so indebted to God that he doubts that he can properly repay God's blessing. Gratitude is now a pattern for the rest of his life! This is not a chore but comes from an inextricable relationship – look how the psalm starts: "I love the Lord"!

[Acts 2:14a, 36-41](#)

But Peter raised his voice (v1)

Given these particular lectionary verses it would be tempting to focus on the power of preaching. What is remarkable however, is the way that Peter links the wild experience of the Spirit with the person of Jesus Christ. James Dunn, in his classic book *Jesus and the Spirit* (SCM 1975) comes to our aid:

"Although Pentecost itself does not seem to have involved a resurrection appearance or even a vision of Jesus it would seem that after the initial resurrection appearances charismatic and ecstatic phenomena became not an uncommon feature of the communal gatherings of the young church." (p146)

"Pentecost was for the disciples an experience of such inspiration and worship of such liberation and power of such givenness and numinous quality that from the first they were sure that this was the Spirit of God." (p152)

Repent, and be baptized every one of you... For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away (vv38-39)

When Vincent O'Donovan, in his mission to the Masai, baptised those individuals who had turned to Christ, he encountered opposition. He was approached by the local chief who told him that their way of living was not primarily as individuals but rather as a community. O'Donovan would therefore need to baptise not just individuals but the whole group! (from *Christianity Rediscovered*)

So that your sins might be forgiven (v38)

Given that what separates you from God is dealt with, you are set free from the past – from the way it's 'aye been'

Your burden is lifted and is replaced with the gift of the Holy Spirit. You are liberated from trying to save yourself and instead are led by the Spirit of Jesus.

For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him (v39)

The drama of Pentecost demonstrated that the gospel of Jesus was not to be restricted to the Jews but is for people of every tribe and language and nation. The gospel is inherently cross-cultural and multi-generational. Are there any practices in our Church that would appear to contradict this?

Peter recognises that this is the beginning of a worldwide liberation movement. In his sermon Peter connects back to the words of John the Baptist to “repent and be baptised.” This is not however simply a baptism of repentance but a baptism into Jesus Christ, at which the gift of the Holy Spirit is conferred. The past is dealt with, the new identity in Christ is embraced and the future is opened up. For Christians the future is bigger than the past.

1 Peter 1:17-23

When 1 Peter was written there were rising levels of suspicion, distrust and hostility towards the followers of Jesus. There is no Empire-led persecution, but they are being marginalised and open to ridicule.

The question therefore in this letter is how, in such a context, should they live as followers of Jesus? By condemning the society around them? By retreating away from the issues that society raised? Or by living differently?

In the first chapter Peter emphasises that followers of Jesus are God’s people. Their identity may bring problems but they are precious in God’s eyes. They have been born again. Peter knows the power of understanding our identity and calling, and starts with a description of those who are believers in Christ. Their faith and hopes are set on God. Whatever happens, you belong to God. If you realise whose you are then appropriate behaviour may well follow.

Although he will go on to develop this theme more fully, Peter does hint in the first chapter at an ethic of living for God, which means living good lives among those around you.

Live in reverent fear (v17)

Live life as a gift from God. Live God-honouring lives, conscious that all that we are and do comes from God.

Love one another deeply from the heart (v22)

What a calling! Not simply to love one another, but to do so deeply, from the heart. In such an ambivalent world, we are to love profoundly.

In His teaching, Jesus says, “You have heard it said but I say unto you...” meaning, I’m looking to you my followers for something better, something that is real, something that will cost. This way of living will be markedly different from the ways of the world around you.

Luke 24:13-35

Why couldn’t the disciples recognise Jesus?

The disciples had been with Jesus for three years. Couldn’t they recognise His voice, connect with His manner? How much did the resurrected Jesus differ from the Jesus of Nazareth?

They were blinded by grief and a deep sense of loss. Their heads were bowed. The disciples were astonishingly unaware of who they were walking with, and yet it is completely understandable to us as human beings. Think about how you may have travelled frequently along a route for a long time, but now no longer notice certain things.

Listening and asking questions

Jesus asks a question and lets the disciples tell their story.

Before we can be heard, the people we are with need to know that they have been heard and that we have felt the pain of their story in all its sadness and pain. Jesus’ conversation is not about giving answers but bringing a bigger perspective to their story.

Stay with us (v29)

The conversation with the stranger had them buzzing! They didn’t want it to end! “Stay with us”, they beg. This reminds us of the request made by Jesus to (possibly the same) disciples to stay awake with Him in the garden. (Luke 22:45)

And Jesus relents and allows His direction, His timetable and His day to be altered at the request of these two befuddled followers.

