

# **MONTHLY WORSHIP**

# **2025**

# **‘HYMNS THROUGH THE YEAR and other ideas’**

With grateful thanks to our contributors who have helped to make this resource possible. We hope that you find it useful and that it enhances your Guild meetings.

# **IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER Revd. Ruth Harvey**

## **HYMN CH4 305**

## **MIDWINTER PRAYER**

God of all creation
of bare forest and low northern skies
of paths unknown and never to be taken
of bramble, sparrow and damp, dark earth

We thank you for loss, for the breaking of the dimming year
we thank you for light, even in its seeming midwinter failing
like a seed dying and living. Amen

*© Rachel Mann****:*** *Doing December Differently: An Alternative Christmas Handbook', Nicola Slee and Rosie Miles (Eds), Wild Goose Publications, 2006,* [*www.ionabooks.com*](http://www.ionabooks.com)

 **BIBLE READING**Psalm 8

## **REFLECTION**

I write this piece from South Australia where the lowest midwinter temperature is 15 degrees centigrade. And where the word ‘bleak’, I’m reliably told, may be used in relation to many situations, but never in relation to the weather!

Christina Rossetti’s haunting poem, published in 1872 and set to music by Gustav Holst was written with a very particular context in mind. It is a context to which half the world might never relate, and the other half today in decreasing numbers as ice caps melt and global temperatures rise. Rossetti’s attempts to relate the birth of Christ in the dust and heat of the Middle East to the worshippers of a ‘bleak midwinter’ of nineteenth century England are noble indeed. Perhaps the first verse was intended to draw in the congregation in the midst of their own ‘bleak midwinter’, which may have been bleak in more than meteorological terms, in order to contrast that reality with the divine scene depicted in verse two.

Her second verse aims to extend the distance between the Jesus who is to come and the inhospitable earth which ‘cannot sustain’ him and which, with heaven, shall ‘flee away’. This is an extension too far, you may think, for the one who is promised as Earth’s redeemer. Having set two very clear scenes: the bleakness of earth and the glorious divinity about to descent, the next two verses affirm that the meagreness of the stable which sufficed for the Christ-child also was enough for the adoring beasts and the angelic hosts who gathered around him, with the prime worshipper being Mary, his mother.

Whatever you make of the first four verses, there is something deeply familiar and moving in the combination of music and words for so many worshippers at a northern-hemisphere Christmas service. And there is no doubt that the final verse draws in many more: I may not be a shepherd; I may not be wise; with the little I have, what can I possibly give to the one who is to give so much, but my heart.

In a world focussed on carbon greed and the deification of consumption, the final line of this verse is a powerful testimony to the gifts of love, welcome, hospitality, gentleness, compassion, companionship. These gifts which come, not with rank, status, privilege or cash, but with love.

I write having spent four consecutive days ‘on country’ in western and southern Australia, hearing the voices of indigenous Aboriginal Christians urging us to sing praise to God in words that make sense in our context. Wherever you are in the world – take a moment to reflect on the context of the hymns that we sing. To what extent do they speak to your landscape today? What if they don’t?
The bleak and snowy-cold political landscape for so many in the time this hymn was written would have resonated then, and still does today. But the increased number of Christians worshipping in contexts where the absence of snow is starkly worrying does make me consider the relevance of this hymn for us today.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Loving God of all ‘lands, waters,
sky, trees, plants,
animals, birds, fish,
rocks, mountains 0 and all people’ –
loving, living God of all,
your greatness in creation dips deep
to touch the tip of the tiniest atom.

And yet you chose to reveal yourself
here on our fragile earth.
Hear us as we confess our limits in caring for this earth;
forgive us the bleakness we have wrought on creation;
inspire us to lessen the gap between earth and heaven
that we may truly give you our heart, the heart of all peoples
to turn bleakness into beauty, and
our hesitation into heartfelt delight, love, hope and glory.
In the name of the one who comes
into our lives now and always, Amen.

# **LOVE DIVINE Vivienne Macdonald, National Convener 2002-03**

## **CALL TO WORSHIP**

We serve a God who forgives and loves with an everlasting love,

no matter what paths we’ve travelled in life.

## **HYMN CH4 519**

## **REFLECTION**

‘Love Divine All Love Excelling’ was written by Charles Wesley. Charles and his brother, John, were founders of the Methodist movement. Often John would edit his brother’s lyrics and words. It is said that Charles wrote a poem every day and it has been averaged that he wrote approximately 10 lines of verse daily for 50 years. Over the course of his life, Charles published the lyrics to over 6000 hymns, including “[Christ the Lord is Risen Today](http://dianaleaghmatthews.com/christ-the-lord-is-risen-today/)”, “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus”, “[Hark! The Herald Angels Sing](http://dianaleaghmatthews.com/hark-the-herald-angels-sing/)”, and “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”.

The words of reassurance of God’s unchanging eternal love have made “Love divine, all loves excelling” very popular for a wide range of occasions. I’m sure that many of us will remember it being sung at the Prince and Princess of Wales’ wedding, a very happy event and then again at the funeral service of the late Queen, a celebration of a life faithfully dedicated to God’s service.

In this month of February our thoughts often turn to romantic love and the joys of St. Valentine’s Day. However, we can rest assured that even when the joy of romance has ended for us, and perhaps is just a happy memory, God’s love is still freely available, no matter how our behaviour through the years might have disappointed him.

## **READINGS**

Galatians 5: 13-22 or 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

## **POEMS**

**God’s Love is Eternal**

(used with permission - Kristine Stanton © 2023)

There is no delay and there is no end
to the love God has for you.
It's everlasting—it is eternal,
no matter the things you do.

He may not be happy—He might be sad
with paths you've chosen to roam.
Confess and repent—the Lord will forgive—
He'll show you the best way Home.

He'll bless and anoint your heart and your soul
with mercy, grace, joy, and peace.
Follow the Lord for the rest of your days—
His blessings will not decrease.

**New Wine by Edward Potts**

One night as I lay in slumber so deep,
A vision came to me, His face was so sweet,
It was Jesus my saviour, my master, my all,
He said come with me, I answered His call.

He led me quite gently beneath Calvary's tree,
And there at the cross He set my soul free,
He loves me, I love Him. His love is divine,
I gave Him my sins, He gave me new wine.

New wine from His table, new wine He did bring,
New wine for my healing, new wine washed me clean,
New wine from His storehouse, new wine for my soul,
New wine from the Father, new wine made me whole.

## **PRAYERS**

Father, because you are a God of love, we can come without fear, and because we know you love us, we can come with confidence. We come because you have called us to come and we have come because the Holy Spirit fills us with a longing to praise you. Father, we come in hope, with joy and to give you thanks and praise. We come in the name of Christ, the one who opened our eyes to your grace and filled our hearts with your love. Amen

God our Father,

we thank you that by so many means you show your love for us.

You give us the world in which we live,

you make us part of a family and members of a community in which we find our friends.

You show yourself to us in Jesus, whose love for us took him to the cross.

We thank you that we learn from you that love is the key to life.

Without it all our activity is worthless.

With love, even that which looks like failure and defeat

can be used to create something new or build up something old.

Lord, we thank you that your love for us is our salvation.

Where should we be without your love?

Only love like yours can bend down and rescue us.

Only love like yours can forgive us and make us whole.

Thank you for your saving work in us through the love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Whose we are and whom we serve. Amen

## **OTHER HYMN SUGGESTIONS**

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation (CH4 124)

Let there be love shared among us (MP 411)

For a further 2 verses, substitute love with peace and then joy

Chorus ‘Wide, wide as the ocean’ available from many sources online.

# **BLESSED ASSURANCE Very Rev Dr Susan Brown**

## **HYMN CH4 561**

## **WELCOME**

Take the time here, just for a moment, to stop.

To be quiet. To simply be.

And know that in the stopping, every one of us, is met as we are,

By the One who longs to bring us refreshment to our very souls.

Let’s praise our Lord *because*… we have his blessed assurance of belonging to him. *And* of being loved by him!

## **PRAYER**

Bless you Lord.

With all our hearts and souls, we bless your holy name.

You, ever living God, are the source of all that is.

You give *us* and every created thing;

Life… and breath… and love – as well as a foretaste of glory divine.

Help us to live as people who know how blessed we are in you.

Help us to make sure your love is our story and our song.

So may we praise you all the day long.

And when, in the busy-ness of life, we rush on

Trying to do things and to fix things

And to sort life out for ourselves,

Gently lift our faces to look into yours… and may we see there,

A smile that says ‘let me…’

Be with us now, Lord Jesus, in this moment of quiet.

Bless this time that draws us closer to other Guild members

and to you, and help us, eternal God, to trust you to lead us, as individuals, and as a Guild, to nourishingly green pastures,

Beside refreshing waters, where we can dwell with you safely,

Forever. All these things we ask in Jesus’ name,

And for his sake. Amen

## **READING**

Matthew 10:40-42

## **REFLECTION**

*(have a box of Ferrero Rocher – enough for one per person)*

What has one of these (*a Ferrero Rocher chocolate*) got to do with the reading we’ve just heard from the pen of St Matthew?

 It’s the Ambassador from the Ferrero Rocher advert, who sprang to mind when I heard that reading. “Anyone who welcomes you, welcomes me” (we heard) “and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.”

Matthew’s words are all about Jesus’ followers being *Jesus*’ ambassadors – in every generation. Even us. Even now.

Imagine that! Diplomats for the Kingdom of heaven – that’s you and me!

