

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

Sunday 7 July 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Shuna Dicks, Minister of Cults Parish Church, for her thoughts on the seventh Sunday after Pentecost.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the Sanctuary First website:
<https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship>

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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Introduction

Our readings this Sunday deal with leadership in different ways. In the 2 Samuel passage we have David being anointed as King of Israel; Psalm 48 speaks of the kings being gathered and trembling at the power of God; 2 Corinthians 12 has Paul acknowledging his weaknesses and finally, in Chapter 6 of Mark's Gospel, Jesus is faced with rejection by His own people and shows leadership by sending out the Twelve to preach.

Different kinds of leadership are on display. David's successes are hailed, and yet we know from further reading of the Bible that he was not without his flaws. The kings acknowledge God as the all-powerful, and the Psalmist writes that God will be our guide forever. Paul acknowledges that despite his weaknesses he can still lead. Jesus learns that He will not always be listened to and demonstrates that He cannot do it all by Himself.

There are lessons for us all to learn – whether we are leaders in congregations and our communities, or if we are the ones who look for leadership. Ultimately, we can all look to God for strength and encouragement – and to Jesus and to Paul for inspiration and example.

This is a Sunday where we can look at the shared responsibility of being Church. There is a role for each and every one of us. Some of us are born leaders, others need to work at it and some will be more comfortable in the background. But all of us are held in the love and care of God, who holds us all together.

The call to worship, prayers and closing blessing for this week come from or have been adapted from the 'Spill the Beans' archive. I have been part of the Spill the Beans team for many years. This resource is available from www.spillbeans.org.uk where you will find a back catalogue of material that covers the Revised Common Lectionary, as well as the Narrative Lectionary and other week-by-week reading plans.

[2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10](#)

David the shepherd boy is now king, and according to this passage, makes a real success of it. If only it were that simple. This is David, slayer of Goliath, the youngest son of Jesse. An unlikely hero who first encounters his predecessor when he was brought in by one of Saul's attendants to play soothing music to the king, who was suffering from an evil spirit. David enters the court of Saul and stays and over time rises through the ranks and becomes a great warrior. Saul becomes jealous of David and their relationship sours to the point that David flees from Saul, aided by Jonathan the king's own son. Saul is determined to see

David killed, but in the end, he died first: killed along with Jonathan in battle, having given up on his quest to see David killed when David spared him. David mourns both Saul and Jonathan. He then seizes the chance to become leader before eventually being anointed as king. David proved to be a ruthless warrior and becoming king did not temper his behaviour.

David is often hailed as a great leader, but we cannot forget his behaviour towards Bathsheba and her husband Uriah – having decided he wanted Bathsheba for himself, he conspired to have her husband killed. He was a flawed character, yet chosen by God, in accordance with Old Testament tradition.

David's journey from shepherd boy, musician and brave soldier, to a mighty warrior and king means he remains a biblical hero to many despite his flaws. David is also remembered as an effective leader, if not an admirable man.

[Psalm 48](#)

This psalm has been largely ignored by many commentators. But it sits alongside the reading from 2 Samuel, recalling the gathering of the kings and the power that God had to quell their mission. Jerusalem, the City of God, stands as a reminder of God's power and might and the holy home of God. This song of praise and awe acknowledges the confidence we can have in God.

[2 Corinthians 12:2-10](#)

In this passage Paul is rounding off his second letter to the Corinthian Church. He has been under attack from those who think they are better than him at preaching and having special visions and powers. Here Paul tries to counter their claims with a story of a spiritual experience he had some years earlier. He then goes on to talk about the thorn that was given to him in the flesh. We are not sure what this thorn was and many have speculated on it – but what is clear is that whatever it was, it had kept Paul from being too full of himself and more reliant on God; that there is a strength in his weakness.

Reflecting on this passage, Alan Brehm observes: 'Some of the greatest sages have made it clear that their deepest spiritual insights came precisely through their vulnerability, through their suffering, through their pain. They virtually unanimously attest that they found peace, happiness, and strength through the full experience of their weakness.'^[1]

Paul uses his experience to do similarly. He may have this thorn in his flesh, but that does not stop him trusting in God. He even admits to having begged God, not once, but three times, to take this thorn away – but God instead reminds and reassures him: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9). Paul uses this to remind his readers that in this he *can* boast. “For whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (v10).

Frederick Buechner put it beautifully and yet boldly: ‘Paul said, “I will not boast except of my weakness,” and he means that too. The God who could work through the likes of Paul, he says, must be a God and a half.