Made known to them in the breaking of the bread (v35)

Communion opens our eyes to see Jesus and all that He means.

As soon as the disciples recognise Jesus He vanishes from their sight – the first of several such shadowy post-resurrection appearances – without clearly stating, “So, what I want of you is this...”. The two disciples receive no directions from Jesus about how to live. The

direction comes instead from the transformative power of the encounter itself. The two rush off back to Jerusalem to tell the others about meeting the resurrected Jesus.

Walking and talking!

Sometimes we have better conversations when walking alongside someone than addressing them directly, particularly when the subject matter is difficult. Think of a time this may have happened to you on a walk, or sitting side by side on a car journey.

Could the disciples have ‘got there’ in their understanding if they had been sitting? Walking integrates mind and body and offers perspective along the way.

Jesus did a lot of walking! Have you had the joy of discovering Jesus outside the church building?

Sermon ideas

Seeing and not seeing!

For an example of this read the story of the famous violinist at the New York subway:

<https://www.classicfm.com/artists/joshua-bell/violin-busking-washington-subway/>

Invite people to chat about what they have only just realised or seen, despite its familiarity, or having walked past it many times.

Recall people’s surprise during the pandemic as they rediscovered parks that they had forgotten about or overlooked.

[Earth Day](#) engages more than 1 billion people every year and has become a major stepping stone along the pathway of engagement around the protection of the planet. As Christians the idea of caring for the Earth is generally accepted, but do we realise the vital nature of relating to the planet on which we live and move and have our being? Read Susan Butler-Bass’ experience of her retreat last year:

“As I have ruminated on Tangier Island, I realize that far too many religious leaders are asking the wrong question. The future of Christianity matters little if there are no human beings, whether we extinct ourselves through war or environmental disaster. We can fix our denominations, bring new members to church, write the best theologies ever—and none of it will matter one whit if we are all dead. The question—“What is the future of Christianity?”—must be held in relation to other questions. Right now, the most significant of those questions is: *“What is the future of humankind?”*”

[Read the full article: <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/a-healthy-church-needs-a-healthy-planet-2022-12-01/>]

Are we carrying so much baggage from the past we literally cannot see what's in front of our noses?

On your way to and from your church building do you cross a river? When encountering the river, take the opportunity to engage with it. At a safe, but close distance, stop and turn and look at the water flowing away from you. Look at the speed, colour and content of the water.

Then ask, "What is it that I need to let go of?" It might help this symbolic action if you use your arms and imagine placing your baggage in the river. Finally imagine your chosen 'baggage' leaving you and it flowing away downstream – soon to be out of sight. Let it go!...

If you cannot get outdoors you may wish to play a video (fixed position camera) of a river running away from you and follow the same steps.

In responding to the psalm, are we able to give thanks to God for every area of our lives? Frederick Buechner writes:

"Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace." (*Now and Then: A Memoir of Vocation*)

You might wish to use this quote and write an 'embodied' psalm.

Look at the sensory actions. What have you found boring or painful, exciting or glorious in the week that has just gone?

How do we live as Christians and as churches in 21st-century Scotland?

We live in a time of post-Christendom where the Church, rather than being at the centre of society, is at the edge and at times is overlooked. In times past people encountered the Church at various stages of their lives. Most young people grew up being taught bible stories. Now however, church attendance can be seen as one amongst many leisure pursuits for older folks and for many the Church is seen as being *against* things.

How do we 'do church' in such times? Do we still expect people to find us and to respect what we stand for? Is our church set up to explain the Good News of the gospel in and for our current generation?

Can we evidence that our identity is not in buildings or in nationality but is grounded in Christ?

Go on your own Emmaus Walk!

Why not invite some people on a walk and have an Agape meal or a simple celebration of Holy Communion? This could take place outdoors, or in a bothy. Or could you plan to have a picnic? You may wish ask people to talk together about the last year and what they are carrying into 2023.

Prayers

Gathering

Watch a stilling prayer

For example, one of the short videos from Eco-congregation

<https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/?s=stilling&submit=Search>

We take time to settle ourselves.

To be still, to be at one with where we are in this season of our lives.

Our bodies, part of our worship,

helping to bring our hearts and our souls before the Creator.

And in the silence we breathe out

knowing that God, our closest breath, is with us.

In the stillness we join with all of creation and hold silence together.

[We hold silence]

You may wish to use a simple prayer that is said before meals and which we use at Forest Church. This raises our expectation of God to be at work in all that happens in this time and that what we do is intended as nourishment of our souls:

For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly grateful.

Prayers of confession and affirmation

Sing a simple Kyrie (e.g. CH4 776, or the Kyrie from *'Many & Great'* – Wild Goose Publications)

Living God

When our heads are down and we have lost hope

May we see Jesus.

