

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – 24 July 2022

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank the Very Rev Dr Derek Browning, Minister of Morningside Parish Church, Edinburgh, for his thoughts on the seventh 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.

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

You may be hard-pressed to work out if there is a theme that links these passages. Perhaps it has to do with relationships. The intimate relationship between spouses and partners, and the equally intimate relationship between believers and God. What are the natures of those relationships? Where is there 'give and take'? Where is the support to be found, or not found? What are the parameters and ground rules?

The motif of faithfulness is writ large throughout the Bible. Fidelity and trust form an inherent part of the life of faith: between God and humanity; between humanity and the rest of the created order; between humans. Where there is no faithfulness, where there is no trust, the fabric of society frays and unravels.

Readings and Sermon ideas

[Hosea 1:2-10](#)

One of the more difficult texts from the prophets who wrote before the Babylonian exile, this passage intrigues, baffles and dismays by turns. The point of this reading is fairly clear, nevertheless: the relationship between God and Israel is similar to a marriage or relationship that has been shattered by an unfaithful partner. God, Who has been loyal, true and supportive, has been set aside by the object that God loves. But a time of reckoning approaches. However, God's final word in v10 is not one of destruction, but of hope and salvation and future.

Hosea wrote in northern Israel around 750-740 BC in a time of turmoil and political intrigue and violence. It is unsettling to think of God being knocked hard by the chosen people's unfaithfulness, and how God appears to go from righteous anger to broken-hearted forgiveness. Hosea's imaginative use of the intimate relationship allows us to imagine God experiencing love's suffering. Hosea makes his relationship and family into one that reads like a parable of broken promise and the tawdriness of what God's chosen people have done to the God Who had given them everything. Having an affair, living unfaithfully, in human relationships, has a knock-on effect far beyond the couple involved. Their children, wider family and friends often get drawn into the hurt and the pain.

We don't know why Gomer, Hosea's ultimate wife, turned to prostitution. Had she grown up in a dysfunctional family with sexual abuse? Were there economic reasons behind her decision? In today's world of modern-day slavery women and men are sold into prostitution every year, or enter prostitution as the means to pay for a drug habit, or simply to earn

enough to subsist. Some scholars suggest that Gomer was a ‘sacred prostitute’, associated with the ‘cult’ religion of Baal, and attached to a local shrine.

Hosea understands something about the essential nature of Israel’s God. This God demands justice and faithfulness and will not tolerate a relationship where these are not front and centre. And yet, the God of judgment is also the God of mercy, and God’s chosen people are connected to the Divine by ties that can never truly be dissolved. Hosea writes about the anguish of God Who cannot ultimately let go even of those who turn away. It is both a poignant and powerful image of a God Who goes beyond what humanity can manage. “God promises to do what human beings ought to do but cannot.” (*Elizabeth Achtemeier, ‘Minor Prophets’.*) Our relationship with God, our long-suffering God is not dependent on us. God holds, until we “turn, return, repent, relinquish, and come back.” (*William Willimon, Feasting on the Word, Year Volume 3.*)

[Psalm 85](#)

For a community, church, nation or world that are going through tough times, Psalm 85 looks with confidence to a God Who continues to encourage and embody incarnation. Some scholars suggest that there is an echo here in the Old Testament of what the angels sing in Luke 2:14, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased!”

The writer of this psalm comes with the lament of the people but moves the song on to one of hope and blessing and the graciousness of God. This is an unequivocal word of peace spoken in God’s own voice.

But before we get to that, we find something gritty and real in the psalm. How do we bridge the gulf between what many believe fundamentally about God and the often fractured reality of everyday life? Does suffering affect what we believe, and have an impact on what kind of relationship we have with God?

One of the healthy traits in the Psalms is the robust relationship the Psalmist has with God. Here is someone unafraid of asking God hard questions and expecting an answer. This is a real faith in a real God and dealing with real issues. The psalm also addresses the issue that is often at the heart of everyday faith – it can grow stale and dry. Our faith, if we don’t think about it and exercise it, can often feel like a muddling through. Our faith, if there is no discipline in it, and no intentionality about it, can soon become something that is very ‘surface’ and without deep roots.

The Psalmist wants the reassurance of hearing God's voice, that intimate, up-close-and-personal connection with the Almighty. How often, in the midst of our busy lives, and in the midst of our troubles, do we pause and make a quiet space to hear what God has to say to us? Particularly when the word of God to the people of Ancient Israel, and to us, is what we most need to hear: "Peace" (v8). Particularly important, when it accompanies God's promise of, "steadfast love" (v10).

Our waiting, of course, is not passive but active. When we call out to God in prayer, the call is to, "Restore us again" (v4). There is a slight sense of the same *engagement* with God that we enter into when we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come." God will act, but in God's action there is a built-in presumption that God's people will respond.

In any time of spiritual dryness and tiredness on our part, here is God's abundant and overflowing and gracious response. We come to God with our worries and woes, but they are not the last word. God will revitalise us and restore us. God's word to us in this psalm is to turn, and turn again, until at last we encounter God, and then walk with God.