‘So with a cauliflower ear, or a split lip, or whatever he meant by the thorn in the flesh that God gave “to keep me from being too elated” (2 Corinthians 12:7), Paul went his way and wrote his marvellous punch-drunk, Christ-drunk Letters. Jesus lit the fire, and Paul used it to forge for him a church.’ [2]

[1] <https://thewakingdreamer.blogspot.com/2012/07/strength-in-weakness.html>

[2] Frederick Buechner, Wistful Thinking, <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2018/9/10/pauline-letters?rq=2%20Corinthians>

Mark 6:1-13

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’” Verse 4 is a salutary lesson from Jesus that His teachings would not always be well-received. There is an undertone of ‘who does he think he is’ in this passage. Not the warm welcome you might expect your home crowd to give you. And yet is it not often the case that when people know you, really know you, that they can be quick to believe the gossipmongers? Jesus, I suspect knew this would be a tough crowd. These are the folks who watched Him grow up, learn His trade as a craftsman – to them He was that wee boy turned carpenter – not some learned Rabbi. They must have wondered what had happened to the lad they thought they knew.

Jesus becomes one of His own illustrations. He is building His team and training them for the work He knows they will have to do. Jesus knows that it will not be easy and their teaching will not always be well-received or even welcome – although even Jesus is amazed at how hostile the crowd are.

But Jesus persists, dusting Himself down and moving on. A lesson here for not just His disciples but for all of us. Sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ will not always be easy,

there will be those that are hostile to the message and just like the disciples, we will not always feel well prepared.

This is a familiar story, it appears in Matthew (Jesus' rejection and the commissioning of the disciples) and Luke (the commissioning), but Mark has some distinct features that are worth exploring. Firstly, in this version, Jesus tells the disciples to wear sandals and take a staff, perhaps indicating the length of the journey they would be on. Secondly, that they focus on households, modelling the success Jesus has had with this model of evangelism, and thirdly, the preaching on repentance. These features of Mark's retelling are helpfully explored in Emerson Powery's commentary on the Working preacher website.

Sermon ideas

Who are the people we look up to? In recent years a term has been adopted to describe those on social media who have influence. 'Influencers' can make a lot of money by advertising products to their 'followers'. Normally these influencers portray a perfect life – often they are beautiful, have flawless skin, are super fit, have plenty of money and have everything together – the perfect life. But can that really be true? Is it possible for every aspect of your life to be perfect? I doubt any of us think we have it all worked out and yet social media tries to paint a different picture – that you can have it all.

Looking at our readings for today we have different 'influencers' from the Bible – the heroes of our faith – and none of them has it easy, none of them has the perfect life. David has risen from lowly shepherd boy to the status of king. And yet we know from his story that whilst he proves to be a warrior who can defeat giants, is very musical, can write lyrical songs and poetry, shows good leadership skills – the reality is he is far from perfect. He can be quite ruthless – Bathsheba and Uriah are testimony to this. Then there is Paul, who boasts about many things, but even he acknowledges that he is far from perfect. The thorn in his flesh, whatever we speculate that to be, keeps him grounded. Even Jesus, dare we say it, learns a salutary lesson when preaching and teaching to His home crowd. His message will not be universally accepted and there will be times when even He and His disciples have to brush the dust from their feet and move on.

Perhaps this Sunday you can think about those who have been hailed as great leaders or influencers throughout the years and consider just how perfect, or not, they were. We are all human and in our human weakness none of us can truly claim to have it all. And if we can accept that for ourselves then perhaps, we can cut some slack for those in the public eye who are worshipped by adoring fans.

There may be space in your worship to ask those gathered to chat amongst themselves about the people they admire. Have they ever felt let down by a hero/heroine? Are they able to look beyond a hero/heroine's weaknesses and still adore them? Are there those whom we despise as we fail to find any goodness in them?

Psalm 48 reminds us that ultimately God is perfection, and only God is worthy of full praise. The steadfastness of God's love never diminishes: "that this is God, our God for ever and ever. He will be our guide for ever." 'Amen' to that.

I usually include part of the service where I introduce the theme of the sermon in a way that speaks to people of all ages and stages. This week one idea might be to have images of famous people and ask everyone to give them a thumbs up or a thumbs down. Ask everyone to consider if they would give themselves a thumbs up or a thumbs down. Finish by reminding everyone of the great love of God – who loves us despite our imperfections. Ask again if they would give themselves a thumbs up or a thumbs down, having been reminded of this – encouraging then to give themselves a thumbs up of course!

