

Fourth Sunday in Lent – Year B

Sunday 10 March 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Catriona Robertson, former Warden of Iona Abbey and Associate Member of the Iona Community, for her thoughts on the fourth Sunday of Lent.

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 [Iona Community](#) is an international, ecumenical Christian movement working for justice and peace, the rebuilding of community and the renewal of worship.

We affirm that worship can be a transformative experience when it reflects the dream of God for the flourishing of all creation. Our worship is rooted in our relationships with God, each other, and the world around us.

Our worship takes shape through imaginative engagement with scripture, Christian traditions, lived experience, and other sources of inspiration. We embrace the creative tensions within worship – structure and freedom; stillness and action; transcendence and immanence.

We seek to create and share in worship that embodies our commitment to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. Therefore we seek to be radically contextual, inclusive, and participatory in our worship.

We are continually learning and growing, so our worship is continually evolving and being renewed.

In my previous role as Iona Abbey warden, and in other contexts, I start preparing for worship, in no particular order, by

- Imagining in detail where and when it will take place, who is likely to come along and who will be responsible for the different aspects of this precious time together
- Paying attention to what is going on locally, for the people likely to be gathering, and more widely – nationally and internationally – on how things are, or are not, reflecting God's intention for our world
- Looking at the set texts for the day in different translations and letting them sit with me for a bit, noticing words or images or ideas that I am drawn to, or feel uncomfortable with, or anything that seems to speak to current hopes and concerns.

Later, I will

- Browse scholarly resources for the readings (e.g. *Feasting on the Word, Texts for Preaching, Spill the Beans*). ChatGPT doesn't seem to be offering much that is useful in this area.

- Use a streaming service, hymnaries and sheet music to refresh my memory on possible songs and instrumental music.
- Find my go-to collections of prayers (ancient ones are sometimes spot-on and contemporary prayers often spark fresh insights) and previous ideas on symbolic action to see if this sparks fresh thinking – there could be fabric or colour or natural material (stones, water, shells, sand, earth).
- I also take a little time out to sit in stillness with God before planning and again just before worship begins.

Ideally, the people leading or facilitating the worship come together ahead of time to share ideas, look at options, decide who will do what, see what needs a run-through or if any of the songs would benefit from being taught as people gather on site or online.

I use an outsize hourglass shape on a large flipchart page to gather ideas and sift through what might work. All the ideas, suggestions, movement, music, is scribbled in and around the hourglass, with arrows and symbols ensuring the flow makes sense. It begins at the top with an open welcome to everyone coming into the worship space (which could be online, or outdoors), then moving on to our approach to God, being addressed by God through scripture or in other ways and our response to God (these are in the centre) and then being sent out, refreshed and brought alive, into the world – the bottom of the hourglass.

Preparing worship as a group is, for me, one of the most exciting aspects of church life – you never know what might emerge.

During Lent, the Iona Community continues its regular monthly online worship. In addition, there is often an opportunity to press the pause button on our busy lives and gather online each week. Prayer and reflection motivate us to take action for justice and peace in the world. We are convinced that the radical, inclusive community we seek must be embodied in the community we practise.

Which is why it is so important for us to meet up, on site and online, to share our experiences, concerns and hopes honestly, to sing and to pray together, and to work with others to transform the world we live in.

The Iona Community's publishing house, [Iona Books](#), often recommends one or more of their publications during Lent and arranges author events and readings. The Wild Goose Resource Group shares inspiration for the season and into Holy Week and Easter, which is sometimes themed. *Stages on the Way* is a well-thumbed book in my home, with litanies, reflections, responses, scripts, meditations, poems and prayers for the Lenten journey, encouraging us to sense something of the hope, apprehension and desolation which Jesus's

friends felt in Lent and Holy Week, before experiencing the unexpected and deep joy of Easter.

Numbers 21:4-9

While visually arresting (snake on a stick) and a page-turner (how do they get out of this mess?), this reading from the exodus story probably wouldn't have made it into the lectionary had it not been mentioned in John's gospel.

