

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost – Year C

Sunday 2 November 2025

This week's Weekly Worship is drawn from the archive material of the late George Cowie and Dr Mark Calder from World Vision.

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

This Sunday is the nearest in the Church's calendar to All Saints Day which provides an opportunity for us to reflect on the faithfulness of Christian people, both past and present, not least those who have taken risks and made sacrifices for the sake of their faith and for the values that faith inspires.

They contain the cries of people who are trying to remain true, despite difficult circumstances.

They contain stories of transformation as people chose the ways of God rather than the selfish priorities of the world.

This archive material was written in 2022 as many in our communities were beginning to see and feel the impacts of the cost of living crisis: on their finances and living standards, and perhaps on their mental and physical wellbeing. Meanwhile, instead of the greater social solidarity we hoped the pandemic would foster, we saw the worsening of inequality, with vast profits being made by some at the same time as people (even some employed full-time) were unable to meet their basic costs. The unfairness of this was exacerbated by a political discourse frequently lacking compassion for those most marginalised and disempowered.

Enabling our congregations to find their predicaments, and the world's immeasurable pain, reflected in scripture can provide some solace. It is a great gift that the Bible doesn't gloss over this kind of reality, and today's readings help us to live our faith with both a more clear-eyed view of our world's unhappiness and disorder, *and* the presence of a God who draws hope from despair, justice from injustice, and life from death.

The difficulties that we are facing throughout the world, some more pointedly than others, and with repercussions that can be exacerbated by access and means, and by the gravest of circumstances – means that we now more than ever need to consider what our theology, liturgy and teaching is doing in terms of healthy faith formation. How are we enabling people to unearth discipleship practices that allow them to follow Jesus faithfully into places and spaces of hurt and work for healing; to creatively consider and craft reconciliation and peace; or to turn tables and seek justice even when it is uncomfortable or costly.

Habakkuk 1: 1-4; 2:1-4

These verses begin with the prophet imploring the Lord and posing a great question: 'Why is injustice allowed to prevail?' Habakkuk was greatly perturbed by the Lord's apparent failure to act. Yet, within himself, the prophet believed that God hadn't abandoned God's people and would eventually send an answer. In time the Lord did provide a message of assurance, confirming '... there is still a vision for the appointed time.' Far from abandoning God's faithful people, God's purposes of justice would yet prevail.

These eight verses distil a longer, quite extraordinary exchange between the Prophet Habakkuk and Yahweh, and it may be worth encouraging our congregations this week to spend time reading and meditating upon the full, often troubling and ambiguous, exchange.

If we find it extraordinary, though, this may have more to do with our expectations of prayer and the register in which we usually address God in worship, rather than the expectations created by the Bible. In fact, scripture is full of such audacious complaint to God – complaint is a key part of biblical lament, that literary terrain in which scripture makes space for human perspectives on pain, suffering, injustice, and loss.

Often in the space of a service, or a sermon, we are addressing issues that cannot be rushed, or neatly answered. How are we enabling our congregations and communities to sit and dwell with these issues, encouraging them to look to God in the silence and seeming inaction – and in that space of waiting, allow God's presence and the Holy Spirit to help shape our response?

Psalms 119:137-144

The Psalmist tells of their confidence in the justice of God and of their faithfulness to God's law. Verse 141 records, 'I am small and despised, yet I do not forget your precepts.' We can perhaps conclude that the writer endured oppression from others, but unlike Habakkuk, does not seem grieved by this apparent injustice. The Psalmist still felt secure in their own spiritual journeying and had confidence that the law of God would ultimately prevail.

The Psalmists, here and elsewhere (e.g. Psalm 19) view God's law as a lavish gift, an insight into God's heart, and an enduring measure against which all people's conduct – rich and powerful, poor and powerless alike – can be evaluated. It is therefore something that the 'small and despised' can lean upon when their rights are denied. Liberals and evangelicals alike have often focused on the respective attributes of specific laws, but the Torah's

narrative contextualisation of the legal texts should remind us of the radical nature of a Bronze Age society pursuing order according to a statement of the inviolable dignity of all. It was a law that had no need for kingship until the people demanded it. We do not grasp the beauty of this easily if we focus on idiosyncrasies of a legal code made for ancient eastern Mediterranean agrarian society, but in many respects the economics of the Torah are more progressive and equalising than anything modern humans have sustained. The Torah is therefore an expression of the Word, the divine relationality itself, which should weave its way through Christian sociality in the church and through the church to all people.