Prayers

Gathering/Call to worship

If responses are not your practice, the following could be led in its entirety by the worship leader. If using the responses in bold, it is important to prepare them in advance for inclusion in a printed order of service or on-screen slides.

When they said: Let us go to God's House,
Our hearts were filled with joy.

And here we are,
In the place of God's dwelling:

Jerusalem,
City of God,

Centre of worship.
All are invited here

To worship,
Praise,

And give thanks
To the name of God.

Let us worship
Within these walls

And praise the God
Who calls us here.

Adoration/Confession/Repentance

God of the past and of the future,
when we look back
may we look forward too.
When we dream of the past,
may those dreams still shape our future.
May our faith be rich enough
to see through, past golden eras,
knowing that You haven't finished
with us yet:
We shall still be a community,
we shall still find a new song to sing,
we shall still believe
You make all things new.

May we have the faith of David
to believe the future
is always moving towards You.
May we have the eyes of David
to see You in every future.
May we have the heart of David
to recognise the future in the present.

God of the past and of the future,
when we look forward
may we look back too,
and know that what is still to happen,
begins now.

Forgive us for when we get things wrong,

relying on our own, and forgetting
to be guided and inspired by Your story.

Help us to look forward,
learning from the past
inspired by Jesus in the present
and guided by Your spirit into the future.

We are part of something quite extraordinary –
We are part of Your story:
past, present and future.

Accept our prayers,
in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour
who taught us to prayer with united hearts and minds:

Our Father ...

Thanksgiving/Gratitude *(sometimes used to precede the Prayers for others)*

Truly God, You are above reproach.
You have gifted us a world in which to live
that provides all that any of us need.
We can stand in awe at the beauty and bounty
around us.

How can we ever match up to this?
How can we even begin to grasp
Your generosity?
Your grace?

For all that You have given us
we are truly grateful,
humbled even.
We bow before You in awe
and wonder.
Gracious, generous God,
accept our thanks and praise.
Amen

Prayers for others/Intercession

Heavenly Monarch,
we pray for our world,
which needs a servant king
to wash the feet of those
who have forgotten
what it is to be touched:
the lonely,
the forgotten,
the ridiculed.
Hear us.

We pray for our world,
which needs a unifier
to bring together those who are enemies
and those who have been forgotten:
the hungry,
the well-fed,
the rich,
the poor.
Hear us.

We pray for our world,
which needs to remember
whose we are
and what we have been called to do,
and whose we have been called to be:
peace-makers,
bread-breakers,
justice-bringers.
Hear us.

We pray for the world,
which needs leadership
to renew our covenant with You
and to refresh our memories
of how we got to be here:
the long path,
the falling in,

and the falling out,
the journey through our living.
Hear us.
Lord graciously hear us.
Amen

Blessing/Closing prayer

May the past
be the beginning of the future for you.
May the faith
be the beginning of eternity for you.
May the way
be all the steps that led you here.
And may love
be the guide that takes you further.

May the God
of the past and present and future,
be the God of today
and tomorrow and yesterday,
and may we look back to this point in time
and know God has been here,
and leads us on.
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.

Gathering Songs

- CH4 196 – “Come, now is the time to worship”
- CH4 567 – “Focus my eyes on you, O Lord”
- CH4 782 – “Lord of life, we come to you”
- CH4 788 – “Know that God is good” (sing both the Shona and English versions)
- CH4 802 – “We are here to praise you”

Hymns for this Sunday

- CH4 36 – “God is our refuge and our strength”
- CH4 83 – “I rejoiced when I heard them say”
- CH4 122 – “Let all the world” (MP 404)
- CH4 153 – “Great is thy faithfulness”
- CH4 166 – “Lord of all hopefulness”
- CH4 192 – “All my hope on God is founded” (MP 16)
- CH4 253 – “Inspired by love and anger”
- CH4 549 – “How deep the father’s love for us”
- CH4 555 – “Amazing Grace”
- MP 188 – “God is our strength and refuge”
- MP 199 – “Great is the Lord”
- MP 307 – “I will enter his gates”
- “Our God is a great big God” (Nigel Hemming)

At the end of our worship at Cults Parish Church, after the ‘Sending’ and sung ‘Amen’, as the Bible is taken out of church and the worship leader goes to the door, a ‘Leaving Song’ is sung. We usually use one of the following and stick with the same leaving Song for a month (this helps new worshippers get to know them)

Leaving Songs

- “As we go now” – Fischy Music
- CH4 786 – “May the God of peace go with you”
- CH4 798 – “The peace of the earth be with you”

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](#)

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