

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost – Year C

Sunday 16 November 2025

This week's Weekly Worship is drawn from the archive material of the Rev Marjory MacLean.

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.

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 23rd Sunday after Pentecost, or Proper 28, focuses on the ultimate fulfilment of all the promises of faith and Scripture. There are a number of enormous and challenging topics contained in the readings, no one of which could be adequately presented in the scope of one service, far less all of them: Apocalyptic, Witness (Martyrdom), Judgement, Salvation, God's Kingdom, Peace, and so on. The preacher may be wise to decide on the topic for focus before deciding which OT reading option to use. Most of the subjects are covered in the NT readings, but the Isaiah passages may be more useful for a more comforting message about peace and God's kingdom, whereas the Malachi passage will bolster an emphasis on judgement, especially judgement between people(s).

[Isaiah 65:17-25](#) with [Isaiah 12](#)

A fruitful approach to this pair of verses is to note that one was written by the writer of Isaiah 1-39 before the Babylonian exile, while the other was written by another figure (Second or Third Isaiah, depending on your point of view) writing around the end of the exile. The point is that the earlier writer generally wrote as if Jerusalem was immune from conquest by external enemies, and had been proven terribly wrong by the time the much later material was written, when the dream for Jerusalem was restoration not preservation.

So, do you preach a sermon about God keeping safe those who belong? What you mean by belonging for that purpose (those who profess faith, those who live righteously, those who belong to a particular community, everyone God loves)? Do you describe future cosmic events as happening to other people? Or, do you take the theme as restoration not preservation? Perhaps a sermon about the assurance of peace despite the suffering of war, of plenty despite the experience of want, of salvation from sin despite the terror of being judged?

Perhaps there is opportunity to use the dialogue between what has been and the promises of God, to explore the idea of the now and not yet, the reality we live within and the hope of a kingdom to come. In the midst of division and unrest, with conflict in many parts of the world, how might we recognise God's hand and creative act in the midst of challenge and difficulty, and how might we play a part in the peace and reconciliation that we hope for? Drawing people towards God, who is our salvation, and the invitation to draw from the wells of salvation. This is rich imagery and paired with more imagery of fruitful vineyards and wolf and lambs sharing food together, we have the opportunity to orientate ourselves towards what is hoped for in the midst of what we are experiencing and witnessing for now.

The song 'Your Labour is not in Vain' #24 from *God Welcomes All* – may allow for these themes to be present within worship without having to focus too much on these passages rather than preaching directly from them.

[There are different approaches to dealing with these passages, but you might note the complexity of each scenario in creating unhelpful dualisms and the need for sensitivity with mention of Jerusalem and Zion.] *Editor's note.*

Malachi 4:1-2a with Psalm 98

Another few weeks and your congregation will be singing these words from Malachi in the third verse of *Hark! the herald angels sing*: 'Hail, the Sun of Righteousness! Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings.'

The challenge here is slotting these words back into their context in this short reading, which contrasts the destruction of the wicked with bringing life and healing to those who revere God's name – not to the nice and kind and thoughtful – but to those who revere God's name. What, for you, is the relationship of goodness and faith, of wickedness and faithlessness, in a world containing some highly unattractive holy people and many lovely humanists? And then how does judgement and apocalyptic work in your world-view, assuming you're not a universalist? That is going to be hard to deal with in something the length of a sermon.

As for the Psalm, which backs up the idea of victory over God's enemies, notice that it forms a trio of concentric circles: vv 1-3 describe Israel's cause for rejoicing, vv 4-6 invite the whole human race to praise God, and vv 7-9 extend the invitation to the whole earth and creation.

This psalm can provide a helpful pattern for prayer. Firstly, in vv 1 – 3 we have an opportunity to give thanks and recognise all that God has done, the marvellous works, the steadfast love and faithfulness – perhaps reflecting on how God has been present in our lives individually and as a community.

In vv 4-6 the invitation to praise God might allow us to sing praise together, or to let a new song emerge depending on your style of worship this could be an opportunity to learn a new song that captures this theme, or to hold space for the Holy Spirit to raise up a new song in us and an opportunity to worship in a free and open more charismatic style.

Vv 7 – 9 encompasses the sea and hills, the world and all who live in it, how might we join with Creation in worshipping and honouring God, and how might we join with the rest of the world – either imagining a more missional side to our worship, or an invitation to notice, recognise and join with the wonderful God honouring things that are already going on in our communities.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

At first sight this is a puzzling companion to the other readings set for this Sunday, describing one little element of the ethics of apostleship – whether to be sustained by the Christian community without having a day-job as Paul normally did.