Jesus though, warns us that it’s not all as glamourous as in the advert. ‘Some people will be happy to welcome us and the faith we hold onto’, he tells us, ‘while others will turn away from us’.

What Jesus wants is for us not to let people knock us off track. Jesus wants us to keep going: to keep doing our best for our Lord and God and not lose sight of whose we are and whom we serve.

And why should we do that?

Because we have the blessed assurance of knowing Jesus. And even better still, we have the blessed assurance of being known *by* Jesus.

And that blessed assurance should inspire us to bless *others*, even as we are blessed.

*If you have a chocolate for all:*

There is a chocolate for everyone. Please eat it (if you’re able to!) but keep the wrapper. Put it in your pocket. And every time you put your hand in there and feel that wrapper, think of the Lord you represent –

And the blessed assurance of being held in God’s heart.

Forever.

Then go to *be* that blessing.

## **HYMN**

CH4 561 Blessed Assurance

**PRAYERS**

For others, the world, us:

 Help us to praise you, our Saviour, all the day long.

 Help us to praise you in the words we speak to strangers and to friends.

 Help us to praise you in the way we hold out our hands to others.

 Help us to praise you in the understanding silence of companionship.

 Help us to praise you in the time we make for those usually ignored.

 Help us to praise you in kindness, and in faithfulness and trust - even in the toughest times.

 Help us to praise you by bringing even the tiniest glimpse of hope to those with none.

Help us to praise you by holding onto your promises.

Into your hands, Lord Jesus, we place the whole of this world. Reassure us that you won’t ever let us go. In your name and for your sake. Amen.

## **HYMN -** CH4 680 You are called to tell the story

## **BLESSING**

May we go now, choosing to bless, just as we are blessed.

And may the love of God, Creator, Son and Spirit,

Hold us tightly in the palm of God’s hand

This day and always. Amen

# **GUIDE ME, O THOU GREAT JEHOVAH Gary Brough**

## **HYMN CH4 167**

## **OPENING PRAYER**

Heavenly Father,

We come to you our faithful guide, grateful for your leading through life’s joys and trials.

We know that we are weak and so we want to trust your mighty hand in all things.

We thank you for your provision and protection.

Guide us in our time together and to lead lives that would bring others to you.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

## **BIBLE READING**

Ephesians 2: 4-10 [ESV]

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

## **REFLECTION**

I have grown used to the feeling of being out of my depth. Despite half a decade spent living in a different culture, it is not mine and will never fully be. At the same time, I’m grateful that this cultural discomfort pushes me to rely on God’s leading more.

On numerous occasions I’ve been reminded of the words of John Wesley that my grandmother quoted often, kept on a magazine cut out in her purse and tried to live out:

“Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.” – John Wesley

When we do all that we can, we also admit that there are things that we can’t. There are many more people that God can and will use in His great plans. There is much more that only God can do. “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”.

So, there are things we are not prepared for, places we aren’t led to go to. In a world of hurt and brokenness, what peace and freedom we find in the fact all of these weights are not left on our shoulders.

As he guides us, he provides for us. As he leads us on our journey, he protects us. Living and serving in Malawi is a privilege, not just for the work we are called into but for the regular reminder of God’s provision and protection when I feel out of my depth. Also, to be routinely humbled when, seeing a person in need, God shows his provision through the local church and those giving from a place of poverty and not privilege.

We can all learn to rest more in the knowledge that while we feel we might fall short; in Christ Jesus we are enough and He is more than we need.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Dear Father,

We are reminded that you provide and we can depend on you.

That you protect, and we can have confidence in you.

That you save us through Christ Jesus, and we have eternal assurance from you.

We are grateful that we can play a part in your great work, yet
we accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent
enterprise that is God’s work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of
saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church’s mission.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own. Amen**.**

Adapted from A Step Along the Way, the “Oscar Romero prayer”

**HOW GREAT THOU ART Rae Lind, National Convener, 2023-24**

## **HYMN CH4 154**

**PRAYER OF APPROACH**

Almighty God Creator of all, You are beyond our imagining and understanding. You are alive from eternity to eternity sustaining the created order of the universe, dispelling fear as we rest in your daily provision, and as we rely on each season to meet our needs. You knew us before we had life, our destiny in your safe hands, constantly working out your purposes. Forgive us for losing sight of Your greatness in Creation and give us humility to acknowledge how much we take for granted the gifts You shower upon us so generously. Open our hearts to the revelation of your power in the beauty of creation, in the life and resurrection of Jesus, and in the everyday activities of life. Amen

**MEDITATION**

This month we are considering the hymn “**How great Thou art**”. Most of us will have sung this many times in various situations, so it will be familiar. As we reflect on the words, I hope it will bring us fresh awareness of its meaning.

Since the artistry of creation is exploding in this month of July with colour and bounty, the threat of thunderstorms is an ever present one. This is a most appropriate choice of hymn as a similar summer setting in Sweden was the impetus for this hymn.

The hymn began life as a Swedish poem: ”O Store Gud” (O Great God) and was written by a lay Minister Carl Boberg in 1885. He was inspired by a sudden violent thunderstorm in which he was caught on his way home from church. On his return home and once the storm had abated, he opened his window and looked out towards the sea. In the quietness of the evening – a quietness punctured only by the peal of church bells – he was moved to pen the words of our hymn.

Only three years later the words were matched with a traditional folk tune and were then first sung in church.

The hymn has had global input as British missionary Stuart K. Hine translated it into English from Russian, as previously translated from the original German.

 It has been named as the favourite hymn of at least three presidents of the U.S.A, having been recorded hundreds of times by religious soloists, country and western singers, and by the rock star Elvis Presley, earning him two Grammy Awards. It has also been voted by the public the second most popular hymn in the U.K.

It was popularised in the U.K by George Beverly Shea’s singing it at the London Billy Graham crusade in 1955.

In this hymn we find the whole of the story of the Bible from:

 The Genesis account of Creation in verse 1

The means of Redemption in verse 2

The Restoration of all things in verse 3

Creation, verse 1: The author in verse one looks at the awesome power in the universe defining the worlds created by God. The consistent silent display of the night stars and the explosive energy of thunder speak of both quietness and the dramatic, bringing a sense of worship in the presence of the God who is beyond our understanding. This might be true of our experience too as we sense the presence of God in a peaceful wood, or as we witness the waves churning in a raging sea. We take these opportunities to pause, reflecting on the mystery of God’s Being and power.

Romans 1: 20 reads: “For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.” (NIV).

Redemption, verse 2: This verse moves from a cosmic to a personal aspect of worship. In Hebrews 1: 1 we read: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom He also created the worlds.” (NRSV)

The coming of Jesus not only changed history but can also change us as we develop a relationship with Him through the Holy Spirit, recognising that we are redeemed by the blood of His Cross.

 The Restoration of all things, verse 3:

As the hymn concludes, it directs our attention to the end of time not only for the world but for us as individuals.

The second coming of Christ is foretold at various points in Scripture including Acts chapter 1 where we read: As they (the disciples) watched, He was taken up and disappeared in a cloud. They stood there staring into the empty sky. Suddenly two men appeared in white robes! They said; ‘You Galileans! - why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky? This very Jesus who was taken up from among you will come as certainly and mysteriously as He left’. {The Message Version)

For the Christian, the hope of the Gospel is all-encompassing, bringing God ‘s presence to us in Creation, in Jesus, and in the promise of life hereafter in God’s eternal presence. No wonder the chorus after each verse endorses the greatness of God with the exclamation: “How great Thou art! How great Thou art!”

It is easy to sing praise to God when life is going well, but sometimes, even in difficult circumstances praise is the very way which directs our thoughts to the God who creates and sustains life in all its forms, who redeems us and who is also our guardian and our hope: “God is your guardian right at your side to protect you “. Psalm 121 (The Message Version).

When I reflect on the words of this hymn, I am grateful for the broad scope of God’s power and also for the individual connection each of us has with our heavenly Father.

**CLOSING PRAYER**

We thank You that You rule over all things in wisdom and righteousness, and that we find in You our refuge, as each generation has done throughout the ages. For all those who find it difficult to sing: ‘How great Thou art’, we pray that your Holy Spirit will strengthen them, assuring them that the great Creator is the One who holds each of us in the palm of His hand.

We ask that You will help us, from the words of this great hymn which we have inherited, to focus on your greatness in Creation, your grace in our redemption and the glory of an eternity to be spent with You once time has run its course. Amen

# **BE STILL, FOR THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD Matthew Phillip, LIFT**

## **HYMN CH4 189**

## **0PENING PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, you brought us onto this earth to serve you in all the ways that could possibly be imagined. We sometimes need to take a step back and think about the impact that we have had in serving you in your creation and your love of us. We understand that this takes a lot of courage, especially if some of the duties that we undertake on a daily basis may, on occasion, be out of our comfort zones. We thank you, for being with us for all the days of our lives and we ask that you continue to be with us in the days to come. We acknowledge that at times it may be difficult to find the courage to speak out or to share opinions or ask ourselves questions about what is going on in our lives and often can’t put it into words. We ask that you are with us, through the good and bad times in our lives and find the courage to support us in everything that we do, no matter how straightforward or challenging our days and tasks can be and what lies ahead of us in the days to come. These prayers, we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

## **SUGGESTED READINGS**

* Joshua 1: 6-9
* Ephesians 6: 10-18
* Isaiah 43: 2-3
* Psalm 27: 1
* Psalm 56: 3-4
* Romans 8: 15-17
* 2 Corinthians 4: 8-12
* 2 Timothy 1: 7

## **REFLECTION**

I often ask myself, what does courage mean to me? I have thoughts about this on a regular basis from various different perspectives. One day I could be thinking about my work life and say to myself, did I do the right thing, or do I need to raise concerns about something that is going on with a certain task or environment. The next day, I could be thinking about what impact this has on my personal life, in terms of other commitments that I have on a personal level and what impact this could cause on my faith journey. All these things have something in common, that God is with me all the days of my life. Courage is something that is always in my mind.

The same can be said about my faith journey, from being baptised to becoming a member of the congregation and to now being an elder in Church life. I have always been passionate in looking for ways to help out in whatever setting that I am presented with, for example it could be, at Church, at Home or at Work. Whether it is helping out with the live streaming of services on Sunday mornings or helping colleagues complete various tasks, all these things have one thing in common, Courage. It takes courage on a daily basis, no matter how tough or easy a task may be, it has to be done regardless. I often link this to my faith journey, getting the chance to attend the General Assembly as a Presbytery Youth Representative in 2017, 2020 and 2022. In 2023, I attended the General Assembly for the first time as an elder. I often thank God for the creation that he has given us and encourage the growth of my confidence to strive towards greater things. One of the things that I am proud about, is that I helped to create what is now known as the Young Adults Guild, it takes a lot of courage to build a new platform in collaboration with the Guild. I am looking forward to seeing how this develops and grows in the future. I think of the Church’s journey that is in front of me, where together we look at all possibilities to include the younger generation in the life of the Church of Scotland and react to the ever-changing situations around us, not only in the UK but around the world. I have learned so much about the Church over the years, these experiences will always come to mind and will be in my memory for the rest of my life. I look forward to being with you all and working towards our future as a fully inclusive congregational body around the world. I am sure that our paths will cross as I look towards my future within the Church.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, you have blessed us with Creation. You have made a garden which was perfect and beautiful. Animals and flowers, the stars in the sky, sunrises and sunsets. Thank you for all you have made that we use extensively within our daily lives. We once walked through your creation in the way that you intended. You trusted us to look after the wonders of your creation, to feed the animals, to water the plants and work the soil. You have blessed us with the materials that we use extensively, that allow us to be as creative as we can. You have given us a responsibility to care for your Creation and we may have disobeyed you in certain ways. We pollute the blue skies with fumes and we bury our rubbish in the ground. The fish in the sea are suffering as a result of this and it shows that we are not caring for the wildlife in a way that is expected of us. We are sometimes unaware of our actions which affect your magnificent creation. Forgive our foolish ways and bless us with a caring heart which is like your heart. Our Lord, our God, help us to realise that we are behaving recklessly. Give us eyes to see your beauty in creation, a heart to love your creatures and hands which work for good. We ask that you renew us today, giving us the courage and the strength to continue our day to day tasks, knowing that you are with us no matter how easy or difficult this may be. In Jesus name we offer these our prayers, Amen.

## **OTHER HYMNS**

* Look forward in faith (CH4 237)
* Brother, Sister let me serve you (CH4 694)
* Courage Brother, Do Not Stumble (CH4 513)
* We cannot measure how you heal (CH4 718)
* The Lord’s My Shepherd (CH4 14)
* Jesus Christ is waiting (CH4 360)
* Be thou my vision (CH4 465)

# **LORD BRING THE DAY TO PASS Revd. David Coleman**

**HYMN CH4 238**

or

Where are the voices for the Earth? (CH4 244 )

[A wee selection of recycled hymns to familiar tunes (see especially ‘The sower sows and knows the birds'.](https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Wee-collection.pdf)

## **OPENING PRAYER**

**Sustaining God**, sharing the flesh of the Earth: How their voices cry! - The Earth, the wildlife; people looking on as waters rise, fields dry, migrations go awry! And prophets of every evicted, exiled species, look us in the eye, us, blinkered folk, who close our eyes to pray. Laws that never shall be broken’: are daily shattered wherever greed, profit and entitlement usurp the love for every Creature commissioned when Christ rose. As if we had no other way to live. But you say ‘read the signs!’

**Wild Wind, and Breath of Life**, still, through you, we are good news where discipleship lets go of control, and grace reassures: Our small response, our quiet voice, when lifted carries blessing. Build in us your foundation of hope through the unjust turmoil which our species has set in motion; the rising heat and frequent storms: For faith and holy writings are not “single-use” for those who, faithful, take some notice.

**Responsive Christ:** Re-use, recycle, repurpose the treasures old and new that define the company of Christ’s friends with hope and even joy defiant. May we shine as light with many lights of faith unhidden by the facts encouraged by possibility in love with this World you so love. Amen

## **READING**

Matthew 13: 1-9: The parable of ‘The Sower’

## **REFLECTION**

“Let anyone with ears listen!”

What better starting point for reflection on powerful stories preserved as resources for our guidance and nourishment today than that witty phrase, “Let anyone with ears listen!” … with which Jesus frequently highlights the spiritual and deeply practical importance of vigilance hard-wired to responsiveness-to-threat.

After a globally traumatic summer of extremes - to deny which would be as dangerous as to disregard racism - we look to the beginnings of a harvest season… in which not only what was sown, but the ***community of environment*** and practices of the sowing and growing, will shape life for time to come.

However industrialized the scope and scale of our partnership with the Earth, it’s only through relationship, care, and a practical acknowledgement of grace, that we are fed, whether spiritually or otherwise.

Our urgently growing awareness of the Nature & Climate Crisis awakens us to neglected aspects even of our most familiar Scriptures. The builders on rock and sand [Matt 7] deal differently with a ‘climate threat’, which - take note- they cannot simply ‘fix’ but rather, either urgently engage with - or fatally deny.

The experiential heart of ***this*** Story [Matt 13:1-9] presents us with a scarily imperfect situation. Is the Sower ‘wasteful', or ‘wise’ when seeds go astray? Look at the outcome! An abundant harvest blesses those who both keep their nerve and grasp the wisdom of acknowledging the wondrous complexity of our partnership in the life of the Earth

Some seed is lost, some eaten, some ‘strangled’, but that is the way of Creation. We flourish only when we allow for the flourishing of life as a whole.

Thus, early twenty-first century wisdom no longer simply writes off the birds and the weeds and the needs of the Earth as if these are in some sense evil. Ecosystems accompanying the sowing are the conditions under which, in the long-term, harvest, or even our economies, are possible at all.

The treasured hedgerows we’ve torn up in the quest for productivity, with their weeds and birds and biodiversity were part of a wider living community, rather than something sustained by plastic barriers and by poison. The health of the ravaged ocean floor is about more than catches of fish. Likewise, the peatlands, treasures of carbon capture, in which we’re now filling in the same drainage ditches they paid folk to dig thirty years ago. As a friend in the churches of Fiji reminded me:

“We are a part of not apart from Creation ... we are the biodiversity we destroy...we are the biodiversity we protect.”

Do we want God’s will to be done as badly in Heaven - in the skies - as we do it on Earth? The interdependence, the relationship, the partnership with the web of life and the cycles of the Earth, which is built into the consciousness of the Biblical writers, is daily being reinforced by a culture of science which has long overtaken brutal human utilitarianism. This led even some churches to teach that our species was the purpose of Creation, of which, *of course*, we’re the pinnacle - and to replace wholesome references in some bibles to “all creation” with the minimal “all people”.

As human beings, we have eyes, ears, or failing that, awareness of one sort or another. As in the earliest of all Christian hymns:

Wake up! Be Church! have Fun! Get on with it!

AMEN.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

**Written by Rt Reverend Sally Foster-Fulton, Former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.**

Let justice flow freely, not drip in desperate, sporadic splats; through blocked-up, constricted channels controlled by the status quo. Let justice roll down like waters, fast and flourishing, bringing respite and reparation to people and planet. Climate chaos, driven by an addiction to consumption, has choked us all, God. The elite rich suffocate under stuff that cannot satisfy, while so many more struggle to survive at all. Wake us up to the world – may we hear the song of sustainability over the constant rumble of ‘what we want.’ May peace fall like rain and justice spread like morning sun. Amen

[Season of Creation worship resources for September Sundays and the first Sunday of October: text, video, and more](https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/season-of-creation-creation-time-creationtide-2023/)

# **FOR THE FRUITS OF ALL CREATION Fan Heafield**

## **HYMN CH4 231**

## **OPENING PRAYER**

Loving Lord, as we come together to worship grant us the grace to respect and care for Your creation. Bless all of your creatures as a sign of Your wondrous love.
O Lord, help us to end the suffering of the poor and bring healing to all of your creation. Help us to use our technological inventiveness to undo the damage we have done to Your creation and to sustain Your gift of nature.

We come to renew our covenant with God and with one another in Christ Jesus, our Lord. We come to help protect God's creation and we come as followers of Jesus to commit ourselves anew to one another and to heal injustice and poverty.

We have come to discover some new beauty every day in God's creation: the sunrise and sunset, birds, flowers and trees, rainbows in the sky, the stars, the many forms of life in the forest. We have come to listen to the "music of the universe"- water flowing over rocks, the wind, trees bending in the wind, raindrops pattering the roof.

We will remember always that God speaks to us through the beauty of his creation, and we will try our best to answer God's call to reverence all that he has created.

Speak to us in our worship and draw us closer together in our fellowship, we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen

## **READINGS**

Genesis 1: 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31 God delights in his creation.

Genesis 9: 10. God’s first covenant with His children “every living creature on earth”.