Loving God

When we feel that we are living in a confusing and hostile world

May we see Jesus.

Generous God

When we live as if this life is ours and not Your gift to us

May we see Jesus.

Compassionate God

When our hands are already full

and we feel unable to welcome the stranger

May we see Jesus.

In silence we each say to God what is on our hearts

[We hold silence]

Christ's words of affirmation:

Christ calls us –

“Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden”

From the self-centredness, contradiction and fragmentation of our lives

we turn to Christ –

the living water

the bread of life

the light of the world.

Prayers of intercession

God of resurrection, God of hope

We pray for this world –

its fragility, its beauty and its pain.

As we remember Earth Day, so we pray for a better relationship with the Earth.
Lord, You said that if people do not praise You
then even the stones would cry out –
in recognition of Jesus, the source and centre of life for the world.

Holy Spirit
give us eyes to see and ears to hear
the connections between Creation and Jesus.

May we walk lightly on the Earth,
cherish our fellow creatures
and learn with Creation the ways of our Creator.

In silence you are invited to pray for local groups in your church and locality that are caring for the Earth.

[We hold silence]

Lord, we lift our heads and our hearts to You

[We hold silence]

Lord, we pray for situations in the world
where there is injustice,
where people are oppressed and are not free to live as God intends.
Where the forces of money and violence dictate,
Lord, come and set Your people free.

Where people's lives are choked with wealth
and where people struggle to live in a world of perfect images
Lord, come and set Your people free.

For Your church –
[Pray for your link church or mission partners]

We pray for our church

In 1 Peter the Church was working out how to be God's people in an increasingly confusing and hostile context.

We pray for the direction of our national Church.
May she walk humbly and hopefully in faith.
Grant wisdom and discernment in these challenging times.

May we know who and whose we are –
that our identity is found in the love of God.

We pray for situations in our community
where people are feeling stuck in a narrative
where things haven't worked out as they had hoped,
where there is gloominess and despondency.
May You grant us all the humility to go on changing
and the courage to be open to transformation
so that we can see Jesus in 2023.

Lord, where there are faithful people carrying burdens
Lord, send Your spirit and set them free

[In silence pray for those that come to mind]

Where there are people with gifts unused
Lord, send Your spirit and set them free

[In silence pray for those that come to mind]

Lord, we lift our heads and our hearts to You

[We hold silence]

Generous God
We thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit
who makes Jesus real for us.
Help us this week to see with Your eyes,
to feel with Your heart
and to walk forward in faith.

The Lord's Prayer...

Closing Responses

As resurrection people
We look for signs of the kingdom

As resurrection people
We walk by faith and not by sight

As resurrection people
We share the hope of the gospel

As resurrection people
We live in power of the Spirit.

Blessing

May the companionship of Christ encourage you.
May the self-giving of Christ nourish you.
And may the joy of the resurrection
astound you and propel you into sharing with others
the good news of the gospel
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 playlist of suggested songs for Easter can be found online:
<https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me/playlist/easter>
- 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 419 – “Thine be the glory”
- CH4 466 – “Before the throne of God above”

- CH4 471 – “To the name of our salvation”
- CH4 622 – “We sing a love that sets all people free”
- CH4 755 – “Be still and know that I am God”
- CH4 762 – “Glory to God” – the Peruvian Gloria
- Ch4 798 – “The peace of the earth be with you”
- “All the wonder that surrounds us” – (Tune, Ar hyd y nos – e.g. CH4 562) from *One is the Body*, Wild Goose Resource Group
- “Over my head I hear music in the air” – from *Love and Anger*, Wild Goose Resource Group
- “The spirit lives to set us free” (Sanctuary First) –
• <https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/music/article/the-spirit-lives-to-set-us-free>
- “Let all creation sing before the Lord” (RESOUND worship) –
https://resoundworship.org/song/let_all_creation_sing
- “We are the tenants of the king” (RESOUND worship) -
https://resoundworship.org/song/we_are_the_tenants_of_the_king
- “Open our eyes to see” (Angela Reith, CJM) –
<https://www.cjmmusic.com/songs/open-our-eyes-to-see-song/>

As we look forward to Pentecost you are encouraged to sing songs with words other than English.

This helps us recognise that we are more than simply a local church but are rather part of a worldwide multi-lingual liberation movement. Such songs are often best sung unaccompanied.

- CH4 757 – “Come all you people”
- “Santo santo santo” – from *Many and Great*, Wild Goose Resource Group

- “Malembe” – from *The Truth That Sets Us Free*, Wild Goose Resource Group

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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