Quite a few verses have elapsed since Paul's comments, in chapter 2, about Christ's coming. There he writes un-sugared predictions about the deceiving and condemning of those who do not believe the truth, and by contrast the glory of those called with the good news of Jesus.

The warning in today's passage is normally understood as referring to Christian believers who were so sure that Christ's coming was immanent that they did not see the need to work, follow a normal routine, or do anything that planned for a future they did not anticipate they would reach. Paul wished such people to be corrected, not condemned, to be shamed with a cold shoulder but not hated as enemies.

In the light of the challenges mentioned earlier in preaching from the Old Testament passages especially Malachi, this Epistle has another possible use, in exploring that difference between belief and goodness. Christian believers, sometimes even with the best of intentions, get things terribly wrong and may need to be hauled back onto the path of discipleship by drastic means for their own good and for the good of the Church and the Kingdom.

Perhaps this passage provides us with the opportunity to explore how Christianity is not a passive faith. If we approach coming to church with the idea of having something done 'to us', that the preacher or the worship team will spark something in us – and if it does not happen it was because they were 'off' in some way – is not a healthy way of living and forming our faith.

How might we explore notions of belonging and being in our gathering, whilst being empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit, to pray and act in ways that build the kingdom of God in our sending back into the world? And as we engage in this shared endeavour, we

can invite more and more people regardless of background and ability to be companions in the call to follow Jesus and do as He did.

[Luke 21:5-19](#)

Your answer to the fundamental question posed earlier – what is your own theology of the end of the Christian story? – is probably going to help you to answer the first question facing the preacher of this Gospel text. Is Jesus describing:

- (1) the witnessing, suffering and martyrdom (our word martyr is the Greek word for a witness) of His immediate disciples in the first decades after the Crucifixion?
or
- (2) that extreme of faithfulness amongst Christian witnesses in every age including sadly our own?
or
- (3) are these words that should be addressed to our own congregations about themselves?

If your answer is (1), consider where in the apocalyptic scheme Jesus describes here do we currently sit, and what is the role of judgement yet to unfold? If your answer is (2), consider how we respond to the suffering of Christians persecuted in so many places today? If your answer is (3), consider how people are equipped to give such testimony fearlessly and without constraint?

In the midst of the terrifying words of Jesus about wars, disasters and nations rising against nations, what are we to do with the reality that we see on our TV screens and as we perhaps indulge in doom scrolling on our phones?

What is it that we are going to testify? Is it, that we believed the right things, or are we going to hope that these things do not directly impact us and we will merely ride it out?

None of this really feels like a satisfactory response to war, famine, natural disaster (more and more attributable to consequence of human behaviour!) – so what to do? Perhaps testifying through the act of creating, of reconciling and peace-making, of showing love to those who might seek conflict or have a different agenda (a sobering thought that this might include, parent, sibling and friend) might be a more fitting and Spirit led response? We can find ways of speaking to our faith and belief, but to show it in profound and meaningful ways that heal and unite, perhaps till a more fertile ground for compassionate telling of our stories, allowing them to land and for seed to take root.

Sermon ideas

The notes above on the Lectionary passages have contained ideas for sermons, and caution about addressing too many huge and tricky themes all at once.

There is certainly one common motif, of suffering giving way to blessing, violence ended by permanent peace, of evil vanquished in favour of righteousness. The penitential seasons of the Church's year, Advent and Lent, have a similar shape and dynamic and hope; and Advent is just two Sundays ahead.

This might be the moment to explain what Advent is really for; not as a gradual ramping up of the celebrations that ought to belong to Christmas, and not even as a time to prepare for Christmas. Advent is a season in its own right: a season of darkness and difficulty, and of reflection and awareness of spiritual need, and of longing and praying.

The Bible's apocalyptic themes – whether you read them literally or figuratively, and whether you locate them in distant history or ages yet to come – feed the mystery that is Advent with its cry of desperate welcome to the coming Christ.

Advent is a time of year that is laden with expectation. How in our worship do we hold adequate space for the difficult reality of living a life of deep faith to be felt? How do we come to God in humility and find the grace we need to then share with others?

The journey through Advent can be accelerated and misguided if our worship doesn't hold us in the challenging place of waiting with God, of understanding the depth of our need and the cry and groan of creation. In this week and next week, we have the opportunity to hold ourselves in a place before advent begins, that reminds us of the work of God in Christ, of the now and not yet, and of the kingdom we are called to join in creating, incarnating and embodying, and that Christ is the one in whom all creation finds its place and context.