The Israelites had complained on previous occasions, in weary nostalgia had wanted to return to being slaves in Egypt, and had enough of the wilderness. What's different here, we're told in Numbers, is that they spoke not only against Moses but against God. Instead of providing food when they were hungry, or water when thirsty, this time God sends venomous snakes and many of the Israelites die. When this happens, there is a turning point (v7). The people come to Moses, aware of what they have done to provoke this anger and desperate for help.

Moses prays to God for the people, and God instructs him to create the likeness of a venomous – possibly fiery – snake and raise it onto a pole. The people bitten by the desert snakes can look at the bronze snake “and live”.

What about this object, this image? Why bronze and not some other metal? Because of the low melting point of copper and tin, the making of bronze was possible earlier in history than the making of iron, which requires a significantly higher temperature. Once the making of iron was possible, its use became widespread in agriculture and transformed economies. Bronze was time-consuming to make, always rare, precious and seemed to have a sacred quality to it because of its use as swords, ornaments and decorated vessels.

A familiar image on chemist's shops is a stylised snake on a stick. Contrary to my assumption, this comes from stories of the Greek demi-god of medicine, Asclepius (known for healing the sick) who carried such a stick, not the biblical story. Ancient Greeks believed snake venom could be remedial and their shedding of skin was a symbol of rebirth and renewal. How ideas and symbols travelled in the ancient world, or emerged independently, is an archaeological and historical quest.

The snakes don't stop biting the Israelites in the wilderness, but the people are saved. They are able to “live” by turning to look at the bronze image, reconciled with Moses and with God. If like me you are thinking, isn't this some kind of idolatry, it is likely that over time this did happen, but there is no suggestion of it in Numbers. In 2 Kings 18.4, we learn that the

new king Hezekiah orders images in the temple in Jerusalem to be destroyed, amongst them the bronze serpent.

In contemporary allopathic medicine, the placebo effect (the body responding positively to interventions which have no therapeutic value) is recognised and is the subject of research. There is still much that we do not understand.

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

From the newly established Christian community on Iona in the seventh century, it's said that Columba (the founder) would wade out into the sea in the early morning to recite psalms. Singing or reciting or shouting out psalms aloud, as with any poetry or song, brings vitality to the words.

The words of this psalm express thankfulness for God's always-there love, for God's goodness, for the availability of God's love for people living in every direction. As in the text from Numbers, redemption is an important theme – the movement towards God when the people were “sick through their sinful ways” and their healing when they “cried to the Lord in their trouble” (v19).

You don't have to look far to find suffering, both personal suffering and the suffering of whole communities or nations. This is not God's intention for our world, both the suffering that comes about through unjust systems and structures, through natural causes, from the decisions of groups of people which result in suffering for others or from personal actions which miss the mark and fall short of what God wants.

The turning point in the psalm is when (v19) they cry to God. God's response (v20) is to heal and to deliver them from destruction, saving them from their distress. We join in again (v21), as at the start of the psalm, thankful for God's steadfast love and wonderful works to humankind.

The refrain 'God's steadfast love endures forever' may be the thing that we cling to as individuals when things have gone very badly, because of our own actions or lack of action, or from a close bereavement or from the circumstances in which we live.

The power of African American Spirituals conveys this certainty: however bad things are, and they are still bad for African Americans today, God's steadfast love endures forever, demonstrating God's understanding for the oppressed and the solace and ability to carry on the struggle as a result of being understood and believed in times of trouble.

[Ephesians 2:1-10](#)

This letter, tumbling over itself in energy and using words in unfamiliar ways, could have been a round-robin which circulated to people beyond Ephesus. Scholars have suggested the writing style is not quite Paul's, which is less stylised and generally has shorter sentences, more like Ernest Hemingway. However, the content is consistent with Paul's other letters, so it is likely that it was written by someone who knew Paul's thinking well and liked it, continuing his approach and writing this letter after Paul's death. The focus is on salvation and the sharp distinction between a way of life, individual and corporate, which is not life-giving, and a grace-filled life, which is.

