

## **Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B**

**Sunday 14 July 2024**

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Christopher Rowe, Minister of Colston Milton Parish Church, for his thoughts on the eighth 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.

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19 and Psalm 24.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Amos 7:7-13 and Psalm 85:8-13.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Ephesians 1:3-14 .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Mark 6:14-29 .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Sermon ideas .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Prayers .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Musical suggestions .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Reflecting on our worship practice .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Useful links .....</b>	<b>13</b>

## Introduction

If I can, I like to read the passages over in good time and let them sit there; or very often I read them in a hurry, late in the week, slightly panicked that I have a service to lead. Prayer is much more fervent when it is urgent! I have found there to be truth in the statement that work fills the hours given to it, so if you've not got much time to give to preparing your service, then give it what you can. There might be one passage that stands out to you – do not be afraid to reduce and narrow your focus – if all the passages speak to you and seem to reinforce each other, use them all, but it is better to have a clear focus than try to squeeze everything in. If you are struggling, then just pick a single passage and maybe even a single sentence or even word – or ask a family member or friend to pick one for you.

There are numerous online commentaries which are available, I like the 'Salt Project' and 'Working Preacher' websites – they usually offer a different perspective (and Working Preacher lets you look back at contributors' ideas from previous years), so it can be nice to read both and see how different ideas come through. Nico ter Linden's book *The story goes ... The Stories of Judges and Kings* covers the passage from 2 Samuel and is a really good read.

I usually use the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible, but will often read The Message alongside it which, although quite American sounding, usually helps me to understand better what the passages are saying in more everyday language, especially Paul's letters. [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) allows you to quickly look up a variety of different translations and [www.biblehub.com](http://www.biblehub.com) offers Greek and Hebrew texts and a variety of commentaries to choose from, which all give other people's ideas on what the text means and often some information to deepen your understanding of the context.

This week you've got two sets of OT and matching Psalm, so first you want to decide which set of readings you want to work with. Read them both and see what inspires and interests you. Don't be afraid to read a bit beyond the verses given, and don't be afraid to include 'missing' verses if it sparks your ideas.

Remember that Bible means library, it is a whole collection of writings, so enjoy the stories you find in all their fullness – if you are able you can try to tell bigger bits of the stories than the Lectionary selection gives. But you can't tell it all, and there is so much possibility in these readings, you will want to be selective. You should choose one set of readings, either Samuel or Amos, but not both.

## [2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19](#) and [Psalm 24](#)

In the 2 Samuel passage it seems that those choosing the reading were uncomfortable with the whole story of the Ark of the Covenant being returned to Jerusalem (or didn't want to dilute their focus on David). But I never like to lose a bit of the story (especially if it's a bit controversial), so I'd be tempted to include the whole thing – even the rather disturbing part which the lectionary excludes at verses 6-12, of how Uzzah was killed by the Lord for touching the Ark of the Covenant.

I think these Old Testament stories make brilliant children's stories – many of them have the structure of fairy tales, with good storytelling techniques, and they usually have wonderful twists and turns and characters.

So I invite you to have a go at retelling the story of the Ark, if not exactly beginning to end, at least a decent chunk of it. What was the Ark of the Covenant – a name that doesn't give us much clue as to what it was? Does 'God box' not describe it better for a child? A holy mascot? Tell about how it came into existence, how it travelled with the people of Israel through their wilderness journey into the promised land, tell of how the Philistines captured it (1 Samuel 5-6) and how it brought the Philistines bad luck until after seven months they decided to return it to the people of Israel, and how for 20 years it sat rather forgotten at Kiriath-Jearim, in the house of Abinadab (1 Samuel 7). So the Ark of the Covenant is potentially dangerous, and needs to be handled carefully. David was certainly wary of it, and only after seeing how it blessed Obed-Edom the Gittite (not an Israelite but from the same place as Goliath, the Philistine giant) did David decide, after three months, that he wanted it back. Google is your friend, see what comes up when you search for Obed-Edom.

Then there is the obvious idea of celebration and David dancing with holy abandon, to Michal's disapproval. She seems to be the baddie (at least grumpy), so why not try to see things from her point of view?