Prayers

Gathering

God of love

WE COME IN EXPECTATION OF MEETING YOU TODAY

God of justice

WE COME TO HEAR YOUR WORDS OF LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS

God of the now and not yet

WE COME TO WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

meet us and renew us as we worship together.

Prayers for others and ourselves

God of today, yesterday and forever,

You were there at the beginning.

Your Spirit, waiting,

Your Word, waiting to be spoken.

We seek You now, in this time

not just for ourselves,

but for those around us that we know and love,

for those around us we are unsure of and do not yet know,

for those we find it difficult to relate to,

and for those who we do not trust or whom we fear.

In Your mercy,

will You give us the humility and strength,

to be Your hands of grace, and to bring Your way of mercy

into every encounter and situation where You have blessed us to be,

and where we might find ourselves regardless.

We pray now for this church, and the communities in which we live,

for the families, friends and neighbours,

for all those who have called this home for many years,

and for those who are still searching for that place to become real,

we bring before You now all those who come to our minds

and those who You lay on our hearts to pray for now

we hold silence and lift our prayers to the God who leans in to hear our cry

[a moment of silence is held]

Lord in Your mercy

HEAR OUR PRAYERS

We pray for all of creation,
where there is famine and drought,
where crops have failed or sources of food and sustenance have been damaged, destroyed
or cut off,
we ask for provision and for abundance where there is scarcity.
In the midst of climbing global temperatures that would melt ice caps
and irreparably damage habitat,
as we see plastic and pollution in the oceans and other water sources,
will You help us O God,
to live more responsibly, that we might work with You and the creatures of this world,
to tend to the earth and live well together.

[a moment of silence is held]

Lord in Your mercy
HEAR OUR PRAYERS

As we see conflict and division both near to us and far from us,
we seek peace and healing.
Where there is violence in word and in action – may it cease.
In the senseless attacks and killing
of those perceived to be different or a threat,
we cry out for mercy, for grace,
for love to prevail and to win out over death and destruction.
May all that fuels hatred be healed,
May any agenda contrary to Your way of peace and love be removed,
and may justice roll down like a mighty water,
to refresh hearts and minds,
to replenish cities laid waste,
may hopes and dreams flourish once more
that all might live in fullness and without fear.

[a moment of silence is held]

Lord in Your mercy
HEAR OUR PRAYERS

We pray for our leaders and our governments.
May they hold fast to what is right and just,
and may we see policies, decisions and actions
that make a fairer place for us all to live.
we call for an end to poverty of imagination and of circumstance,
an end to political grandstanding,
and that isolationist politics would cease allowing a better way to emerge,
where the hallmarks are grace, compassion, mercy and equity for all,
and that dignity would be recognised and celebrated,
rather than despised and denigrated.

[a moment of silence is held]

Lord in Your mercy
HEAR OUR PRAYERS

We pray now for ourselves,
God of compassion meet us here in our need.

[a moment of silence is held]

Lord in Your great mercy,
hear the prayers that have been said, whispered, imagined and felt.
We trust them to Your grace and mercy.

And we join now in the words that Jesus taught those early followers to say together
Our Father...

Blessing

God our Maker,
may we bring into being the world that You dream of.
Christ our Saviour,
may we be the followers and healers You call us to be.
Spirit of God,
may we know You guiding and comforting us and all whom we meet.
Send us now to be Your presence in the world,
to live out Your will, for Your glory. Amen

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music and words-only versions are now available; and digital resources, including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from

<https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

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

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

- GWA 31 – “You who fear the Lord, do not be afraid”. Based on Malachi 4:2
- GWA 93 – “Take heart” – A song for this season.
- GWA 224 – “Sing a new world into being”
- CH4 61 – “O sing a new song to the Lord” – Psalm 98

The Kingdom coming:

- CH4 472 – “Come, thou long expected Jesus”
- CH4 476 – “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord”
- CH4 261 – “Father Eternal, Ruler of Creation”

Witness

- CH4 248 – “For my sake and the gospel’s, go and tell redemption’s story”

Reflecting on our worship practice

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

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

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

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

- How inclusive was the worship?
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different "Spiritual Styles"?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?



Did it function well as a whole?

How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?

- How balanced was the worship?
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/
community?
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

God Welcomes All can be ordered from [Hymns Ancient & Modern](#)

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](#)

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