Psalm 19: 1, Romans 1: 20 Psalm 8: 3 – 8 Creation is a rich testimony to the goodness and power of God.

Psalm 104: 10 – 30, Job 38: 25 – 28 God cares for his Creation.

Isaiah 55: 12 – 13 God calls all his creation to worship.

**Jeremiah (15)**reflects grimly on the personal cost and yet the purposefulness of responding, even where change seems beyond his own resources.  In **Romans (12),** we find Paul in the midst of the necessary building of community, equipping the church with a powerfully counter-cultural love for all whom God makes and calls – repurposing our instincts for hatred and revenge not by passivity, but ‘overcoming evil with good’.  A world in climate crisis is one in which *every* conflict hurts *every* creature.  And yet Jesus’ determination to confront evil on the Cross **(Matthew 16)** forces us to reflect on the even more terrifying cost of ignoring the signs of our times, in the illusion that pursuing a quiet safe life in the status quo will make it all go away.

## **REFLECTION**

The psalmist wrote “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1). Yet any honest reader of the newspaper or thoughtful observer of current events must acknowledge that all is not well with this earth that belongs to our God. As the earth’s population grows and humanity’s ability to impact the created order increases, we face an increasing and intensifying cluster of environmental concerns.

The very first thing the Bible teaches us about God is that He created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). The opening chapter of Genesis is a cosmic call to worship this God who is so amazing, majestic and powerful that simply by speaking He brings the world into existence. Speaking of Christ's work in creation, the New Testament affirms God as the Creator: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). Fundamental to the Christian understanding of God is that He is not a part of nature, but that He stands over and above it as its all-powerful Creator. This world in which we live is His handiwork. The Bible reveals, however, that God's interest in creation did not stop when the work of creation was completed. To the contrary, the Scriptures show us a God who has an ongoing interest in and care for His creation.

A hymn often sung at the time of harvest has words like “plowing, sowing, reaping,” these words have a place in our lives throughout the whole year because our Creator cares for His creation in every season. The fruits of His creation are given at all times for “ev’ry nation,” as the apostle Paul writes, explaining that God did not “leave Himself without witness,” but “did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17).

God did not create the heavens and the earth only to abandon His creation. His continuing, overflowing gifts are woven into the fabric of all that He has made. At creation He said, “‘Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.’ And it was so” (Genesis 1:11). Our Creator carefully placed our “future needs in earth’s safe-keeping.”

Through faith in Jesus, we live as God’s holy people. In “our world-wide task of caring” for God’s creation we reflect our God’s love and care, and “in the just reward of labour, God’s will is done.” “In the help we give our neighbour … in the harvests we are sharing,” God works in and through us. As we go about our daily work in a business, in a school, in a hospital or a home, God is at work in us, caring for His creation as people are fed and clothed, healed and encouraged. But those who are struggling must be helped in order for us to come before God and say we have tried to look after his creation and his people. Amen

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

God of all creation,

We pray for your world, for its beauty and its fragility.

We pray for those who are suffering because of climate change and environmental degradation.

We pray for those who are working to protect your world, for those who are campaigning for change and for those who are making changes in their own lives.

We pray for ourselves, that we may be inspired to make changes in our own lives and to work for change in our communities.

We pray that we may be part of your healing work in the world. Amen

(Thanks to Rt Rev Sally Foster-Fulton Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland)

## **OTHER HYMNS AND SONGS**

For the beauty of the Earth (CH4 181)

Beauty for Brokenness (CH4 259)

We Lay our Broken World (CH4 721)

It’s a world of sunshine (CH4 245)

God who made the earth (CH3 151)

I have seen the golden sunshine (High Fly Music)

If I were a butterfly (Words and music by Brian Howard)

Think of a world (JP 254)

# **SO MUCH WRONG Ian Alexander**

## **HYMN CH4 572**

**OPENING PRAYER**

My beloved, show me where you are to

be found today:

Amongst those who most need your presence;

Amongst those who seek to live out your ways in our world;

Amongst those who want to know you more.

Gracious and good God,

Give us pure hearts that we may see you

humble hearts that we may hear you

hearts of love that we may serve you;

hearts of faith that we may abide in you.

O Spirit of God, Eternal, Dynamic, Vibrant,

Spirit which calls us into community,

Spirit which loves us into fullness of life;

Fill me now with your refreshing, uplifting power,

Ready to live out your call to serve

In good days and bad. Amen

**SUGGESTED READINGS**

* Isaiah 58: 6-10
* Matthew 5: 3-11

**REFLECTION**

There is such a deep sense of longing in this song from the Arabic speaking Christian community in the Middle East. When I lived in Jerusalem, the chorus line, translated here as “My Beloved”, was a favourite in our services. In Arabic it is: Wa Habibi, and the local community loved to sing it. There was an uplifting power in the plaintive, Wa Habibi, Wa Habibi as it ascended and reverberated around the church whenever it was sung. It is a song that gives voice not only to a two thousand years of continuous witness, but also to so many of the contemporary abuses and harassments which the Christians (and Muslims) of occupied Palestine experience today. So much loss of lands and homes and identity and opportunity. Olive trees, which can live over a thousand years, do show the weight of the injustices in this land, uprooted as collective punishment or stolen and transplanted to beautify Israeli settlements, they are one marker of life under occupation.

November 29 is the United Nation’s International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People to encourage the world to continue to give the widest support and publicity to the situation of the Palestinian people today. Kairos Palestine (a group of Palestinian Christians from churches and civil society, alongside international organizations concerned about the situation – [www.kairospalestine.ps](http://www.kairospalestine.ps)) urge Christians from around the world to visit, to take the opportunity to see the reality of life on the ground, to meet people and see places and gain a first-hand understanding of what life is really like. Come and see, the Palestinian Christian community say. Then go and tell your neighbours, communities, congregations what you have seen, and speak about who you have met. This reassures the Christian community - and their Muslim and Jewish neighbours who seek justice that they are not forgotten and can encourage the local community to continue in their struggle for justice, fullness of life and freedom.

November 30 is also the day of the special service in St Cuthbert’s, Edinburgh when the Friends of St Andrew’s Jerusalem and Tiberias remember the work of the Church of Scotland there, all the partners they work with to seek justice for all, and the ministers Stewart Gillan and Muriel Pearson (friendsofstandrews.com).

And as we go into Advent, these weeks will lead us to Bethlehem, and should also raise in our minds, prayers, worship and conversations, the Israeli occupation of Palestine and all the challenges Christian brothers and sisters will have in seeking to worship freely in their own churches in Advent and Christmas-tide.

**CLOSING PRAYER**

May God bless you with discomfort,

At easy answers, half-truths,
And superficial relationships
So that you may live
Deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger
At injustice, oppression,
And exploitation of people,
So that you may work for
Justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears,
To shed for those who suffer pain,
Rejection, hunger and war,
So that you may reach out your hand
To comfort them and
To turn their pain to joy. *(Ruth Marlene Fox, b1936)*

“Everything I could ever offer

could not pay for what God has done;

But my life shall be spent in honour

of my Saviour, God’s only Son.” AMEN

# **O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL Rob Rawson**

## **HYMN CH4 273**

## **OPENING PRAYER**

Dear Heavenly Father,

As we come before you this afternoon/evening, it is likely to be dark outside, or if not, it soon will be. During these shorter days, we so look forward to the brightness and warmth of spring.

At this time of year, we are reminded of the darkness being pierced by the light of the world – your Son, Jesus. A light that turns gloom into brightness, sorrow into joy, captivity into freedom, decay into growth, death into life.

We thank you for loving us so much, that you were prepared to step down into this world and be amongst us. We thank you for Jesus’ birth, death and resurrection. Forgive us when we have not reflected that love. We are sorry for the times when we have failed to love you or our neighbours and have not reflected Jesus’ light to shine out in the dark world around us.

Gracious Lord, please forgive us and may you prepare our hearts for the coming season when we celebrate the arrival of your Son.

We ask this in our Saviour’s Name, Jesus, Amen.

## **SUGGESTED READINGS**

Matthew 1:23

Isaiah 9: 2-7

Ezekiel 36: 24-27

Matthew 28: 18-20

## **REFLECTION**

I have been involved in youth work for many years and over that time have led numerous camps and residential weekends. But before all that, I was a young person on the receiving end of these events and I have to say, I adored our youth leaders.

When I was about 13, we had a great leader called Terry Withers. Terry was one of those all-round good guys who had an impish sense of humour, sporting prowess, musical talents and yet also had a deep, Christian faith. He had so much to share!

Inevitably, his surname proved a source of amusement. Other leaders would sometimes say, ‘Do we have Terry with us?’ Often, when Terry was joining us on the sports field, one of our young people (including me) would think he or she was being so witty in saying, ‘It’s OK, we have Terry with us!’

Although it was a fun thing to say and in truth, it was an expression that lost its wit due to over-usage, having Terry ‘with us’ was a great relief. We loved having him around and being so young, I felt reassured by his presence. When he wasn’t around and indeed, when he left his leadership role to move to the south of England, we felt very bereft.

The word ‘Emmanuel’ (or ‘Immanuel’) means ‘God with us’. Unlike Terry, Jesus has said in Matthew 28 that he will always be with us, to the end of time. That is very reassuring! Jesus is Emmanuel. Jesus came to earth as God incarnate – God having come to be with us in human form. Jesus is still with us however, through his Spirit.

In the hymn, ‘O come, O come, Emmanuel’, the words relate to Israel’s long wait for the Messiah. During Advent, we only have to wait four weeks for the Christmas celebration. For many children, that’s still feels like an eternity!! But what of beyond? How do we feel when it’s all over in the New Year? The famous monk, Brother Lawrence once said, ‘Always practice the presence of Christ.’ In other words, whether washing the dishes, driving to the shops, or of course, in conversation with others, we should realise that Jesus is right there with us. It is not something like an inspection, but more of an assurance. Jesus will not leave our side under any circumstances. Verse 5 of the hymn reflects what Jesus’ presence can bring to us:

*O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer*

*Our spirits by thine advent here;*

*Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,*

*And death’s dark shadows put to flight.* Amen!

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Loving Heavenly Father,

We thank you for your immense love – a love that cost you your Son. We thank you for Jesus’ promise of always staying by our side, through thick and thin. That same Spirit, spoken of through Ezekiel, is our helper, adviser, comforter, conscience-pricker, but above all, our best friend. We thank you for your eternal presence and the assurance that it brings.

Please remind us of your companionship. When we neglect you, remind us of your presence; when we are fearful, give us courage; when we are tempted, give us the power to resist; when we are anxious or worried, give us peace and when we are weary in service, give us energy and zeal.

We ask this for Jesus’ sake, Amen.

## **OTHER HYMNS AND SONGS**

* Make way, make way (CH4 279)
* Joy to the world (CH4 320)
* Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes (CH4 277)

# **HOPE Very Rev. Martin Fair**

### Hymns and Songs

As pants the hart CH4 32 Look forward in faith CH4 237

Up from the depths CH4 88 All my hope on God is founded CH4 192

This is a day of new beginnings CH4 526 We lay our broken world CH4 721

It is well with my soul In Christ alone

### Opening Prayers

1. God of wonders, make yourself present to us this afternoon / evening. Come, and by your Spirit, silence the siren voices and settle our souls that we might know you and hear you.

Lord, forgive us our lack of anticipation. Forgive us that we’ve become flat, that we’ve taken for granted the beauty of your being and the wonder of your work. Ignite within us fresh flames - a hunger and longing for more of you. Reveal yourself to us in new ways that we might marvel more and more as we grow ever nearer to you.

Speak to us in our worship and draw us closer together in our fellowship, we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

2. Loving Lord, as we open ourselves to you this afternoon / evening, may we come to see you more clearly, to know you more nearly and to love you more dearly. For this faith of ours is not a matter of religious duties to be performed but a relationship to be entered into and enjoyed.

And yet we know we fall short and so it is with heads bowed that we come before you, acknowledging our faults and failings and that we have been slaves to sin. Forgive us we pray and by the power of your Spirit, break the chains that bind us and liberated, lead us into new days and new ways.

## May our time together be richly blessed and our sense of your majesty and love much increased. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

### Readings

Isaiah 40:26-31 Jeremiah 29:1-14

John 14:1-6 John 21:1-17

Romans 8:18-25 Romans 15:13

Hebrews 11:1-16

### Reflection

In 2011, I was enjoying a much-needed sabbatical and spent much of the time off exploring in Scotland’s great outdoors. I hiked, climbed, camped and rested; wonderful activities that left me refreshed and inwardly renewed.

But on one occasion, in the August of that summer, I found myself having bitten off more than I could chew - attempting a route that was too long and too arduous for the time that was available. Oh, and throughout it, the rain never let up and when in odd moments it did, the midges were horrific. It was, you might say, a typical Scottish summer!

My low point came as I headed through (normally beautiful) Glen Affric. The clouds were low, the rain was pouring down, I was soaked through and sapped of pretty much every last ounce of energy. Every part of me wanted to curl up and give up. Each step felt like it would have to be the last. I don’t remember if I was in tears but I certainly felt that way.

And then the breakthrough. Ahead of me, as the clouds broke for a moment or two, an eagle swooped low then soared up. A magnificent golden eagle. The last thing I’d have expected to see in such foul weather! And what a sight at the best of times but on that day, it was all I needed. I found myself immediately thinking about the passage from the prophet Isaiah that my great-aunt had helped me to memorise while I was just a boy in primary school:

*Do you not know?*

*Have you not heard?*

*The Lord is the everlasting God,*

*the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*He will not grow tired or weary,*

*and his understanding no one can fathom*

*He gives strength to the weary*

*and increases the power of the weak.*

*Even youths grow tired and weary,*

*and young men stumble and fall;*

*but those who hope in the Lord*

*will renew their strength.*

*They will soar on wings like eagles;*

*they will run and not grow weary,*

*they will walk and not be faint.* Isaiah 40

My pace quickened, my heart was gladdened, my spirits were lifted. I found myself soaring on ‘wings like eagles,’ stepping out with renewed hope. I was going to make it. And so, I did, eventually arriving back where I’d left my car in the early evening. Bedraggled, yes, but un-bowed.

Like everyone else, we Christians can find ourselves brought low. But never despairing. For through Christ, we have hope that night will turn to day, that mourning will turn to dancing and that even through death, life awaits.

Let us not be as those who are without hope.

### Closing Prayers

1. What a joy, Good Lord, to know you and to walk with you all the days of our lives. And what a joy that you don’t ask us to journey alone but in the company of fellow travelers - not least our Guild friends.

For time shared together, we give you thanks.

For lessons learned together, we give you thanks.

For laughs laughed together, we give you thanks.

For tears shed together, we give you thanks.

And most of all that we are in Christ, together, we give you thanks.

And all of that, as we go our separate ways now, in Jesus’ name and for his glory. Amen.

2. Good and generous God, may we never take for granted the blessings that are ours day by day.

As we have enjoyed fellowship, let us remember that there are those who know only loneliness.

As we have enjoyed worship, let us remember that we have brothers and sisters in other places who can do so only in secrecy.

As we have pledged ourselves to be generous-hearted and to serve you in all we do, let us remember that many struggle just to get by.

Send us out into the world then, knowing full well that we are in your loving arms each step of the way. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

# **ABUNDANCE Val Brown, Christian Aid**

### Hymns

Touch the earth lightly (CH4: 243)

Oh the life of the world is a joy and a treasure (CH4 141)

### Opening Prayer

God of all,

Thank you that we live in a world of plenty,

A world that produces an abundance of food,

A world that has an abundance of fresh water sources.

A world that has enough for everyone.

And yet we know that for too many there is hunger, want and poverty

Across the globe people cry out trying to meet their daily needs.

People struggle in the face of seemingly endless hardship.

And yet you are a God of abundant love,

Help us to work always for justice, so that all your people may know what it is to have enough. Amen.

### Reading

Matthew 5: 1-12

### Reflection

When I think of abundance, I immediately think about my garden. I’m lucky to have a decent sized garden to be able to grow some fruit and vegetable crops around the area demarcated as a football pitch by the kids! This year I had an abundance of blackcurrants – so much so that I still have two drawers full in the freezer. I had an abundance of strawberries at the start of the summer, and an abundance of apples from 4 small trees. So, the immediate connotation of abundance is a positive one. However, if I think about what else I grew, the abundance in question is a negative one. My carrots were destroyed (twice) by an abundance of visits from neighbouring cats. Abundant rainfall, which bordered on flooding, made both the raspberries and the blackberries develop mould. Gardening is something I enjoy and when I get to eat the produce it is a bonus that makes all the work seem worthwhile. But it also makes me realise how much we depend on the climate being right for our food to grow successfully. Too much rain, or not enough rain, can be equally damaging. Too much sun, or not enough sun, is the difference between crops ‘bolting’ (the yet to be successful broccoli) or just never developing (tomatoes in Glasgow). Working for Christian Aid, I have had the chance to see first-hand the impact of the climate crisis. I sat with a community in El Salvador whose fresh water had been contaminated by flood water. Across many of the countries where we work the twin challenges of prolonged periods of drought followed by flash flooding has made life very difficult for people. People who rely on the land to grow what they need struggle when there is ether not enough, or too much rain. Climate change increasingly plays havoc with our traditional seasons, meaning that food security is seriously compromised. We know that the weather is more extreme now - I’m writing this after seeing pictures of Brechin under water. Christian Aid is continuing to campaign for climate justice – asking governments to take climate seriously, to reduce emissions, and to have in place a Loss and Damage fund to support people who lose everything when climate disaster strikes.

In the reading today, from Matthew’s gospel, we hear the well-known lines:

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
    for they will be filled.*

When I think about climate change, hunger and thirst are two of the first things that come to mind, as climate chaos makes securing food and clean water so hard for so many.

When I visited Church and Christian Aid partners in Palestine and Israel, I was interested to hear a reflection on the Beatitudes. We are used to hearing the Beatitudes expressed passively, but below is a different interpretation from Archbishop Elias Chacour, and one that sits more easily with me.

*‘Blessed’ is the translation of the word*makarioi*used in the Greek New Testament.  However, when I look further back to Jesus’ Aramaic, I find that the original word was*ashray*from the verb*yashar*.  Ashray does not have this passive quality to it at all.  Instead, it means ‘to set yourself on the right way for the right goal; to turn around, repent; to become straight or righteous’.*

*When I understand Jesus’ words in the Aramaic, I translate like this:*

***Get up, go ahead, do something, move, you who are hungry and thirsty for justice, for you shall be satisfied.***

*To me this reflects Jesus’ words and teachings much more accurately.  I can hear him saying, ‘Get your hands dirty to build a human society for human beings; otherwise, others will torture and murder the poor, the voiceless, and the powerless’.*

[Beatitudes | Ashray (wordpress.com)](https://ukashray.wordpress.com/beatitudes/)

Until the climate crisis is resolved, we will all need to get up and do something on climate, and encourage our elected leaders to take strong action to safeguard the planet, to ensure our collective ability to eat a variety of fresh food and drink clean water.

### Watch

[Till & Keep: A theology of climate change - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mElVYwM1mt8)

### Closing Prayer

God, you came that all may have life

And have it in all its fullness.

Help us to tread lightly on the earth

To use her resources sparingly so that there is enough for all

And enable us to keep on working for justice.

Amen

# **PEACE Helen Eckford, National Convener 2022-23**

### Hymns

* Make me a channel of your peace
* Bind us together
* In Christ alone
* I’ve got peace like a river

### Opening Prayers

**Peace of mind**

Gracious and loving God, whose we are and whom we serve, give us peace in our hearts. We have so much to be grateful for and yet we all have times when we are troubled or anxious. When we feel overwhelmed and don’t know where to turn, comfort us and guide us onto the right path. Remind us of your constant loving care and your constant presence with us. Bring peace in our families, in our churches, and in our workplaces. Help us to be peacemakers. Show us how to share peace with those we love and those who are hard to love. We can trade our worries for your peace, if we only come to you. Give us peace deep in our hearts; a peace that stays with us day and night and calms our troubled minds. When anxiety shakes our calm, remind us of the power of prayer which allows us to bring our concerns to you. In the name of your son, Jesus, Prince of Peace, we ask this. Amen

**Peace in the world**

God of peace, we see our troubled world and feel helpless. Our hearts go out to those affected by the horrors they see in their communities every day, and we feel helpless. We are perplexed by the problems faced by refugees who see the only way forward is to put themselves and their families in the hands of ruthless men and women who promise them a future. What can we do? We cannot control people, governments, or events but we should not feel helpless because we have the power of prayer. In every stressful moment, for every time of trouble, we can go to you and talk to you, and you will listen. You bring out the good in every circumstance if we put our trust in you. You have promised us a peace that passes all understanding. Put peace in the hearts of all who are suffering from the actions of others, and peace in the minds of those whose actions cause so much fear and anxiety. Restore peace in the world you created. This we ask in your name. Amen

### Bible verses/readings

* John 14: 15 - 27
* Philippians 4: 7 And the peace that surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Jesus Christ.
* Isaiah 26: 3 You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast because they trust you.
* 1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.
* Matthew 5: 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

### Reflection

Peace in the everyday world is about living in friendship and harmony. It means the absence of war, and freedom from hostility and violence. In the bible it is more than an absence of conflict it is wholeness. It is about repairing a broken situation. The word peace in the bible comes from the Greek word eirene (i-ray-nay) which means peace, quietness, rest and comes from the word eiro which means to join or tie together into one. It means coming together to be one again.

Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace, means making amends. The word peace appears more than 200 times in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. In Jesus’ time people often greeted one another with peace.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came among them and said, “Peace be with you!” (John 20:19)

We cannot create peace without God’s help. God is the source of peace; Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Jesus is our inner peace. We are empowered by His Spirit to be peacemakers with friends and enemies. Through him we make our peace with God and with others. Jesus’ death took our sins away. We are one with God, we can have fellowship with Him and live in unity with others. A peace which keeps us together in times of trouble.

### Closing prayers

Heavenly Father, make us instruments of your peace. Teach us to love our enemies as well as our friends. Give us the power to choose peace even when we want to wage war. Encircle us with your love and help us to sleep peacefully in your care. We thank you for your gift of peace to us. Amen

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. (Numbers 6: 24-26)

# **TRUST Maureen Clark, retired SU staff member**

### Hymns

* The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want – the Stuart Townend version with the refrain ‘And I will trust in You alone’ fits perfectly (www.stuarttownend.co.uk. You tube)
* Father, I place into your hands the things I cannot do.

### Opening prayers

Dear Lord and loving Heavenly Father, we gather today as a Guild, thanking you for the promise of your presence with us. We thank you for your unending love to us, shown in the coming into the world in the Lord Jesus. We pray that as we gather, our faith and trust in you will be strengthened and our commitment to live out our faith every day will be renewed. We remember those of our number or known to us who are struggling to keep going at the moment. We remember any who are anxious about their own health or that of a loved one. We pray for our families as they face different joys and sorrows. We thank you for the wider Guild family and for the encouragement we receive from being part of this wonderful organisation. We pray for the work being undertaken by the various projects we support this year. Bless each one who seeks to share the love of the Lord Jesus with others in such a variety of ways. Bless us as we continue in your presence. In Jesus name. Amen

Our Heavenly Father, draw near as we gather in our Guild meeting today.

Refresh us…renew us.

Remind us …that we need to trust you

Remind us …that you are from everlasting to everlasting

Remind us …that you are committed to us in love.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

### Bible readings

* Proverbs 3:5,6 (NIV and/or The Message)
* 1 Peter 5:7Psalm 143:8

### Reflection

Trust is a basic building block in many relationships. We trust the driver when we get on a bus to take us safely to our destination; we trust that the coffee we order will be safe to drink…we all exercise an element of trust in others many times each day.

In more personal relationships we exercise trust in a more selective way. We don’t tell everyone if something is troubling us; we tell a good friend who has proved to be reliable and able to keep something to themselves. In a family we have to trust that children will be careful when we give them new responsibilities which are potentially dangerous. That’s how they grow in independence. In a marriage the basis of the vows we make rely on us being willing to trust the other to keep their side of the commitment. We trust them to mean what they say.

Trust is a precious commodity. Trust builds up community and mutual dependence.

But what makes human trust such a precious thing? On what basis does it work?

There are a number of key components to a good, healthy and trusting relationship.

Firstly, we know the other party and the characteristics they have shown in the past.

We know they are reliable. They’ve probably shown us understanding. Therefore, we are confident that they will do so again.

What does it mean when Proverbs encourages us to ‘Trust in the Lord with all our heart’? What does trust look like in the context of our relationship with God and what does it mean to do so ‘with all our heart’? We know what it is to trust a friend, a spouse, a child but how can we trust God with all our heart? Or as the Message puts it, ‘Trust the Lord from the bottom of your heart’. It suggests a wholehearted action. It’s total, complete. Given energy and commitment. Yet, this injunction could be seen as being a bit abstract, even an emotional response. Difficult to pin down. That’s where the context of this injunction helps us to understand it better. In order to trust the Lord in this whole-hearted way, the writer goes on to give us some practical pointers. It’s as if he’s saying, Trust…and here’s two key ways to check if you’re on the right track

Firstly, ‘don’t try to figure out everything on your own’, is how the Message paraphrases it.

What kind of strategies have you developed over the years to cope with the unexpected? How have you learned to deal with sort of issues that rock you and cause a sense of panic deep inside? It might result in sleepless nights or an edginess in our relationships because we’re worried. It might be a family issue causing bad feelings among different members or it might be a church issue where some key areas of church life are feeling under threat. How do you react? Maybe you’re a fixer, always ready with a solution, quick to get involved and figure out how to make it better. Maybe you see what you think is an obvious answer and you attempt to engineer it so that this works out. Or is your preferred strategy to withdraw, to dwell on the problem, maybe to become very anxious and stressed? Both of these strategies might be the opposite of exercising trust in God. Figuring out everything on our own implies that we haven’t asked God to give us direction. Prayer, in a developing trust relationship with the Father, should precede action. It’s handing the issue over to him first and awaiting a prompt from God and a willingness to take a hands-off approach until we’re sure that this is the way ahead. It’s to commit to God all the anxieties surrounding the issue, to hand it over to him…and not lift the burden back on to our own shoulders. Cast all your anxieties on to him, for he cares for you.

And it’s this careful listening and waiting that is the second way to develop the habit of trusting the Lord. This will underpin the trust relationship. The habit of daily reading of the Bible, praying over what we read and asking God to lead us in all that the day will bring be it opportunities or challenges will build up trust. As we grow in this discipline, we will know God’s leading.

Result? He’s the one who will keep you on track.

### Closing prayers

Lord God, thank you that your Word encourages us to trust you. May we reflect on the words we’ve heard today and remember to hand over the issues and problems which trouble us and allow you to work out the way ahead. Help us to be listeners to the prompts that you give us so that we can discern your will and way. We trust in your unfailing love. May that peace which you promise be ours each day. In Jesus name. Amen

I am calmed because I know you love me.

Because You love me, nothing can move me from my peace.

Because You love me, I am as one to whom all good has come.

Deliver me from self-trustfulness.

In the frequent days in which I must do battle with myself for foe,

Arm me with a constant trust in Thee. Amen

*(from ‘Hebridean Altars’)*

# **REFUGE Marian Macintyre, National Convener 2019-20**

### Hymns

* God is our refuge and our strength (CH4: 36)
* Safe in the shadow of the Lord (CH4: 55)
* Will your anchor hold? (CH4: 737)
* Jesus, lover of my soul (CH4: 490 esp. v2)
* Through the love of God our Saviour (CH4: 562)
* We turn to God (CH4: 393)

### Opening Prayer

Loving God, we come to you now, as children come to a loving parent, asking for your care, protection as we face the upheavals and uncertainties of this world. Nothing is easy at the moment, and we need a safe, calm refuge. Grant us your Spirit of Love in our meeting, guide our thoughts and our words, and may our fellowship be one of joy and fulfilment. Amen

### Readings

* Psalm 46
* Psalm 91: v 1-4
* Deuteronomy 10:18-19

### Reflection

Refuge is defined as ‘shelter or protection from danger’ and in Psalm 46 we read:

**‘God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble’**

When I was wee, I spent all my summer holidays in Shetland. I loved the overnight trip on the ferry, sometimes in rough seas. My dad was a very keen sea angler, and my uncles and cousins would take him out fishing in their boats. My great-aunt, a crofter who was brought up in the islands, never took a safe return to shore for-granted, and she would always be looking out of the window, even on a summer’s evening, for sight of the boat on its way back to the safety of the harbour. You see, she could remember, in her long life, times when a boat didn’t return, resulting in children being orphaned and women being widowed.

A safe harbour, or refuge, was, and still is a ‘must’ in seafaring communities.

And so with us, in the tempests and storms of life. We need a refuge, a safe place to be calm and still. God can be our refuge if we put our trust in him. The reality is that there will be difficult times, but God promises to be our refuge. When all around us is crumbling and our world is shaken, God has not failed us, nor will he.

I can’t read the word *‘refuge’* without seeing the word *‘refugee’* (from the same root). A word we hear too often in our news bulletins. We may never really know what storms, tempests, uprisings, wars, famines, crises refugees are fleeing from, but surely as followers of Jesus we are bound to side with them and to do all we can to ensure that the refugee, the marginalised, the outcast, the discriminated against are properly and fairly treated as they seek refuge in our land. Ask yourself: ‘What would Jesus do?’

What can we do? We can educate ourselves in the work of charities like The Scottish Refugee Council and ‘New Scots’, the Scottish Government's strategy to welcome, support and integrate refugees. We can welcome the stranger in our midst, in our communities, in our congregations and in our Guilds. We can welcome the ‘other’, as Jesus did.

What will you do, as a Guild, as individuals, this year of 2023, to be part of creating a ‘safe harbour’ for refugees.

### Closing prayer

God, our loving heavenly Father, as we leave this place, grant us your peace, your serenity, your hope, so that we might serve you better. May we, as your children, be enabled to send out a beacon of hope to those around us who are in difficulty of any kind. Be with us, and with those whom we love and those whom we are called to serve. Amen

### Additional Prayer

You are the God in whom we take refuge;
yet many have been cast off,
cast into the depths of the sea.

You are the God in whom we take refuge;
yet many have had to walk so far,
mourning for family and longing for home.

You are the God in whom we take refuge;
yet many are oppressed by conflict,
refused safe passage and the refuge they need.

You are the God in whom we take refuge:
so to you we bring our downcast souls,
disquieted by questions, we refuse to be silent.

Be our hope and our help
as we seek to provide the answers
of welcome and hospitality for all.

You are the God in whom we take refuge. Amen

*(Christian Aid, 2016)*

# **CELEBRATION Maggie Lunan, founder member ALTERnativity**

### Hymns

* O God you search me and you know me (CH4: 97)
* I shall praise you O God from my soul (CH4:95)
* Give thanks with a grateful heart
* Now thank we all our God

### Opening Prayers

Called by God, and known by name, you search us and you know us, and still you love us.

Called by God and longing to be close to you, we will share our gifts with others, as you have shared with us.

Called by Jesus to care for this world, to cherish your creation, we will care for our planet, and for one another.

Called by the Spirit, we will comfort the broken hearted, and challenge injustice

By your grace we will seek peace and show your love to all, in the name of God our Creator, Jesus our Saviour and the Holy Spirit. Amen

God of all, who gives to us with a generosity and beyond our understanding or deserving, we come here, as always in need of your strength and your wisdom, your grace and your mercy.

*Your* strength that allows us to care more, *your* wisdom that allows us to know when to speak out and when to be silent, your grace and mercy that we might be at one with you and at one with our neighbours.

We come today and in a time of quiet we bring before you those known to us who need your healing touch - family, friends near and far.

With confidence we place each of them, and ourselves, into your hands. In Jesus name, Amen

### Bible Readings

* Philippians 4:4-7 (The Message)
* Isaiah 55:12-13 (The Message)

### Reflection

Our immediate thoughts on hearing the word ‘celebration’ often turn us to the big events of life - a wedding, the safe arrival of a new child, or simply a gathering of friends round the table. These times of celebration are often because of heartfelt thanks to God for the opportunity to be together, or that all went well, or that we have reason to be happy, and to be hopeful. But whatever we are celebrating, it is always an outpouring of gratitude - for life, for health, for faith, for love, for family, for a special moment, for an anniversary, or a festival. As a church we “celebrate” Communion and the custom at funerals nowadays is to talk of ‘celebrating the life” of the deceased.

Celebration and gratitude go hand in hand. Many of you will have heard of or experienced the joyous greeting in Malawi where the leader of worship proclaims **‘God is good!’** and the gathered congregation responds ‘A**ll the time. God is good.’** and the minister echoes **‘All the time’.**

It is interesting that those who have the least, both here in the UK and across the world often have the best celebrations. In the global south the community shares what food they have and follow this with carefree and infectious dancing and singing. They are daily aware of God’s goodness and their celebrations come with deep, deep gratitude.

We know the benefits of celebration come when we don’t take ourselves too seriously, when we can let go of our striving for perfection and can just relax and enjoy, when we can be free of judging ourselves or others.

But there is, too, a quieter form of celebration that comes from within; it is a strange welling up of gratitude, or an unexpected experience of God drawing close; or perhaps even at times of waiting, when God feels far away.

Each of us will have their own way of prayer, some new, some ancient. The ancient Celtic prayer below(known as St Patrick’s breastplate) has been described as ‘medicine for the soul’, and it is recommended that you take it three times a day (after meals)! It is not only a prayer of protection but an invitation for Christ to live within you; You might even want to add your own actions to it.

For many, when they find their faith struggling or under pressure, a celebration is to be found in nature, whether it’s a plant in a pot, a bunch of flowers or a walk in the woods, standing on ashore or looking to the hills; ‘Creation is God’s first Bible’ and he God is to be found in the world around us, and in the people around us, and the celebration of nature can draw us closer to him, just as gratitude for love and the celebration of life draws us closer to God.

### Closing Prayer

(Said together. This could be printed and laminated so that each member could take a copy home)

Christ be with me, Christ within me,

Christ behind me, Christ before me,

Christ beside me, Christ to win me,

Christ to comfort and restore me

Christ beneath me, Christ above me

Christ in quiet, Christ in danger

Christ in hearts of all that love me

Christ in mouth of friend and stranger. Amen

Dear Lord,

We have so much to be grateful for

our time together,

our freedom to worship you as we would wish.

Plant in our hearts the desire to live in the light of Jesus, loving and serving with joy, praying and caring with your compassion,

Show us how to walk lightly and lovingly through your world, sharing you love, spreading the good news, in deeds more than words. Amen

# **STRENGTH Norah Summers, National Convener 2005-06**

### Hymns

There are quite a few, whole or in part, which would also serve as readings or prayers. Pick & Mix!

* God is our refuge and our strength CH4 36 (Psalm 46) or CH4 37 which is a modern version of the words
* Great is thy faithfulness CH4 153 - Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow
* Who would think that what was needed CH4 295
* Jesus loves me CH4 564 - Little ones to him belong, they are weak but he is strong
* Spirit of God, unseen as the wind CH4 600 - We need your power, we need your strength, following Christ each day
* Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength SOGP 106
* Love and Anger (Wild Goose) 34 - Goodness is stronger that evil, love is stronger than hate.

### Opening Prayers

Loving God,

we need you every hour.

We are weak, but you are strong.

Give us courage, we pray,

to believe that when we are weary,

you will renew our strength.

Bless us now with your strong presence,

as we come to worship you.

Loving God,

You know what burdens we are carrying as we meet today,

so we ask your blessing on our time together,

that we may find strength in our sharing of worship and fellowship.

May we encourage each other in our faith today

and be assured of bright hope for tomorrow.

### Bible Readings

* 1 Samuel 17 – David and Goliath – a long chapter! Such a well-known story that any one of the three ‘acts’ might be enough to set off discussion.

v 3-11: setting the scene v32-40: David volunteers and prepares v: 41-53 the fight

* Isaiah 40: 28-31 - strength renewed.
* 2 Corinthians 12:8-19 God’s strength in our weakness

###

### Reflection

As soon as I saw the word ‘strength’ given as a theme I thought of Psalm 46 – ‘God is our refuge and our strength’. I am greatly devoted to the Psalms and can usually find a reason to bring a quote into any worship I write or prepare to speak about.

The Psalms are indeed full of references to God’s strength and power to save his people, and to the strength we in turn derive to enable us to cope with life.

A lot of the Old Testament is about wars and military victories, and the imagery of a lot of our old hymns was quite warlike. Onward, Christian Soldiers! Personally I do not find this helpful (though it was a good strong tune to sing!)

God’s strength is not strongman stuff, all about being bigger or more powerful-looking. It is much subtler. In the story of David and Goliath there is detailed description of the giant’s armour, and later of the armour Saul tried to give David – far too heavy for the lad whose own protection was ‘I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty’. There is no answer to that!

A spider’s web is stronger, weight for weight, than steel.

Jesus did not come as a mighty King in pomp and power, but as a helpless baby, born into the family of a small-town carpenter, far from home and compelled to become refugees in a foreign land.

Paul speaks of ‘strength in weakness’ – so often the wisdom of God is revealed in paradox – the foolish things confounding the wise.

### Closing Prayers

Loving God,

thank you for our time together here today.

Thank you for our friends who cheer us

and encourage us in our faith,

so that we go from here

refreshed in spirit

and renewed in the strength that you give your people.

Loving God,

as we go from here,

we ask your blessing on us all,

and on the homes we return to.

May your strength go with us,

to enable us to share your peace and your love

with all we meet.

# **THANKS Rev Janet McKeller, Ordained Local Minister, Argyll**

### Hymns

* Count your blessings
* Give thanks with a grateful heart

### Opening Prayer

Generous God, today we gather together as friends and we reflect on the many blessings that you have given to each of us. We thank you for all those mentioned and all those that we hold in our hearts.

Today as we bring you our thanks, we ask your blessing on all those who need to know your presence with them today, that they too might know your love, your comfort, your healing hand.

Generous God, may we always be joyful, may we pray to you in all times and be thankful to you in all circumstances as we live and breathe a life in union with you, Amen.

### Readings

* Psalm 103: 1 – 5
* 1 Thessalonians 5: 16 – 18

### Reflection

As a child, one of the very first things we are taught to say is ‘thank you’ and yet often in life we forget to give thanks. We come to God with all of our concerns, but we are often slow to give thanks for the many blessings we have.

One of my Dad’s favourite hymns was ‘Count your Blessings, name them one by one’. It’s a hymn we don’t hear much now but yet it has such an amazing message about remembering to give thanks. Just for a moment, why don’t we count our blessings? Think about the place we call home, the community of which we are a part, our family or friends. I’ve considered the words ‘thank you’ as an acronym to thank God for:

T - Today and all its many gifts

H - We have a place to call Home and food on our table.

A - A place where I and many of my Ancestors were born, those who came before us.

N - New friends, and New opportunities

K - Kindness, received and given.

Y - Young people and the ways in which they bless and challenge us

O - God Omnipotent, all powerful and all-knowing, with all things in his care.

U - Our Church family Universal

Why don’t you try it ?……… ‘then it will surprise you what the Lord has done’.🕆 ♬

### Closing prayer

Loving God, we come before you in grateful thanks for all the blessings you have given us. We thank you for the wonder of creation and the beauty we see all around us. We thank you for those who have guided our path over the years and helped us to see the plans you have for each of us. We thank you for the friends and families who support us to be the people you want us to be. Continue to bless us faithful God. Amen.

# **PRAISE Rev Dr Jessie Fubara – Manuel, Tumekutana**

## **Hymns**

* Praise to the Lord, the Almighty CH4 124
* for a thousand tongues to sing CH4 352
* Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord CH4 286
* All people that on earth do dwell CH4 63
* Praise God from whom all blessings flow (Doxology) CH4 807

## **Opening Prayers**

Almighty God, you are the great God. We adore your name. You alone are worthy of all our praise. You are beautiful in splendour and surrounded by greatness. There is none to be compared with you. We confess that we have not always praised you as we ought to or acknowledged you in all our circumstances. Be with us in this time of worship and help us to know that you are worthy of all our praise, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen

Gracious and most loving God, we come before you today to give you praise; to worship your holy name; and to ascribe to you all glory, majesty, and power. In our darkest hours or brightest days, you are close, loving and kind. We can trust you for you are the Almighty God who works out all things according to your purpose and will. Help us never to forget this. Forgive us when we do; and grant us grace to always worship you aright in Jesus’ name, Amen.

## **Readings**

* Psalm 150
* Acts 16:19-33

## **Reflection**

Praise, whether in songs and prayers is an essential act of Christian worship. It is an expression of our admiration for and gratitude to God, for who God is and for what God does. We are created to give God praise. But is our praise and worship of God ever adequate? The Psalmist, in Psalm 150, confirms the fact that we can never sufficiently exhaust our praise of and for God: not in terms of place, reasons, or expressions.

What we find in this Psalm is an earnest call to praise the Lord. The Book of Psalms is full of hymns, prayers and songs of thanksgiving and praise. In this last chapter, the Psalmist calls the whole earth, ‘everything that has breath’ to praise the Lord. Perhaps, the Psalmist is saying that in the final analysis, what is most important, what is the chief purpose of a worship community is to praise the Lord. So, the Psalmist finds a space in every verse of this short Psalm to invite us to praise God. Thirteen times, the Psalmist makes a case for the possibilities of where, why, how and with what we should praise the Lord, drawing us repeatedly to the necessity for praise.

It would be difficult to read this Psalm and not feel the pulse, the sounds and movements associated with the Psalmist’s praise to God. If we listen carefully, I believe we can hear the trumpet, lute, harp, tambourine, strings, pipe, and cymbals. If we are not careful, we might find ourselves swaying, like in a dance, to the symphony emanating from the combination of this imagined orchestra. If we watch closely, we might even find in the noise of animals, the movement of plants, the rushing rivers, the seasons with its varied shades of colours, all attempting to offer praise to God. The Psalmist calls us, in verse 2, to praise God ‘for his mighty deeds; …according to his surpassing greatness.’

Perhaps, like me, you would agree that praising God isn’t always easy; especially when we find ourselves in unpleasant situations. I do not imagine that I would be as celebratory as Paul and Silas were, to be praising God and singing hymns in prison. The Psalmist’s firmament as a place to praise God, is for Paul and Silas, a prison. Despite the dismal situation they found themselves, having been unjustly stripped, beaten and imprisoned, they praised God, praying and singing as other prisoners listened (Acts 16:22-25). I cannot say if they really ‘felt’ like worshipping God, or if it was something they felt called to do and for which they were determined to do, because praising God is beyond our present situations or circumstances. They demonstrated that praising God, singing and worshipping, were acts of worship for who God is, and what God represents for us – One for whom our praise can never adequately exhaust his greatness or his power. They also demonstrated that, consistent with the Psalmist calls for all to praise God, God is present in every aspect of life and deserves all praise. In their praise, Paul and Silas experienced the remarkable miracle of being set free from imprisonment. Their testimony resounds with that of many Christians today, that praising God connects the believer with God in a mysterious way, and enables freedom, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

In the narratives of our two Bible readings, we discover that praise is not limited to any singular mode, content, or place. In a typical Nigerian Presbyterian worship, no matter the place of meeting, one finds praise in solemn rendition of hymns, chanted Psalms, as well loud singing with musical instruments accompanied with dancing and clapping. Some people may prefer to stand and join in the shouts, others may decide to sit and to praise in quietness. Sometimes, it may not be issues of life that impede or determine people’s act of praise, feelings of not having good singing voices, or not being expressive could account for that. For others, the idea that the ‘sanctuary is a holy place where all should be silent’ could be a factor. What is obvious is that praises could and should take place beyond traditional worship spaces; and so long as God is the centre of our praise, then it’s all good.

As we reflect on the theme of praise, I invite us to consider the ways and means with which we can offer our unconditional praise to God, not for the temporality of our lives but for the certainty of God’s greatness. I call us, like the Psalmist to simply, praise the Lord.

## **Closing Prayer**

Great God, in your presence, we worship. **Praise the Lord, halleluiah**

Powerful God, with sound and dance, we worship. **Praise the Lord, halleluiah**

Liberator God, in all circumstances, we worship. **Praise the Lord, halleluiah**

Creator God, with all creation, we worship. **Praise the Lord, halleluiah**

For ever and for always. **Praise the Lord, halleluiah, Amen**

# **GUILD AIM Key Ingredients**

### Intention

 To encourage us to think about what key things we need to do as followers of Jesus

### Equipment

* Ingredients to make a fruit cake, leek and potato soup and flapjacks
* A Bible, Cross, bread and wine, loose change, pair of knitting needles, small tool box

### Preparation

* EITHER put the two sets of equipment in two separate bags
* OR place on separate tables and cover each over with a cloth

### The Talk

1. Empty the bag of food/remove cloth and show what you have
2. Explain that you want to make three different meals
	1. Fruit cake
	2. Leek and potato soup
	3. Flapjacks
3. Ask for help to organise the **key ingredients** into ‘sets’ for each recipe… can do it ‘straight’ or have a bit of fun, especially if there are children present!
4. Take other bag and empty it/remove cloth from table and show what you have this time
5. Explain that here you have some of the **key ingredients** we need as followers of Jesus

### AND EXPLAIN FURTHER WHAT EACH ITEM REPRESENTS…

* Bible = our manual for living
* The empty Cross = the symbol of Christ’s resurrection
* Bread and wine = Sacrament of Communion, but also the times we share food together in fellowship, times of hospitality etc.
* Loose change, knitting needles, toolbox = symbolize the gifts that God gives us which are to be shared with others

### Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you and praise you that we can grow together in faith and share your love with others. Help us to remember the key ingredients that we need to include in our lives each day, so that we can truly say we are your disciples. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen

### Hymns

* Brother, sister let me serve you
* Fishers of men
* Will you come and follow me

**The Guild office has a range of other resources that are available for you to order:**

* **Our Annual Theme & Discussion Guide**
* **Guild Invites**
* **Project Trifold which explains all about each project**
* **Leaflets about each project**
* **A USB with contributions from each of our project partners**
* **Guild timeline leaflet**
* **Over 30 ideas for Guild meetings without a speaker**
* **LIFT (Love in Fellowship and Trust) information for young people 18-30**
* **Details of events across the country being held each session.**

**You are also able to order items sale or return for a Guild shop.**

**Sales from the shop help to supplement our Guild activities each year.**

**For more information contact us at** **guild@churchofscotland.org.uk** **or call us on 0131 380 6306**