Psalm 24 is a psalm to be sung for a processional entrance into the Temple, so it is easy to see how it fits with the joyful procession of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. Many of you will know it as a psalm to the tune St George's (Edinburgh) to sing at communion – CH4 19: "Ye Gates lift up your heads on high".

## [Amos 7:7-13](#) and [Psalm 85:8-13](#)

In Chapter 7 the prophet Amos is shown three scenes from the Lord: a plague of locusts, a devouring fire, and a plumb-line. Our lectionary only gives us the last one, so why not start

at the beginning of the chapter and include all three – they are short but they add to our understanding. In them you can perhaps see Amos talking God down from a more destructive approach to Israel – not sending locusts, not sending fire, instead the Lord declares judgment and does not pass by them again. Because of fidelity to speaking the word of the Lord, Amos is exiled by the priest Amaziah – little does Amaziah know that Amos has stood in the breach and perhaps saved Israel from a worse fate. How often does this remain true today, that if you don't like the message, you sideline the messenger? Where are the prophetic voices in the world today? In an era of climate emergency, famine and fire, there are plenty of opportunities for us to listen, to notice the angle at which the wall is leaning from God's truth.

Psalm 85 is said to be a prayer for the restoration of God's favour, and clearly fits the idea that Amos has announced God's displeasure that the plumb-line has shown God's people to be crooked.

### [Ephesians 1:3-14](#)

I find [The Message translation](#) especially helpful at making Paul's letter's comprehensible – I find it so rich in ideas they can be overwhelming. As you read this perhaps there will be one little phrase that sticks out; focus on that one idea or phrase if you are feeling overwhelmed. 'Long before he laid down the earth's foundations, he had us in mind.' 'Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family'. 'Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, ... , we are a free people. And not just barely free, either. *Abundantly* free! 'A long range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.' 'It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for.'

### [Mark 6:14-29](#)

The gospel reading is a flashback, sparked by the news that King Herod (with a guilty conscience?), hearing about Jesus, thinks that Jesus is the reincarnation of John, who he had killed. Mark then tells us how John's death occurred. A grim tale. In contrast to the joyful dancing of David, Salome's dance gets twisted. There is an obvious link of dancing in the story of the Ark of the Covenant and Mark's story of the death of John the Baptist. Some might choose to highlight the heightened emotions aroused by dance, its uses and misuses. Or if using Amos, there is the cost of prophecy, the cost of holding up a plumb-line to societies and their rulers. Amos was banished, John was arrested and beheaded. Perhaps there is also something in this story about how Herod was still intrigued by John, he liked to

listen to him – everyone has a God-shaped hole in their lives, and truth is attractive as much as it might be unpalatable.

The violence of the story is shocking, yet sadly it is not unique in our world. In poorer communities in our country there remains frequent violence, and other Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), passed on from generation to generation. Search online for ACEs and trauma to find lots of introduction to the concept. Our news headlines are filled with violence in the world. Many will have heard of Alexei Navalny, but in every generation there are prophets and martyrs. You might want to read about Christian de Chergé for a remarkable story from the 1990s. [www.plough.com/en/topics/life/grieving/christian-de-charge-a-story-of-forgiveness](http://www.plough.com/en/topics/life/grieving/christian-de-charge-a-story-of-forgiveness)

## Sermon ideas

Usually I try to prepare a short reflection of five minutes with a single takeaway point, and to get people involved with questions and answers and discussion. I like our worship to be interactive, where all ages can contribute their ideas, and often I will use the Old Testament story as the children's story – telling it as if I were telling a late-night story around a camp fire – “When I tell you a tale, fair maiden, bold youth, the tale is a lie, what it tells is the truth.” The story of the Ark of the Covenant lends itself well to this style.