[Colossians 2:6-15](#)

Jesus is a gift, and the children of God receive Jesus as a gift from God. Jesus forms the basis of our lives of faith. Jesus is at the foundation of what we believe. Not only are we 'rooted' in Jesus, receiving nourishment from Him we are also 'built up' in Him – in other words receiving strength and stability.

There are many siren voices that seek to lure the unwary away from the basics of faith, and the essential relationship that we are to have with Jesus. If our relationship with Jesus is shallow, and not well-rooted, it often does not take much to rock the foundations. It is why Christian faith is not something that we receive merely as instruction in our youth, rather it should be part of an ongoing commitment to learning, and relating, and thinking and wondering. I wonder how many take the time to have a 'refresher course' in what they believe? Sadly, many seem to stop at Sunday School classes, and then are surprised that that basic teaching does not always see them through adult life, particularly when times are hard.

As humans, we have been shaped and created to make meaning out of life, and faith. The search for meaning, faith that is continually seeking understanding, shapes our basic identity. What do we stand for? What do we believe in? What difference does knowing these things in life make to the way in which we live our lives? Another reality, certainly within the Christian family of faith, is that none of us is completely self-made. All of us, at

some point or other, need to acknowledge that our identity as an individual is shaped by many contexts: family, education, economics, the society in which we live, the Church in which we continue to express our lived-out faith.

This is why baptism, the entry point into the Christian faith, is of such crucial importance. It is an event that touches the life of the individual, but it is embedded within the faith experience of the community of believers. There is something incredibly moving and powerful when the congregation is invited to welcome children and adults at baptism, and to live before them in a kindly and Christian way, sharing with them the knowledge and love of Jesus. It is a life and death matter, which is why living and dying and burying and rising again, continue to have that somewhat jarring pre-eminence in the words of a baptismal service. Baptism matters. It's where our faith journey finds its rooting and grounding. It is indeed a matter of life and death and new life again. We work at it, and we work with Christ and our fellow followers of Christ.

[Luke 11:1-13](#)

One of the key ways in which we maintain our relationship with God, and include our fellow humans around us, is through prayers. Prayer can be intensely personal and publicly uplifting. Prayer is the essence of God's Spirit weaving Her way around and between and through us, encouraging us to speak, listen, engage, think, and act. Prayer tunes us in to the mind of God and the feelings of God and has nothing to do with us telling God what God must and must not do.

That being said, if there is only insipid obeisance in our prayer life, and none of the robust dialogue that we find, for example, in the Psalms, then we miss something out of the relationship we have with the Creator. We may be creatures, but we are not doormats when it comes to God's relationship with us.

The indispensability of prayer emerges from the fact that it puts those who pray in touch with God's incredible generosity and continuous presence. When we pray, we can be assured God always listens. When we pray, are we sure we listen as much as we speak? Scholars suggest that the difference between the two versions of the Lord's Prayer we have in the gospels of Matthew and Luke are likely to stem from the various ways prayer evolved in the earliest churches' worship. Both versions offer 'corporate petitions', consistently speak in the first-person plural, reminding us that Jesus envisages communities together in prayer, as much as solitary individuals. We remember that it was the disciples as a group who came to Jesus with their request, "Lord, teach us to pray." It remains a request people

make to this day, still finding it challenging to find the right words, and silences, in their prayer life. With the Lord's Prayer, our prayers need never be wordless.

There is nothing magical nor mysterious about good prayer. It is not the preserve of the 'professional' alone. It need not cover every topic under the sun, but may include thanksgiving, confession and intercession. Which is why the Lord's Prayer is so wonderfully refreshing and is why it's often the one prayer we all commit to memory. It is a deeply accessible prayer that lifts us to God in praise, in awareness of our needs, and in acceptance of the way in which our loving God meets our needs.

Prayer was an intrinsic part of Jesus' life. Jesus expects the same of all His followers. Its opening emphasises the intimacy of prayer, as it is addressed to "Our Father". God's power over all is undoubted, but never rush over the power of that simple and inclusive word, "Our." It is there for a reason and should, consistently, stop us in our tracks.

The prayer goes on, with admirable directness, with, "Give us...Forgive us...Lead us...Deliver us..." Confident in that place within God's family love, we are **bold** to pray. Being direct is not equated to being disrespectful. God can handle it.

The verses that follow the Lord's Prayer in this richest of lectionary texts serve only to reinforce the point that the prayers has made. "Ask...seek...knock..." Prayer is not merely a passive exercise of piety. It can have passion, it can have pointedness, it can have persistence.

Luke's writing invites us to reflect on the story and the reality of our prayer life. Who taught us, and when? It's a lesson we keep learning, we must always ask, "Lord, teach us to pray." In the asking, and the listening, is also the doing, and the sharing, and the putting into practice.

Prayers

Scripture sentence

"He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:25)

Collect of the day (*from Common Order*)

O God, the protector of all who trust in You,
without You nothing is strong, nothing is holy.
Increase and multiply upon us Your mercy,

that with You as our ruler and guide
we may so pass through things temporal
that we lose not the things eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever and ever.