The first three verses are downbeat and illustrate pre-salvation life: being dead (through trespasses and sins), being unable to withstand negative powers that reduce us to a kind of slavery, and being "children of wrath" – subject to God's anger. At first reading these seem pretty extreme until we take a cool look at our own lives, and those of our friends, communities and the impact of some of our actions on God's creation: the environmental emergency is not under control, inequality is growing, foodbanks are standard, the refugee crisis continues, and there are wars and proxy wars in most of the world's continents.

We may imagine we have great freedom to live the way we want to, but we are heavily influenced by our start in life, our educational and social background, our economic position, political decisions and much more. Devastating consequences of war and environmental degradation overseas leaves people powerless over the simplest aspects of living.

I was drawn to the abundance of mercy in verses 5-7, bringing back a sense of life even when we're bowed and cowed by our 'dead' life. It reminded me of a children's picture book, *So Much*, by Trish Cooke, which shows a bored toddler at home suddenly having a great time welcoming, hugging, dancing, playing, singing and finally falling asleep after being loved 'so much' by everyone who visits their house in the late afternoon – their family, friends and neighbours. The toddler didn't initiate the love, it came to them and they joined in enthusiastically.

[John 3:14-21](#)

We break into a night-time conversation, a private and important Q & A for the religious leader Nicodemus, who comes to talk to Jesus "by night". Before verse 14, we hear that Nicodemus recognises Jesus as a teacher, as coming from God, but he is finding it hard, as

we might ourselves, to grasp the magnitude of what Jesus is saying about “heavenly things” and why they are important for an earthly life.

It can be hard to find the right language for the serious things in life. One of my favourite writers is Martin Luther King Jr’s theologian friend, Howard Thurman, who said, “Don’t ask what the world needs, ask what brings you alive, because what the world needs is people who are alive.” In contemporary language for the civil rights movement in the USA, and which still works decades later, he discards the duty-laden ‘should’ for something that people will be curious about, able to grasp, ask themselves and run towards: ‘coming alive’. Grace is not for us to earn, to slog away at; God’s love is given freely.

The text for today starts at verse 14, with John’s account of Jesus referring to the passage in Numbers, and explicitly linking the “lifting up” of the Son of Man to show God’s love (His crucifixion and resurrection, which early readers of the gospel will immediately have grasped) with the lifting up of the bronze serpent before the Israelites in the wilderness as God’s saving response to the people’s suffering.

The physical manifestation differs between the two instances of lifting up, but both demonstrate God’s love, and result in God’s people turning towards what is being lifted up and being radically changed: in Numbers the people look at the serpent and live, and in John, the people look up to the Son of Man, believe and have eternal life.

In John’s gospel, the word ‘believe’ is always active; it doesn’t mean passive assent or intellectual agreement, it means something happens as a result of belief – or disbelief. Later on in this chapter (v36) we read, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life”. Disbelief, therefore, is to disobey. Both have consequences, which goes some way to explaining why Nicodemus was so keen to understand what Jesus was all about.

Verse 16, one of the most well-known and most quoted verses in the Bible, tells us that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”. This echoes Psalm 107: God’s promise of steadfast love.

In verse 17 we read that God did not send the Son into the world to condemn it, but that the world might be saved. The differences between those who believe and those who reject this gift of love are expressed in dualistic terms. At verse 18, those who do not believe “are condemned already”, which suggests that judgement is not waiting in the wings for a future decision, but that people who turn away from God’s love are living a deathly life as they live now. Eternal life and judgement have consequences and are happening now, in the present.

Sermon ideas

'Homesick', by Carol Ann Duffy, in the poetry collection [The Heart's Time, by Janet Morley](#), can be read either as part of the sermon, or separately afterwards, or given in printed form for the congregants to read through silently on their own. The poem can be found online.

"When we love, when we tell ourselves we do,
we are pining for first love, somewhen, ..."

The poem shows what it's like to have a deep longing, to be restless, distracted, when we can't focus or get on with the things that matter, when we're not in tune with ourselves, with God or with other folk.

