

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – 9 July 2023

The Faith Impact Programme would like to thank Rev Liz Crumlish, Priest in Charge, St Oswald's Scottish Episcopal Church, Maybole, for her thoughts on the sixth Sunday after Pentecost.

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

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

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

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the [Sanctuary First website](#).

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

I prefer to read the lectionary passages as early in the week as possible – so that they can be milling away in my thoughts as the week goes on. There are various websites, blogs and podcasts I'll listen to for inspiration, and I'm usually involved in discussions of the texts on various social media groups.

This week's passages have an overarching theme of discernment – from finding a wife for Isaac; through working out how to allow our nature to be overwritten by the goodness and love of God; to being confident in who we are as beloved of God, called into relationship with the one who bids us rest.

However, there is something about the closing words of the gospel reading – when Jesus invites us to find rest for our souls – that perhaps brings all the passages together, by taking us to the heart of who God is and how we are welcomed into that communion of saints through the ages as faith is passed on from generation to generation.

[Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67](#)

The story of Abraham is a story of faithfulness – in his old age he left all that he knew to go to a land where God would lead him. When, however, it was time to find a wife for his son Isaac, Abraham determined that that wife should be found in the land from which he had come. It was important for Abraham that the woman who would bear the “great nation” God had promised, would come from the midst of people who knew and followed God. The length of this narrative in Hebrew Scripture gives some indication of just how important this choosing a wife was for the generations that would come out of this match.

Abraham entrusted this task to his servant, making him promise to find a suitable woman in the land from which they came.

There is a lot of trust in this story – Abraham trusting his servant to complete the task, Rebekah's father, Bethuel and brother, Laban trusting the servant's story and, ultimately the trust of Rebekah in leaving her family to go with Isaac. I am curious about Rebekah's part in the story and what made her consent to leave all that she knew behind. Was she, too, convinced by the servant's story that God was at work in her life?

There is also the sense of a task accomplished – Rebekah's father and brother entreated the servant to stay a while but the servant, knowing that he had found a wife for Isaac, was keen to be on his way.

However strange this narrative seems today, it provides insight into the importance that Abraham placed on establishing the right grounding in faith for generations to come. For Abraham, the tradition and teaching that he sought could only be found in the people from whom he had come, and not in those whose experience of faith might already be waning in the new land to which God had called them. For Abraham, it was paramount that faith was passed on from generation to generation. We might consider how important that is for people of faith today and how it is accomplished.

Psalm 45:10-17

Psalm 45 is described as a love song – a fitting accompaniment to the first reading from Hebrew Scripture about a ‘match made in heaven’. The psalm elaborates on the sacrifice made by women as they leave the life they know.

I was struck by the notion in verse 14 of how the woman who obediently “leaves her father’s house” becomes an example for those who follow on – she leads her sisters. I wonder about the role that women have played, throughout the ages in carving a way through which others may walk and how seldom that is recognised.

Romans 7:15-25a

Wisdom assures us that, however much we long for a perfect Church, that perfection will be tarnished by our presence! When we point the finger at others there are three fingers pointing back at us – there’s just something about human nature that makes us most critical of those traits we see in others that are glaring in us.

It is this ‘dilemma’ that the apostle Paul is attempting to unravel in this passage. Often, we know what is right yet, perversely, we will not act in accordance with that knowledge. There is a defiance that goads us to make life more difficult for ourselves and others that we so often get caught up in.

This may sound self-defeating, but the point the Paul is making is that the Spirit of God can change our perverse nature. Paul explains this as some kind of ‘over-writing’ of the code by which we live so that we can overcome our instinct to live as people changed by God. Of course, Paul being Paul, explains that in a very complex fashion!

[Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30](#)

The gospel writer has a go at exemplifying how humans will never be universally liked – there will always be those who find any excuse to object to who we are and how we behave. This is a passage for having a bit of fun with – but the underlying message is that being confident in our own skin is a good trait to cultivate – when we try to please others, we will always come up short.

In the second part of this reading, there is a reminder that the wisdom of God is revealed to the most unlikely people – the very people whom Jesus exhorts to find rest in him.

Sermon ideas

I would probably choose to focus on the gospel out of these passages – inviting folk to think of a time when they have tried to change to please others, or to think of a time when it seemed that they just couldn't get things right... before sharing a reminder that God loves us as we are, something that can never be shared too often – and it is knowing ourselves loved and invited into relationship that enables us to know fulness of life.

There's also something fun in that passage that speaks of contrariness – and I'm reminded of the words of Maya Angelou:

*“Laugh as often as possible. You must.
Because the world will offer you every reason to weep.
So, as often as possible, you laugh.
That, I think, is part of the Great Love.”*

The second part of the gospel reinforces that message by reminding us of God's invitation to rest. God invites us to throw off the heavy yokes that the expectations of others place on us and to take on the lightness of God. This invitation follows the reminder that God chooses whom to share the mysteries of God with.

Prayers

As the texts live with me during the week, sometimes particular phrases will be more persistent than others and I'll use those in prayer. As an overall theme emerges, that will inform the prayers so that they feel part of the flow of worship, where one thing leads into the next. (Sometimes people express surprise that everything felt connected!)

Call to worship

In every age, in every place

You call Your people to worship

In every hour of every day

You invite us to rest in You

In this time and place, O God

We worship and rest in You.

Gratitude

God we thank You that You rate us

You rate us enough to share with us Your wisdom

Wisdom that comes

not from learning

not from study

but from instinct

that begins in the womb.

Wisdom that, through the years

becomes tarnished

dulled

diminished in us.

Overwhelmed

by the weight of years

by disillusionment

by cynicism.

Ground down

by hurt

and rejection.

Yet You persist.

You persist in calling us back

to that which we know instinctively

that we are loved

Loved as we are

and called to rest in You.

Forgive us our forgetfulness
and restore us.

Intercession

Lord, teach us to pray...
Teach us to pray with abandon,
not to limit our requests
but to pray big
for the impossible.

Lord teach us to pray...
Teach us to pray with audacity
not avoiding the evil that stalks our world
but to pray into hatred and violence
for Your kingdom to break out.

Lord, teach us to pray...
Teach us to pray with courage
Courage that names injustice,
calls it out, admits our complicity
and prays for lasting change.

Lord, teach us to pray...
Teach us to pray with conviction
that Your will
is for love and compassion
to flow like a river
that the prayers of all whom You love
are heard and answered.

Lord teach us to pray...
Teach us to pray with abandon,
with audacity,
with courage and with conviction.
Lord, teach us to pray.

Closing prayer

When the buzz of achievement wears off
Christ, You bid us rest
When we've given all we have to give
Christ, You bid us rest
When our resources seem exhausted
Christ You bid us rest

You bid us rest
not so that we can simply regroup and replenish
You bid us rest in You
so that we can be reminded of Your love
and Your desire to hold us close

You bid us rest.
Until, resting in You,
we find healing and strength
that enable us once more
to be open and vulnerable

But first,
in You we rest.

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 342 – “Says Jesus, ‘Come and gather round’” – echoing the words of the gospel that God chooses to share wisdom with unlikely suspects)
- CH4 404 – “I danced in the morning” – a reminder of the words in the gospel; they would not dance!

- CH4 540 – “I heard the voice of Jesus say” – Jesus inviting us to rest
- CH4 759 – “Come to me” – a chant suitable for reminding us of God’s invitation to rest
- “We played the flute! the Children Said” – (Carolyn Winfrey Gillete) Metre 8.8.8.8
Tune: CANONBURY
http://www.carolynshymns.com/we_played_the_flute_the_children_said.html

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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