Prayers of adoration and confession

Most Holy God,
we take this moment to pause, and wonder, and bless.
Your greatness balanced by Your nearness.
Your judgment balanced by Your mercy.
How we should praise You!

As we still ourselves before Your majesty, and wait in awe,
yet we are also bold to lift up our eyes
to see You, face to face.
We call You our King, our Saviour, our Inspiration, our Friend.
Too often we rush by and fail to take that time
to marvel and exclaim at the wonder of this world,
the intricacy of creation,
the abundance of good things You have given us to enjoy and to share.

This day, Lord, we sing Your praises!
This day, Lord, we rejoice in Your generosity!
This day, Lord, we are glad You continue to reach out to us, even us, with love.

Forgiving God,
it does not take us long to stumble from the high peak of praise,
to the low valley of brokenness as the awareness our sin
engulfs like darkening cloud.
Not only the major flaws in our character,
but the petty triviality that trips us daily.
Forgive us the hasty word, the harsh thought,
the too-easy judgment, the spiteful action.
Why, with all the potential You have knitted into our souls,
do we, so easily, slip into bad habit, shameful action,
unhealthy obsession, lazy forgetfulness?

O gracious God, have mercy on us.
Forgive us, remake us, redeem us, restore us.
When all seems lost beyond hope,
yet still You reach out in tenderness and kindness
to make that difference in our hearts and souls and minds,
to reinstate the broken relationship,
to give us the second chance we sorely need.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Prayers of intercession

Eternal God,
we may only see our small corner of this earth,
You will see the whole expanse of countless universes,
yet we are called to bring our prayers
not only for ourselves,
but for those around us.

In a world fraught with fear and violence and greed,
we pray that darkness is driven out by the light
of compassion, of open-handedness, and of peace.
Let these not be mere words we pray,
but words we put into action through our support
of causes and charities and individuals who make it
their mission to be the light-bearers in every darksome place.

We pray today for the healers who practise their gentleness
in every hurt place of heart and soul and body.
Where the encouraging word, and the unflinching compassion
brings hope like a cleansing flame into every wound.

We pray today for the teachers whose gift of thinking and words
enrich our mind and help us grow and develop and mature.
Especially today we thank You for those who taught us to pray,
who formed the ideas and the rhythms and cadences
that to this day give texture, colour and shape
to the relationship we have with You, our living God.

We pray for our Queen and country, and all who are called to be the decision-makers in our society at every level.
For politicians and economists. For artists and scientists.
For farmers and business owners.
For those who provide our energy and secure our safety.

We pray for our world in its beauty and fragility,
the astonishing resources, and the unsustainable demands we make on them.
As we seek to form a new relationship with You, our God, and with our sisters and brothers,
let us also seek to form a new relationship with this Earth we call our home.
Nurturing it, tending it, stewarding its beauty and energy,
not only for ourselves, but also for the generations still to come.

O Holy God,
so much to pray for; one prayer is not enough,
so may our pledge this day be to offer new prayers
each morning, each night,
as we revel in Your presence, humble ourselves in Your mercy,
strengthen ourselves in Your love.
Through Christ our Saviour and Lord.
Amen

Offertory prayer

Gracious Lord,
when we review the ways in which
You continue to break in upon our lives,
showering us with gifts and wonder,
we are reminded how we, in our living
should emulate that same generosity.

Remind us the best giving is cheerful,
and that the unclenched hand is more fitted to sharing.
Accept what we offer:
our time, our talents and our money,
and all that we have and are.
So that this world, our world, Your world,
need not be gripped by fear or want,
or lack of shelter, or lack of friends.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Benediction

Into every relationship that is dear to us,
into every relationship that is hard for us,
send health, and steadiness, and hopefulness,
modelled upon the relationship You, loving God, have with us.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you all, this day, and forevermore.
Amen

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 1 – “How blest are those who do not stray”
- CH4 27 – “I will always bless the Lord”
- CH4 87 – “Lord, from the depths to thee I cried”
- CH4 128 – “How shall I sing that majesty”
- CH4 135 – “O Laughing Light”
- CH4 174 – “God of great and God of small”
- CH4 189 – “Be still, for the presence of the Lord”

- CH4 192 – “All my hope on God is founded”
- CH4 225 – “Summer suns are glowing”
- CH4 261 – “Father eternal, Ruler of creation”
- CH4 268 – “O God of Bethel! by whose hand”
- CH4 352 – “O for a thousand tongues to sing”
- CH4 485 – “Dear Lord and Father of mankind”
- CH4 488 – “Teach us, O loving heart of Christ”
- CH4 519 – “Love divine, all loves excelling”
- CH4 547 – “What a friend we have in Jesus”
- CH4 562 – “Through the love of God our Saviour”
- CH4 605 – “Thanks to God whose Word was spoken”
- CH4 617 – “Great and deep the Spirit’s purpose”
- CH4 625 – “O thou who camest from above”
- CH4 738 – “Glorious things of thee are spoken”

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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