The pattern of worship I usually follow is to try to begin where people are at, so even before we have had any readings from the Bible, I will ask a question for small group discussion – people turning to their neighbours, or if we are very small in number, just joining in as a whole congregation, or often a combination of the two, starting off in twos and threes, and then feeding back into a bigger group. I call this reading the Big Book of God – based on the idea that there are two ‘books’ of God – the little book of God is scripture and the big book of God is the whole of ‘life, the universe and everything!’ This is not to be disrespectful to the Bible, but to acknowledge that even by its own testimony it does not contain all the words of Jesus, let alone all that God has done, and that before the Bible was compiled, the world and humanity had existed for thousands of years and God was active in that. Reading the Big Book of God is based on the idea that, as Paula Darcy says, ‘God comes to us disguised as life.’ God is as present in the everyday experiences of ordinary people as in the stories of the Bible (which often are the stories of ordinary people).

There are themes of dancing; judgment – Michal's of David; David's of himself, Michal and God; God's judgment of Israel and Herod, Herod's impaired judgment, Herodias'; the Ark of the Covenant; joy and abandon; and exuberance in worship.

How do you feel about dancing? Embarrassing, dad dancing, an older generation who met at the dancing and still in their 80s regularly take the floor ... Perhaps an alternative story could be Gerald the Giraffe in *Giraffes can't dance* by Giles Andreae. How do you feel about dancing in church? Have you ever offered it or suggested it? We have played Daniel Boone's *Beautiful Sunday* as an opening song in our worship, which in Glasgow is the usual accompaniment to the dance 'the Slosh' and had half of the congregation willingly dancing in church! How does the story change if you picture David dancing in a kilt like a true Scotsman – there is certainly more than a hint in Michal's rebuke to David that, like Tam O' Shanter's witches, 'that reel'd, and set, and cross'd, and cleekit' – David had shown off more of his anatomy than was 'proper' ('Donald where's your trousers?'). David is unrepentant, he danced before the Lord and he was obviously not ashamed for the girls to have seen his manhood. I'm sure there is a possible critique in here of the double standards of men who are studs (David has quite a few wives) and women who have to cover up. Either way, Michal seems more Presbyterian than David, so let's not be too hard on her.

Or maybe the idea of the Ark of the Covenant interests you, this God box, this talisman and mascot and literal home of God. How is it that some people are blessed by its presence and others are burned by it, or literally killed? Coming into the presence of God is indeed a frightening thing, and initially David decides it's safer to leave well alone. But God blesses Obed-Edom, the Gittite – a Philistine. There is something potentially very interesting going on here.

As you can tell, I've got more excited by the 2 Samuel readings!

The idea of the plumb-line and moral compass and the potential cost of adhering to it is one way of joining Amos and John the Baptist. But you don't need to join them all together in a clever dot-to-dot of ideas. Find something that interests you in the readings and explore. Who is Amos? His book is quite short, so you can read it all.

Perhaps the idea of freedom that Paul speaks of strikes home. Would you like to feel freer in worship? To be more expressive? More visual. Are you shocked at the thought of dancing the Slosh in church?

What is the 'everything' that Paul speaks of being brought together? Is it the ultimate reconciliation of Herod, Herodias, and John? To quote from the final letter of Abbot Christian de Chergé, who was beheaded by Islamist militants in Algeria – '... for this life lost, I give thanks to God. In this "thank you", which is said for everything in my life from now on, I certainly include you, my last-minute friend who will not have known what you are doing [*Here he is referring to the man who will kill him*] ... I commend you to the God in whose

face I see yours. And may we find each other, happy “good thieves” in Paradise, if it please God, the Father of us both.’

## Prayers

### Gathering prayer/Call to worship

*I always begin our worship with opening responses – these could be based on the themes, lines from the Psalms often work well, or the Isaiah reading – but my habit has been to use a fixed opening response. Based initially on a paraphrase of Psalm 24:*

*“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it  
**The world, and those who live in it.”***

*I try to make this more specific – we need to see that our particular context is where we meet God, God comes disguised as our lives, not only the lives of people from the Bible.*

*So we (in Milton – a housing scheme in north Glasgow) always begin with:*

Milton belongs to God  
**Glasgow and all its people.**

Whether we know it or not  
**God is present.**

For we are made in God’s image  
**and gather in God’s name.**

*You could adapt these for your place, or you could do something totally different, but I encourage you to try to make it particular to your context. The scandal of being specific – God does not just generally love everywhere, God specifically loves you in your place. So affirm that Thornhill belongs to God, or Dornoch, or Comrie – see how it makes your people feel.*

Most Gracious God,

Open us up to a sense of Your presence with us now,  
for we believe that You are always here,  
always present,  
that there is no place where You are not.