- This Sunday falls just after [International Women's Day](#) on 8 March, which calls for a world free of bias, stereotypes and discrimination. The 2024 theme is *Inspire Inclusion*, so there could be a focus on women during this service, maybe asking after the readings or the songs, "Where are/were the women?" and including people of all genders in the leading of the service. Much of the material suggested for prayers below has been written by women.
- The theme that links today's scripture readings is salvation and grace, God's steadfast love for us and the whole of creation, in spite of grumblings and less than optimal behaviour. The offer from God is of life lived in all its fullness. There are several reality checks on how God's people turn away from God – and also turn back, coming alive to a deep and meaningful way of living, both individually and as a community. In spite of the archaic language and dualistic approach, it is likely that everyone in the congregation can sometimes relate to feeling disconnected, of being lost or overwhelmed or of 'doing time' in a flat, stale life that lacks meaning or hope. Our families, neighbourhoods and even our nation can experience something similar – things are harsh and hopeless. They may also have experienced, perhaps unexpectedly, a deep connection with God, with others and with creation – as individuals and as part of a group or society. This can sometimes evoke tears and deep emotion – of being recognised, loved for what we are, accepted and welcomed – which can lead to the "new life" that Nicodemus was trying to get his head around for himself and for the community he led.
- All the readings lend themselves to being read aloud and are fairly concise. The gospel reading, if a PA system is being used or if the service is online, could be stage-whispered – neither Nicodemus nor Jesus wanted to wake everyone up.

- You may feel you want to address head-on the reservations that people may be feeling about the bronze serpent and the response of God to the grumbling Israelites. There could be a number of explanations as to why this story retained a place in Numbers.
- Part of the sermon or reflection could take the form of asking the congregation to turn to the person sitting next to them and have a conversation in twos or threes about the reading(s), asking one of the following questions. You will know which of these is most likely to allow people to share important experiences with each other:
 - What night-time conversation/video chat/podcast has had a significant impact on your life? Why?
 - What word or image caught your attention from the reading(s)? Why?
 - Describe a time when you and/or the wider community felt fully alive.
 - Reflect for a few moments and then complete the following observations about the reading(s), “I notice ...” and “I wonder ...”
 - Are there any psalms or poems you like to recite or read out aloud? Why?
- If you choose to include a reading of the poem *Homesick*, the congregation could be asked to form their duos or trios again and share with each other:
 - Have you, or has someone you know, felt ‘homesick’ in a way similar to the poem? Is this unusual or fairly common?
 - Is it possible to imagine the opposite? What would that look like?

The purpose of the conversations is not to agree on a correct interpretation of scripture, but to engage with these stories, ask questions, allow them to speak to us and to come to know that we are invited to be part of the dream of God. Online participants can be put into chat rooms for the questions, using the written chat function to share reflections.

- Alternatively or additionally, some sheets of damp blotting paper could be laid out on a hard, flat surface, with jewel-coloured inks available to use (with pipettes for liquid ink or large fibre-tips in a range of bold colours). After the sermon or reflection, these words below, from Evelyn Underhill, can be read, followed by an invitation for anyone to come to the table and add their brilliant colour to the paper as a symbol of their willingness to be open to God’s steadfast love. The colours will spread out and partially merge on the blotting paper and create a vivid image. Online participants can be asked to have a smaller version available next to their device.

“Do not entertain the notion that you ought to advance in your prayer ... All real progress in spiritual things comes gently, imperceptibly, and is the work of God. Our

crude efforts spoil it ... Remember that the only growth which matters happens without our knowledge ... Think of the Infinite Goodness, never of your own state." [*The Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, Ed. C Poston, 2010, University of Illinois Press.]

Prayers

Gathering prayer / Call to worship

Leader: Give thanks to God, for God is good;

All: God's love endures forever.

Leader: Let all who know God tell of their story,

**All: from east and west, from north and south,
we will tell our story.**

Leader: When we cried to God in our trouble,
God saved us from our distress;

All: God sent out the Word and healed us.

Leader: Let us give thanks for God's unfailing love,
and tell of God's works
with songs of joy in worship.

Adapted from Psalm 107.1-3, 17-22, from Spill the Beans, Lent, Easter, Pentecost 2021, p39

Confession / Repentance

While standing

Leader: God says,

When Israel was a child, I loved that child.

I called my children out of Egypt,

But the more I called, the further they went from me.

I was the one who taught them to walk;

I was the one who had taken them in my arms;

but they did not remember

that I had looked after them,

that I had led them in bonds of love,

that I had lifted them like a little child to my cheek,

that I had bent down to feed them.

We sit and hold silence, in which we remember how we forget God.

SILENCE

Leader: If we have forgotten You,
forgotten that You made, feed and love us,

All: Kyrie eleison (*see music section*) **or**
Lord have mercy (*sung or said*)

Leader: If we have forgotten You,
and in Your place imagined a god made in our own image,

All: Kyrie eleison (*see music section*) **or**
Lord have mercy (*sung or said*)

Leader: If we have forgotten You that You smile
and thought only that You frown,

All: Kyrie eleison (*see music section*) **or**
Lord have mercy (*sung or said*)

Leader: If we have forgotten the range of Your friends
and have kept safe within our familiar circle,

All: Kyrie eleison (*see music section*) **or**
Lord have mercy (*sung or said*)

Leader: If we have forgotten that we were made in Your mould
and have not loved ourselves the right way,

All: Kyrie eleison (*see music section*) **or**
Lord have mercy (*sung or said*)

Leader: God says
How can I give you up?
How can I abandon you?
My heart will not let me do it,
my love for you is too strong.
For I am God, and not a human being.
I, the Holy One, am with you.

From 'A Wee Worship Book', Wild Goose Publications

Spirit of integrity,
You drive us out into the desert
to search out Your truth.
Give us clarity to know what is right,
and courage to reject what is expedient;
that we may abandon the false innocence
of failing to choose at all;
but may follow the purposes of Jesus Christ.

From 'Women Included, services and prayers from The St Hilda Community', SPCK 1993

The Lord's Prayer (*said in the form used locally or in this form from the Iona Community*)

God in heaven,
Your name is to be honoured.
May Your new community of hope
be realised on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today the essentials of life.
Release us from our wrongdoing
as we also release those who wrong us.
Do not test us beyond our enduring;
save us from all that is evil.
For You embrace justice, love and peace,
now and to the end of time, Amen.

Thanksgiving / Gratitude

O Christ, the Master Carpenter,
who at the last, through wood and nails,
purchased our whole salvation,
wield well Your tools in the workshop of Your world,
so that we, who come rough-hewn to Your bench,
may here be fashioned to a truer beauty of Your hand.
We ask it for Your own name's sake.

From the Iona Community's [Abbey Worship Book](#), Wild Goose Publications

A prayer for Mothering Sunday

Leader: For the mothering of mothers
and the mothering of fathers;
for the mothering of others:

**All: Mother God,
 we give You thanks.**

Leader: For those who act as midwife
 to our hopes,
 for those who nurse us through our pain,
 for those who nurture, strengthen and guide us:

**All: Mother God,
 we give You thanks.**

Leader: For those who gently push us from the nest,
 for those who welcome us home,
 for those who become our family,
 for the motherhood of the Church:

**All: Mother God,
 we give YOU thanks.**

For the greening of trees
and for the gentling of friends,
we thank You, O God.

For the brightness of field
and the warmth of the sun,
we thank You, O God.

For work to be done
and laughter to share,
we thank You, O God.

We thank You and know
that through struggle and pain
in the slippery path of new birth
hope will be born
and all shall be well.

Kate McIlhagga, from the 'Green Heart of the Snowdrop'

Prayer for others / Intercession

God of life,
You know us and You love us.

Be with us now and with those who pray with us.
Assure us of Your presence and Your steadfast love.
Hear the words we can barely speak.
Bring hope and healing to the raw edges of our lives,
to those who are broken-hearted and hurting,
and to the torn and ragged parts of our world.
Strengthen our spirits,
soften our hearts,
and keep us on Your way.

God of the heights and the depths,
we bring to You
those driven into the desert,
those struggling with difficult decisions.

May they choose life.

God of the light and the cloud,
we bring to You
those lost in the mist of drugs or drink,
those dazzled by the use of power.

May they choose life.

God of the wild beast and the ministering angel,
we bring to You
those savaged by others' greed,
those exhausted by caring for others.

May they choose life.

Christ tempted and triumphant,
we bring ourselves to You,
tired of difficult choices,
anxious about the future,
drained by the loss of a loved one.

May they choose life.

May we feel Your healing touch,
know God's presence in all things
and receive the crown of life
through the Holy Spirit of compassion.

(From St Augustine of Canterbury)

Tend Your sick ones,
rest Your weary ones,
bless Your dying ones,
soothe Your suffering ones,
pity Your afflicted ones,
shield Your joyous ones,
and all for Your love's sake.

Kate McIlhagga in 'The Green Heart of the Snowdrop' – adapted

Blessing / Closing prayer

Leader: Those who work for change suffer resistance.

All: So make us strong.

Leader: Those who do new things sometimes feel afraid.

All: So make us brave.

Leader: Those who challenge the world as it is arouse anger.

All: So grant us inner peace.

Leader: Those who live joyfully are envied.

All: So make us generous.

Leader: Those who try to love encounter hate.

All: So make us steadfast in You.

From 'Women Included, services and prayers from The St Hilda Community', SPCK 1993

A blessing

May God bless you.

May you be holy and strong and creative.

May you know the joy of Jesus.

May you dance in the wildness of the Spirit's breath.

May God's glory continue to grow in you,
gently, powerfully, tenderly.

May you be cradled in warmth and healing.

May you be held in God's wisdom and love.
Amen.

Ruth Burgess

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.

A suggested playlist of [songs from CH4 for use during Lent](#) can be found on the Church of Scotland website.

- CH4 141 – “Oh, the life of the world is a joy and a treasure” – this Sunday is all about coming alive and this song overflows with pleasure and detail, ending in giving thanks for life and giving love to God.
- CH4 167 – “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah” – a well-known song of praise and of trust in God in the face of difficulties, whether in the wilderness or on the pilgrimage of life, with opportunities for lower voices to add dramatic harmony.
- CH4 555 – “Amazing grace! how sweet the sound” – God's love is not conditional and this song assures us of the promise of God's steadfast love, even in the most difficult contexts.
- CH4 724 – “Christ's is the world in which we move” – a call to love others as Jesus did, asking us to feel for people outside our comfort zone and, in the refrain, assuring us all that Christ shows His face and offers his embrace to everyone, including the lost, the unloved, the disgraced. To the folk tune Dream Angus, which some will know and which is easy to pick up from being taught earlier in the service or played through a couple of times before singing.
- CH4 776 – “Kyrie eleison” – a beautiful Kyrie from Ukraine which can be used between the sections of the prayer of confession/repentance. It is easy to learn and

can be taught before the service proper begins. It has some swooping harmonies for those who love to add to the singing in this way.

- A choice of two recorded pieces for the times when the congregation may be speaking quietly in twos and threes:
[Stream](#), from the album *Opening* by the Tord Gustavsen Trio
[XII: Benedictus](#) from *The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace* by Karl Jenkins.
- “Come with me for the journey is long” – The first song on the album/songbook “[The Truth That Sets Us Free](#)” by the Wild Goose Collective, is from South Africa. It is available to stream and easily taught either at the end of the service immediately before singing or in advance at the start. Percussive instruments, bought or improvised, or clapping, can be used and at the end of the service, the congregation moving out of the worship space together singing, and maybe dancing, too. The words and tune are simple and easily memorised, particularly if there are one or two people leading the singing. The words can be adapted to the circumstances of the day.

The journey of Lent can be long and travelling it together builds connection, solidarity, joy and companionship through difficult days together. Singing is a great way to boost endorphins and build community. Congregants online can be invited to clap or tap their table top to join in the final song.

Reflecting on our worship practice

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

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

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.

- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

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

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

Useful links

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 can be found [here](#)

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

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

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