

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter – Year C**

**Sunday 18 May 2025**

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Rosie Frew, Moderator Designate for the Church of Scotland General Assembly of 2025 and Rt Rev Shaw Paterson, Moderator of the Church of Scotland General Assembly 2024, for their joint thoughts on the Fifth Sunday after Easter.

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.

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Acts 11:1-18 .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Psalm 148 .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Revelation 21:1-6 .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>John 13:31-35.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Sermon ideas .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Prayers .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Musical suggestions .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Reflecting on our worship practice .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Useful links .....</b>	<b>17</b>

## Introduction

As Moderator and Moderator designate we have been asked to prepare Weekly Worship for Sunday 18 May 2025 together, and in conversation reflect on how the lectionary readings for this week tie in with the themes we have chosen for our respective years.

Shaw:

*I am sure you are all familiar with the 2024 theme: 'Building Together'. Not bricks and mortar or stone and lime, but the people who are the Church. The Church of Scotland is going through a period of great change and we need to reflect on how we can work together and build together, what is in reality, Christ's Church on the foundations He has laid.*

Rosie:

*The theme for 2025 is 'Extravagant Love', based on Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (Ephesians 3:14-19) – "that we may grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love."*

There are so many words we use to describe God's love for us – amazing, gracious, unmerited, unconditional, everlasting, steadfast, tender, constant, unchanging, the list goes on and on – wide and long and high and deep. So extravagant! We are called to know this love and show this love.

We're in the Fifth Sunday of Easter and it's all about the new. God doing a new thing, giving a new understanding. Jesus giving a new commandment. John's vision of a new heaven and a new earth.

## [Acts 11:1-18](#)

This passage follows on from Acts chapter 10, where, after a vision and an encounter with Cornelius in Caesarea, Peter's thinking is challenged and he goes on to declare "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." (verses 34 and 35). Jesus is Lord of all (verse 36). Now, in chapter 11, Peter is having to report back to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. It's a re-cap of chapter 10. He recounts this vision and encounter and explains his new understanding that God's love is not restricted, showing no partiality, or favouritism. The Good News is for Jew and Gentile. This is a transformative time in the life of the early church. God's love is wide and long and high and deep. Extravagant love.

We are all familiar with the phrase, “Are you all sitting comfortably, then I shall begin...” What follows would normally be a tale that cheers the heart and makes us all warm inside. When we read this passage from Acts, we hear that phrase... but in a different way. We hear God saying, “Are you all sitting comfortably... well, let me upset your warm cosy sense of sitting back and enjoying what comes next, let me challenge you.”

We must continually examine our ideas and views and opinions to discern not what we would like, but what God is telling us to do. One of the responsibilities of ‘Building Together’ is that we must recognise our differences – our differing gifts and abilities, together with differing views and opinions – and discern how God is urging us to grow, develop and build together that we might share God’s love more effectively with all people.

### **Psalm 148**

Some passages of scripture are best read without comment. Psalm 148 stands on its own. However, it is worth reflecting that it begins and ends with ‘Praise the Lord’, as do the two Psalms on either side of it (Ps 146 – 150). It offers unrestrained praise and encourages us, even in the midst of all the issues, tensions and challenges of our present time to look beyond and praise God.

Psalm 148 calls on the heavens and the earth below to praise the Lord because it was at God’s command that all was created, the same word used in Genesis 1 to describe God’s creative activity. Psalm 148 is referred to as one of the Creation Psalms inspired by St. Francis of Assisi in his writing of the hymn ‘The Song of Brother Sun.’ Its words were used, in part, to form the hymn ‘All Creatures of Our God and King.’

This Psalm is a wonderful call to worship. It’s a real celebration of God’s creation. Every aspect of creation, in heaven and on earth, everything, everyone praising God with joy, wonder and thanksgiving. What more can be said?

### **Revelation 21:1-6**

I still remember the first time I was aware of hearing this amazing passage being read in church. It sent a shiver down my spine. It still does – such beautiful words of hope and promise. It is just a few verses, but filled with such imagery – a new heaven and a new earth; a bride adorned for her husband; every tear wiped from every eye; making all things new; the spring of the water of life. It speaks to me of God’s love that is eternal, personal, comforting, transformational, filling. Extravagant love.

These verses contain beautiful words and wonderful imagery that reassure us that the home of God is among us, not distant and far away from us.

### [John 13:31-35](#)

To put this reading into context, Jesus knew that the hour had come for Him to leave this world. He shares a meal with His disciples, gives them an example of humble service as He washes their feet, predicts Judas's betrayal and then begins His farewell discourse, then His final words of instruction, promise and prayer before His arrest.

This is another passage that says so much. Let us home in on the new commandment – “love one another as I have loved you.” This is our challenge. Love with a love that is wide and long and high and deep. Love with a love that is gracious, generous, extravagant. “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples”.

I have quoted often over this past year the words of verse 35: *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* We must put our faith into action and love one another.

Faith is dynamic. Faith is action. It's not a noun, it's a verb, it's a doing word. People will know that we are Christians through our love, not through the traditions we follow or who our ancestors are. Therefore, we must continually be looking for ways to love one another. For whenever you did this for the least of these my children you did it for me... for Christ. Others will recognise our faith, not through the words we say, but through the things we do. When we 'do' we are building the Kingdom of God on the foundations set by Christ.

### **Sermon ideas**

All these passages chime well with the theme for 2025. They all speak of God's love that is high and long and wide and deep. A love that shows no favouritism, no partiality. A love we are to know and to show.

The reading from Acts chapter 11, and with reference to Acts chapter 10, tells a wonderful story of a pivotal time in the life of the early church. Unpacked for us in these 2 chapters is the challenge of a new understanding of God and his love, a new understanding of what Jesus came to do, a new understanding of the Holy Spirit, the breaking down of barriers between Jew and Gentile. Paul, in his teaching would go on to expand that 'there is no

longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.’ (Galatians 3:28)

Here's the first challenge for us – do we show favouritism and partiality? Do we restrict God's love? What are the barriers we have erected?

Moving to John's gospel we come to our second challenge - love one another as I have loved you. Jesus' love is a love we are to know and to show. How are we doing? Do people know we are disciples of Jesus by our love? Where are we failing? Who should we be loving? Who do we find it hard to love?

All the passages for today speak of love. Love is at the centre of our faith.

Love is how we can see God at work in the world, and as a community of faith we must live our lives to show love for God and for our neighbour. As I have already hinted, our faith isn't something that allows us to sit back and let it happen around us. Our faith is something we need to do, we need to be active.

The builder of the Panama Canal had to put up with criticism that he would never complete his project. But the builder kept going and said nothing. One of his assistants, who was becoming increasingly annoyed by the comments, asked the great engineer if he was ever going to answer his critics. “In time,” he said, “when the canal is finished.” ‘And they will know we are Christians by our love’, as the song goes but our job, our mission will never be finished... but people will see the results of our labours through the love we share.

Building people together, building the Church of Jesus Christ together, with an extravagant love as the cement binding us to each other and giving us strength.

## Prayers

### Gathering prayer / Call to worship

*Psalm 148 makes a wonderful call to worship:*

Praise the Lord!  
Praise the Lord from the heavens:  
**praise God in the heights above.**

Praise him, all his angels:  
**praise God, all His heavenly host.**

Praise him, sun and moon:  
**praise God, all you shining stars.**

Let them praise the name of the Lord:  
**PRAISE THE LORD!**

Praise the Lord from the earth:  
**praise God, great sea creatures.**

Praise him, storms and clouds:  
**praise God, mountains and hills.**

Praise him, fields and woods:  
**praise God, animals and birds.**

Praise him, rulers and nations:  
**praise God, old and young.**

Let them praise the name of the Lord:  
**PRAISE THE LORD! AMEN.**

*The Psalm can be used as a call to worship, or these verses can be used as a shorter, opening sentence:*

12 Young men and women alike,  
    old and young together!  
13 Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
    for his name alone is exalted;

#### • Confession / Repentance

Lord Jesus,  
You love us, each and every one of us.  
You love us, no favourites, no partiality.  
You love us with a love that is wide and long and high and deep.  
You love us.  
May we know the extravagance of that love in our hearts and our minds.

You love us.

May we show the extravagance of that love in our love for one another.

Lord Jesus,  
forgive us when we let You down –  
when we are hateful and not loving;  
when we are hurtful and not kind;  
when we are selfish and not generous;  
when we are prejudiced and not impartial.

Lord Jesus,  
Grant that we may love You wholeheartedly,  
and love one another as You love us,  
that everyone may know that we are Your disciples  
Amen

*Use the words below and develop, adapt or change, while incorporating silence after each line to allow people to add their own narrative to the confessions.*

Forgive us when we moan and complain,  
Forgive us when we are quick to point the blame.

Forgive us when all we do is express concern,  
Forgive us that we never seem to learn.

Forgive us for those things that take a toll,  
Forgive us for not recognising that we have a role.

Forgive us for the ways we have messed,  
Forgive us for not seeing how we are blessed.

Help us to know that we are forgiven,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord in heaven.

### • **Thanksgiving / Gratitude**

Loving God, we thank You.  
We thank You for your love -



wide, long, high, deep;  
amazing, gracious, unmerited, unconditional;  
everlasting, steadfast, unchanging, tender.

We thank You for the love of our families -  
those closest to us.  
Those who see us at our best and our worst.  
Those who have shared our good days and our bad.

We thank You for the love of friends -  
those we can confide in,  
those who are always there for us,  
to encourage and support us, to comfort and console us.

We thank You for the love of our brothers and sisters in Christ -  
in our congregation and parish,  
in our Church of Scotland,  
in the Church of Jesus Christ around the world,  
Who worship with us and pray for us.

## **Thanksgiving**

Almighty God,  
Thank You for making us and loving us.  
Thank You for putting us into the world but remind us  
that the world consists of more than me and us, but of all Your people everywhere.  
Thank You for sending Jesus to live and die for all the world.  
Thank You for His victory over death, the victory of Your love.  
Thank You for the joy of worship and the privilege of telling others the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Lord God, we are on a journey of building together that will honour You.  
Through Your Spirit we seek togetherness in the pursuit Christ's mission –  
our shared vision for the future.  
As we continue to build the church,  
instil within us a sense of purpose that transcends individual aspirations.  
Cultivate in us the fruits of Your spirit:  
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

May these virtues guide our interactions, shape our decision-making,  
and help us to build a church strong and secure on the foundations of Christ.  
Grant us a keen awareness of each other's strengths and weaknesses,  
so that we may build each other up where we are lacking  
and celebrate where we are strong.

Instil in us a sense of excitement to meet the challenges that lie before us.  
In the spirit of togetherness, we ask that Your Spirit will guide us in all we do.  
As we share our talents and energies, we seek the peace that comes from Your grace,  
asking that our work together would reflect the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world.

• **Prayer for others / Intercession**

*For the Church meeting in General Assembly (from Common Order)*

Almighty God,  
Your Son promised His disciples  
that He would be with them always.  
Hear the prayer we offer for Your servants  
now met in General Assembly.  
May Your Holy Spirit rest on them:  
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
a spirit of counsel and power,  
a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.  
Grant them vision and courage;  
unite them in love and peace;  
teach them to be trustworthy stewards  
of Your truth.  
And so, guide them in all their doings  
that Your kingdom may be advanced,  
Your people confirmed in their most holy faith,  
and Your unfailing love  
declared to all the world;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen

*The following prayer was used every day at last year's General Assembly:*

Lord God,

Keep us true to who we are.

Enable us to use the gifts You have given.

Bless us with Your Spirit that we might build upon the foundations of Christ  
as we seek to be Your church at work in the world.

I came across this prayer in the early years of my ministry in the book *Preaching on the Lord's Supper* by Ian MacLeod. It's a prayer I have used often.

Lord, Your love for mankind and for us today  
Is breath-taking.

We can only gasp and marvel  
When we consider that You cared and care for us  
As much as Your suffering and death reveal.

Lord, fill us with love and devotion to You,  
So that we may honour You with purer lives,  
With deeper reverence,  
And with a greater compassion in the service of others.

Lord, by the width of Your love,  
Teach us to care, as You cared,  
For the unloved and the unlovely,  
For the ungrateful and the ungracious,  
For the unhelpful and the unkind.

Lord, by the depth of Your love,  
Teach us to care, as You cared,  
Where caring hurts,  
Where caring is costly,  
Where caring demands sacrifice.

Lord, by the length of Your love,  
Teach us to care, as You cared,  
When we are tempted to give up,  
When our patience is sorely tried,  
When more is asked of us than we have to give.

Lord, strengthen us to follow Your example,  
Who came not to be served, but to serve,

And to give your very all for our sake.  
Amen

*This prayer begins by using some words written by Nick Fawcett (in Prayers for all Seasons):*

Let us pray...  
We come  
We talk,  
We hear,  
But do we listen?

We come  
We reflect  
We consider  
But do we learn?

We come  
We exchange greetings  
We share time  
But do we meet?

Lord,  
It's easy to talk of fellowship  
but it's hard to take the step of trust;  
easy to give our opinions  
but hard to receive those of others;  
easy to open our mouths  
but hard to open our souls.  
Come among us now  
and, through Your Spirit, draw us more deeply into Your love and closer to one another.  
Break down everything that prevents dialogue and denies fellowship,  
and so, instead of simply coming to another meeting  
Help us to truly meet together.

Almighty God, parishes and buildings, ministry and mission  
have been at the heart of much of our discussion for several years.  
Through Your spirit, draw us closer and enable us to build together for the future,  
cementing all we do on the foundations laid by Christ.

Guide the debates of the General Assembly,  
and keep the minds of all commissioners focussed on Christ, and His church –  
the church we serve – to share the Good News of our Risen Saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Bless the ministry and mission of each one of us  
as we seek to share Your love in our parishes and beyond.

- **Blessing / Closing prayer**

*This prayer from 'Prayers for the People' brings this time of worship to a fitting end.*

O God, we are Your children  
and You love us:  
so deep is Your love  
that nothing we have done, or thought to do,  
shall take away the peace You give;  
so strong is Your love  
that no passing trouble  
shall tear us from Your arms;  
so precious is Your love  
that all our life shall be lived in Your service –  
and Yours shall be the glory,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

or

May the sincerity of our worship and of our love for each other  
provide evidence to the world of the power of Christ,  
and may we be recognised as a living example of Christ's love.

## **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.

Songs that relate to Acts 11:1-18 –

- GWA 148 – “I will sing a song of love”
- CH4 123 – “God is love: let heaven adore him”
- CH4 193 – “God is love: his the care”
- CH4 359 – “He came down that we may have love”
- CH4 619 – “Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me”

Songs that relate to Psalm 148 –

- CH4 104 – “The Lord of heaven confess”
- CH4 105 – “Glory to God above!”
- CH4 147 – “All creatures of our God and King”

Songs that relate to Revelation 21:1-6 –

- CH4 473 – “Thy kingdom come!”
- CH4 557 – “O Love that wilt not let me go”
- CH4 749 – “Soon and very soon”

Songs that relate to John 13:31-35 –

- GWA 39 – “Love is patient, love is kind
- GWA 82 – “Here and now we’re bound together”
- GWA 129 – “Come set your rule and reign”
- CH4 110 – “Glory be to God the Father”
- CH4 115 – “Love is the touch of intangible joy”
- CH4 198 – “Let us build a house where love can dwell”
- CH4 519 – “Love divine, all loves excelling”
- CH4 622 – “We sing a love that sets all people free”
- Songs of God’s People (SOGP) 2 – “A new commandment that I give to you”
- A suggested playlist of songs from CH4 throughout the Easter period can be found on the Church of Scotland website (<https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me/playlist/easter> )

## 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](#)

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

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