And yet so often we go through life unaware of You;  
so help us now to become aware of Your presence with us,  
and within us,  
and in the space between.

Help us to realise that there are no unsacred spaces,  
only sacred places and desecrated places,  
and that by our attention to You,  
we make this a sacred space.

For we come to meet with You,  
trusting that knowing You will bring us all that we need  
to face what life has in store for us.  
We long for the day when things will be done Your way  
on earth as they are in heaven,  
so hear us as we pray together, saying

## **Our Father...**

### **Confession/Repentance**

*I have generally stopped using prayers of confession, most people in my community are acutely aware of their own shortcomings and don't need to be reminded, and God knows about them too and has already forgotten about them – I think we live in a time where we need to be reassured and encouraged and not reminded of our faults and failings, so rather than confession, I ensure that we have some words of affirmation and a reminder that no matter what we have done, God is with us and God loves us. But if you feel it is important, then again, try to be specific. If you will be using Amos, use the idea of the plumb-line, a measure of what has gone awry. The unbalanced nature of our society? With David's dancing in mind, perhaps repent our reputation to be kill-joys?*

### **Thanksgiving/gratitude**

*There are so many things to be thankful for – for life itself (we always ask if there are any birthdays in our congregation to celebrate – every life is worth singing about).*

For God's immense creative love, which holds all things in being.  
For God's immense patience that means God's loving kindness endures forever – no matter what we say or do, believe or think.  
Goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life.

For Jesus the human and divine One, who came to live among us, to show a human face to God and to burnish the face of God in humanity.

The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayers and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

*We have a prayer book, where before the service people are invited to write down names, or more proactively someone goes round asking people.*

*News headlines will often show some of the situations around the world that people are concerned about.*

**Closing blessing** *(continuing the reading in Ephesians to Paul's prayer)*

'I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know Him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.'

*Or you could turn it into a set of closing responses:*

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.

**Give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know God.**

With the eyes of our hearts enlightened,

**May we know what is the hope to which God has called us.**

What are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints,

**And what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power for us who believe? Amen**

## **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.

I will often sing the lectionary Psalm rather than read it:

- CH4 18 – “The earth belongs to God alone” – for the first half of the psalm – singing unaccompanied often works well with the Psalms, an old practice, but sitting quite happily alongside more contemporary music or praise bands.
- CH4 19 – “Ye gates, lift up your heads on high” – the second half of Psalm 24, and well known in the Kirk.
- CH4 20 – “Lift up the gates eternal” – Perhaps less well known, this has the whole psalm and still has the feeling of a triumphal entry

Often we will listen to a version of the Psalm, search on YouTube for the number of the Psalm or add and ‘psalms project’, or ‘poor bishop hooper’ to your search of the Psalm number to be more specific: there are usually some brilliant versions out there, that can really enhance your worship. And when you find one band or artist performing a version you love, the chances are they have recorded other Psalms for you to use another time.

Taking the theme of the dancing in 2 Samuel and Mark (but making it a more positive experience than Mark suggests):

- CH4 404 – “I danced in the morning”

CH4 has a handy topical index, which under **Dance** suggests:

- CH4 360 – “Jesus Christ is waiting”
- CH4 422 – “Christ is alive, and the universe must celebrate”

- CH4 487 – “Come, let us seek our God’s protection”
- CH4 617 – “Great and deep the Spirit’s purpose”
- CH4 680 – “You are called to tell the story”
- CH4 692 – “Jesus puts this song into our hearts”

## 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

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](#)

You are free to download, project, print and circulate multiple copies of any of this material for use in worship services, bible  
studies, parish magazines, etc. If you would like to reproduce this material for commercial purposes, please contact the  
copyright holders, the Faith Action Programme, for permission: [faithaction@churchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:faithaction@churchofscotland.org.uk)

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of  
the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

©Faith Action Programme

Scottish Charity Number: SC011353

[www.churchofscotland.org.uk](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk)