

## Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – Year A

### Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – 13 August 2023

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank the newly recruited Young Adult Volunteers from the Church of Scotland for their thoughts on the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost. We thank Nicola Whyte for the use of her prayers from this week in August 2020. We are grateful to the World Council of Churches for their invitation to pray this week for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea.

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

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

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

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

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

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## Introduction

The material this week was explored through a conversation with the newly recruited Young Adult Volunteers (YAVs) from the Church of Scotland, who will shortly be leaving for the United States of America to embark on a year of working with the Presbyterian Church of the US.

We asked the volunteers to consider each of the passages in the RCL and to talk about what they noticed in the passages, what themes they saw emerging and how they responded to the readings in conversation.

We hope that considering the thoughts and questions raised in the conversation will help you in the creation and leading of worship.

## [Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28](#)

### Themes

The conversation explored the themes of family dynamics and dysfunction, and the historical narrative that runs through Genesis of siblings, inheritance and rivalry. We also noted morality and the bravery required to bring compassion into a difficult situation and to disrupt the dominant way of thinking or acting.

### Conversation

This is a very familiar passage, but I noticed new things this time: the culture here has changed a lot since I last read it, names that used to sound 'foreign' are now familiar in our multicultural society. Complex family structures are more normal today, with extended families and step-siblings, which brings home the reality of complex and difficult family dynamics. How do we react when we don't get our own way in a complicated family setting? Do we see ourselves in the story in different roles? Jacob is disrupting the traditional pattern/family dynamic of the oldest being blessed by God and who was historically favoured by God.

There are reminders in this passage of other difficult relationships with brothers – Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, etc.

I really felt for the brothers and their feelings against their goody-two shoes brother, the sneak; they knew he was their father's favourite. We recognise the brothers' attitude in our society today, wanting to trip people up, or bring them down a peg or two. Joseph has dreams of better things, he's ambitious for greatness but the brothers show their own limited imagination and fear of ambition or change. Dreamers are risk-takers. Would Joseph

be called a 'dreamer' today, as someone who walks a different path, who is more emotionally sensitive?

The story captures a feeling we can identify with. There are still parallels today – we're all fighting for our parents' attention and hate it when we think they have favourites. We see that envy and jealousy lead to extreme immoral action. As Christians young people want to fit in but still do what's morally right. Reuben brings compassion and restraint. Reuben is really brave to stand up to the other brothers, and weirdly admirable. He shows bravery in the context of the level of extreme hatred and the desire to ostracise, manipulate, disinherit. He breaks the group's thinking, and pushes against the crowd mentality.

This story takes place before Moses received the Ten Commandments and society's attitude to sacrifice were very different. Child sacrifice was practised, and was not as abhorrent as we find it today.

Why is verse 15 included: "What are you looking for?" Is this an echo of or a literary link to the stranger who met Jacob when he was alone in Genesis 32 and asked, "What is your name?"

## [Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22](#)

### **Themes**

The discussion centred on what it means to consider God's plan and care for God's people and how this can be a complex issue to consider pastorally when teaching or praying.

### **Conversation**

Why is Joseph's story here in the Psalms? It's important to keep telling the stories of rescue in the past to give hope in difficult times. This adds an extra layer to the story told in Genesis. We get to see God's plan – Joseph was sent ahead so the family would be cared for in the famine. How often do we share the heritage stories of our own communities?

We remember all that God has provided despite the horrible times, because of God's love and Joseph's great faith. This feels optimistic, even though the situation feels never-ending and hopeless at the time. I felt that the Genesis telling of this story is an ancient, wisdom-filled story, but this one feels a bit more wishy washy. It's less powerful, but still stresses the importance of maintaining your faith. "Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually" (verse 4). We see this later in Matthew, when Jesus goes away to a quiet place to seek God's presence.

I felt this was a vivid description of imprisonment. How would Joseph be treated today? Cancel culture doesn't allow people a second chance, but Joseph's reputation is fully restored.

I feel discomfort around the word judgement (verse 5). How do we understand the issues of miracles versus judgements today? We don't want to attribute bad things to God, so it becomes a difficult space to be in. We must remember this is just one person's view, we don't know the Psalmist or their experience or theology. Science, education, etc. holds us back from using the word judgement.

## [1 Kings 19:9-18](#)

### **Themes**

How are we aware of God and how do we sense God's guidance? How is this impacted by our context and how are we influenced by other things that may or may not be a distraction?

### **Conversation**

Elijah was looking for God in the big things – but it's very encouraging that God spoke to him in the quiet times. I have never had dreams or dramatic encounters, but we can expect God when we're not expecting it. You can really lean into your faith in times of difficulty – Elijah was trying to understand or find out what was happening.

The first part of the story is similar to Joseph's – Elijah is alone, the only one left. In the midst of troubles, people hear God's voice in different ways. The NRSV translation is "the sound of sheer silence" – what must that have been like? Was it terrifying? It brought a moment of realisation. In the NIV it is "a gentle whisper", which is very different. The idea of sheer silence is very appealing – living in the city I regularly seek silence in daily life.

We don't build enough silence into our daily rhythm or take time to be still. We can often leave out silence from our times of worship. But it's where prayer can really connect you to God. This is another pointer to Jesus moving away from the crowds in the Matthew passage.

Are people afraid of silence because it's a place of vulnerability? There are many examples in the Bible of people meeting God in silence. I tend to be more aware of the need to ask for forgiveness in the silence, but people respond differently.

Elijah went through a real struggle to get to the cave and then the stuff before the moment of silence to hear God. He hears that it's a difficult message and it was a struggle to get himself into a space to hear that this is God's will, that only those who haven't worshipped Baal will be saved.

There is a historical and metaphorical context – what might we focus on from this passage in our worship gatherings that would be helpful?

## **Psalm 85:8-13**

### **Themes**

The poetic description of a compassionate God.

### **Conversation**

Salvation is near to those who fear God. How do we understand 'fear' today? The first part of this psalm (the verses omitted from the lectionary reading) is a lament and second part is the compassionate response – there will be peace and salvation. This could be used in worship or as part of the prayers. It is in stark contrast to some of the more troubling passages. This God is compassionate, God is Divine love.

This is beautiful, poetic language – the image of faith springing up from the land and righteousness looking down from the sky. The poetic language sparks the imagination and brings the concepts to life. It encourages us to be really creative in our worship.

It reminds me of the passage in Revelation, when heaven and earth are in unity.

We should expect that what we pray for will come to fruition. We're promised peace if we're righteous, but if not there are other consequences. It's poetic, but I like that this doesn't use flowery language.

## **Romans 10:5-15**

### **Themes**

We noticed the expansion of the idea of who are the people of God, and what it means to be 'the people of God'.

### **Conversation**

We need to beware of a false binary between faith and works, we shouldn't pit one against the other. Paul talks about the faithfulness of Jesus and how we respond to that in our own faith. This is very inclusive; Paul specifically mentions the Gentiles – he is expanding the traditional cultural understanding of the people of God. God answers 'all people', not just members of one particular faith/community.

I had to read this several times, it was confusing, with all the references to the Old Testament passages. But it's a lovely message: if you trust God and believe the resurrection in your hearts you will be saved.

This is not about having the right words, it's about holding the hope in your heart. It is more holistic and inclusive.

It was great to see so many members of different faiths invited to be part of the General Assembly in May. Verse 11 (Living Bible) says – anyone who believes will not be 'disappointed'. We can feel disappointed if we don't get the outcomes we expect, but there is a spectrum: Faith, belief, trust. But doubt is also a component of faith. Our tension is with disappointment. I have heard it said that the opposite of faith isn't doubt, but that it is certainty. In the NRSV translation, nobody will be 'put to shame.' I wonder what the original word was to give these different translations? When it says that Christians are put to shame; I read that as being ridiculed, but the Living Bible translation word brings a different perspective.

The question of how to be non-judgmental reminds me of the Merchant of Venice; "do we not bleed?" etc. We're all the same. How do we express that sense of unity and celebrate the diversity and difference within that?

### **[Matthew 14:22-33](#)**

#### **Themes**

The importance of sabbath and self-care and the deeper truths held in a story that we thought at first was familiar.

### **Conversation**

This passage relates to our situation now as we get ready to head across the water, putting our trust in God as we set off to the USA for our YAV year.

Looking at the logistics that were required for the feeding of the 5,000; Jesus was like the Operations Manager and it's not surprising that He needed time by Himself afterwards. Jesus was fully human, but we don't often think about His personality or character. Was Jesus an introvert? He needed time alone – what was the toll on His human characteristics?

Why is it so important that we read about Jesus regularly retreating to a quiet place? A massive part of this story is self-care. We are quick to put an over-spiritualised spin on this and say Jesus needed time with God, but the feeding of the 5,000 must have been exhausting. There are times when you get the sense of how much of an impact Jesus ministry had on Him, He felt the power leave Him when the woman touched His cloak, etc. But again, it is pointing to the important spiritual practice of setting aside time for retreat. It's essential/vital.

This is the *miracle* of Jesus walking on the water. We too often gloss over it, it's too difficult to explain, but this is a human's experience.

Why did Jesus choose to walk on the water? There was no need for this spectacle, He could have called them in or waited for them on the shore. Was He just having fun, making the most of the ability to do it? These stories are so familiar we don't question them. It would have been great to witness these miracles. This unexpected, sudden display of power – this account may be conflated with the calming the storm story, to make it more dramatic – but ultimately, asking the why? and what did it reveal of Jesus? – are good questions to explore.

I wonder what tone Peter had when he asked Jesus to let him walk on water. Was it doubting or excitedly asking to be part of something special, a treat because he believes it's possible. I think I would have been doubtful.

Is it a reassuring thing to hear that Peter sank? – Not for me, but I can see I would probably have been the same, I would have panicked and lost focus. I find it reassuring for our own experience that Peter, the Rock, also failed. Knowing that the people before me have made a hash of things. Peter had to be rescued, Jesus had to reinstate him numerous times – so there's hope for all of us.



## Sermon ideas

### Creative responses to the readings

- **Reading of 1 Kings 19:9-18**

Use the above as a backdrop, the tent can act as a cave. Use the Bible reading as the script and have different voices for each character. Volunteers can also make noise or music for wind, fire etc. providing a contrast to ending on silence.

- **Matthew: *A Watery Adventure***

Create a simple visual scene to represent an adventure (or holiday) landscape – e.g. cover a lectern with a sheet to represent a mountain, put up a small one-person tent, lay out a strip of blue fabric to represent water. Welcome everyone to the adventure, pointing out what is there. Invite people to share experiences of any outdoor adventures they've had, particularly ones involving water of some kind – this could include imaginary adventures in the garden or park.

Ask if anyone has a story, or has heard one, in which people got into difficulty on or in the water and needed some help, even rescuing. How do they imagine those people felt? Today we explore how faith and fear can go together as we respond to God's call to venture out and grow in faith, and how God is with us in all the storms we might face.

There are a few themes that run throughout the passages this week, namely God's invitation to all, God's guidance or speaking to us in the midst of our circumstances, and what it means to consider God's plan.

Throughout the conversations with the YAVs questions were raised that will allow us to consider more deeply what is going in the passage as we think about what may be preached on, but also what questions could be explored in groups or as a Q&A time within the worship gathering.

Some of these questions raised may also point us towards what type of prayers may be needed to allow people to respond more fully to ideas of difficult family circumstances, doubt, the sensation of sinking (like Peter) and other challenges that arise as we open up the scripture passages together.

The psalms have incredibly creative and visceral language throughout, how might we use them in creative ways to pray or to respond to God's word in our gathering? How might some of this language help in framing some times of silence within our gatherings? How else might we hear the still, small voice of God's Spirit? Is there something that could be

done outside in nature, or using image or poetry to hold a space for people to encounter God?

The Matthew passage is set around the familiar passage of the feeding of the 5,000 – could you have a meal during church and use this setting to pray together and explore scripture? Is there something about provision and generosity towards your wider community that could be explored with the worshipping community who are gathered? Or perhaps the focus on Jesus' retreating from the crowds will allow for a time of quiet and of self-care as people tend to themselves and seek God for healing and to listen for the still, small voice.

## Prayers

### Approach to God

Faithful God,

We gather this morning in Your presence:

Those of us who come here often  
and those who have not been for a long time.

Those who are full of faith  
and those who don't know what we believe.

Those who can hardly keep from singing,  
and those who can barely face the day.

We gather because You have called us,  
because You love us,  
because You are our God.

We gather, not because we are good  
or pure or holy,  
but because of our need.

We gather, knowing that again and again  
we have failed to live as You would have us live,  
that we have not loved one another,  
that we have not loved Your creation,  
that we have not loved You,  
that we have not loved ourselves.

Forgive us, God,  
and renew us to be Your people.  
Make us one,  
and reassure us in our true identity  
as children of the One who is above all things.  
For we pray this in the name of Jesus Christ,  
Our faithful and forgiving friend  
Amen

*Nicola Whyte, 2020*

### **Thanksgiving**

Before the world began,  
You loved us.

Before You had created us,  
You were faithful to us.

And we, as Your people, are thankful  
for Your great and abiding love,  
shown again and again down the ages.

You have never abandoned us,  
even when we have abandoned You.

You have never forgotten us,  
even when we have strayed far from the path.

We praise You, faithful God,  
for the steadfast love which has always guided us,  
for the promise which has never faltered,  
for the light which has lightened our way,  
for the story which has reminded us of those who came before us.  
For Your steadfast love and mercies new with each morning,  
We join with one the voice  
To give You praise and thanks.

*Nicola Whyte, 2020*

**Collect of the Day** *from Common Order*

Almighty God,

You sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of Your Church.

Open our hearts to the riches of Your grace,

that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love, joy, and peace;

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

*or*

**Collect of the Day** *from Book of Common Prayer*

Grant to us, Lord, we pray,

the spirit to think and do always those things that are right,

that we, who cannot exist without You,

may by You be enabled to live according to Your will;

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Prayers written by the YAVs**

Loving God, You know me through and through.

You know my hopes, my fears,

the things that get me going, and those that make me freeze.

Give me the courage to put my anxious, fearful thoughts and feelings aside, to listen to You.

And to get out of the boat, my eyes fixed always on You.

Amen

Dear Lord,

We thank You for sending Your only Son

so that we may understand the greatness of Your love.

Jesus helped us to have true faith in You

and showed us that You will guide us through the storms we face in our lives.

As some of us embark on new journeys in life;

to new jobs, new schools, new relationships,

we take a leap and trust that our faith in You will help us to ride the waves and become stronger and more knowledgeable.

Teach us to spread Your word and love and support our neighbours.

Keep us from doubting Your word  
and continue to help us trust You in all things  
now and in the future.

Amen

**Blessing** *From Pray Now: Stories of Encounter p33*

May you shape common ground  
through love and generosity,  
with your brother and sister  
the world o'er. Amen

*or*

**Blessing** *From Pray Now: Stories of Encounter p35*

The blessing of the God  
who cares for all  
and is companion to all  
be with us this day and all days. Amen.

## **Prayer for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea**

The World Council of Churches invites the churches around the world and all people of good will to join in prayer for peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula on Sunday 13 August. This is the Sunday before Liberation Day on 15 August, observed in both North and South Korea, to mark the date in 1945 when Korea won independence from Japanese colonial oppression. The date was also when the peninsula was divided into two countries, a division that exists to this day.

A prayer written by Dr Sang Chang, President of the World Council of Churches Asia region

God of life, God of peace, God of justice!  
Together we pray for the people of Korea,  
in the north and in the south,  
for young and old,  
for women and men,  
for the powerful and the powerless,  
for those who have a strong faith and those who have lost hope,  
for all who thirst and long for peace,  
for a just peace,

for a sustainable, lasting peace  
that can bring the gifts of renewed kinship and friendship,  
for a peace in the mind and peace in the land  
so that the peninsula and the people of Korea  
can be a sign of the justice, hope and joy of your eternal reign.

God in your mercy!

## Musical suggestions

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

- CH4 193 – “God is Love” – picks up on themes from Psalm 105
- CH4 260 – “Eternal Father, strong to save” – picks up on themes from Matthew
- CH4 351 – “Jesus’ hands were kind hands” – picks up on themes from Matthew
- CH4 471 – “To the name of our salvation” – picks up on themes from Romans
- CH4 485 – “Dear Lord and Father of mankind” – picks up on themes from Matthew
- CH4 510 – “Jesus calls us here to meet him” – picks up on themes from Romans and Matthew
- CH4 542 – “Lord, speak to me, that I may speak” – picks up on themes from Matthew
- CH4 605 – “Thanks to God whose Word has spoken” – picks up on themes from Psalm
- CH4 662 – “Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts” – picks up on the themes from Romans

- “Teach me to dance” (Graham Kendrick, Steve Thompson) – CCLI Song select: Song Number **1042097**
- “O God, Will You Restore Us?” (Bifrost Arts, *Lamentations: Simple Songs of Lament and Hope, Vol. 1*) – a version of Psalm 85  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Klew9FvlhvE>

## Reflecting on our worship practice

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

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

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord’s Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of ‘holy chaos’.
- While singing in our congregations is still restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

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

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

## Useful links

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

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

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

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