‘Your promise is well tried’, the psalmist is drawing us towards trusting God, not through statements that we need take as true, with no real substance or proof, but rather is eluding to God’s faithfulness and consistency in being present and ... ‘give me understanding that I might live’ – is not a seeking of why? The sort of need for an answer that either ties us up in knots or makes us frozen in time. Often the why question does not bear any fruit, because things just happen. It is the nature of things that it is not only the good that we experience - it is not why it has happened that is important, but how we faithfully live out our response, just as God faithfully empowers us to do so and indeed journeys with us into the heart of even the most profoundly challenging questions and circumstances.

2 Thessalonians 1: 1-4, 11-12

Whatever the dating of this epistle, it is clear that the Christian community in Thessalonica continued to encounter opposition. The letter begins by commending the people’s faithfulness despite the persecution and suffering that they faced. In the final verses of this passage the writer promises to keep praying for the Christian believers, that they may stay true to their calling, to the glory of God.

The editorial cut in this reading means we lose the referent of v11, which is the hope of enduring vindication and the destruction of the evil powers persecuting them. ‘To this end...’, this hope, continue the Apostles, we pray ‘that God will make you worthy of his call’.

This is a rather curious comment, suggesting that in some sense their admirable faith and love is not in itself their worthiness, nor that this worthiness is something attained once and for all. Instead it is a function of the power of God within the community, of which their faith and love is an expression.

It is not uncommon to note the remarkable spirit that animates our siblings in the faith in contexts marked by oppression and deprivation – notably in the global south. We need not romanticise such people and their hardship to assert this, nor should we stop praying for

the ongoing sustaining work of God among them in order to continue to bear the fruit that we currently discern.

However, we should also pray that, as circumstances around us turn markedly for the worse, our church communities would not be holy huddles barricaded against the world, but expressions of loving solidarity *and* hospitality in which an alternative, Christ-shaped way of being together is made available to our neighbours, a way of being that is robust in the face of injustice, and gentle with the stranger that arrives at our table.

With the rise of concerning expressions of nationalism throughout the UK that point fingers and make scapegoats of those seeking hospitality and refuge, we face a deepening challenge to shape our communities as places of radical hospitality and welcome, as we seek to recognise and dignify all our neighbours – who we are called to love as we love ourselves and love God. How might we faithfully live this out in our communities – what might it look like in the midst of our local context?

[Luke 19:1-10](#)

The account of Zacchaeus is only contained in the gospel of Luke, but is perhaps one of the best-known stories about Jesus.

For Zacchaeus this encounter with Jesus was to be transforming. His life had previously been focused on the accumulation of personal wealth, but he immediately pledged to give half of his possessions to the poor. Moreover, Zacchaeus pledged to provide fourfold restitution to any whom he had defrauded. In so doing Zacchaeus was doing far more than was required under the Torah. This was a free and heartfelt response from a man who had been found by Jesus. It is symbolic that the meaning of his own name was then fulfilled: Zacchaeus, ‘the pure’ had also found his true self, discovering God’s intentions for his life.

We tend to think we know who ‘the marginalised’ are – invariably they are those for whom we have sympathy. But most of us have people whose political views or behaviours or apparent complicity with injustice make them beyond the pale for us – our opponents, even enemies. The Zacchaeus story tells us that, whether we like it or not, Jesus has a heart for those in *these* margins too.

Jesus’ insistence that Zacchaeus’ inclusion begins with showing hospitality: ‘I *must* stay at your house’. The one whom nobody would entertain as guest is now the host of Jesus Himself.

And his belonging to this upside-down kingdom, this new social order is expressed even more fully by his lavish gift, above and beyond his debt, to the poor – to those who cannot repay him. In so doing, according to the norms of his culture, Zacchaeus was throwing away his social capital to discover a new kind of belonging, with Jesus, in the household of God.

It is a beautiful and challenging story of a way of belonging together that could be especially needed in times of great hardship and deep division.

Sermon ideas

Made for the glory of God.

A sermon could centre on the story of Zacchaeus, in particular focusing on the inner transformation that enabled him to fulfil his created purpose and even to be more deserving of his name meaning ‘pure’. Reference could be made to the Westminster Shorter Catechism: the chief end of humanity is to glorify God, and to enjoy God forever.

The sermon could explore the contrast between the self-seeking worldly priorities that all too easily dominate our lives and the very different priorities of God’s Kingdom, which call us instead to give of ourselves. A useful illustration may be the story of John Newton (1725-1807), whose own journey of faith resulted in a transition from slaver to abolitionist.

Reflecting on Habakkuk’s distress that injustice often seems to thrive unchecked. When God seems to be silent it can hard to believe that God’s purposes will eventually triumph.

At times our faith is challenged and we share the cry, ‘How long, O Lord?’ Yet, as people of the resurrection we have a reason for hope and can trust that the light will eventually shine.

Today’s readings speak to different facets of righteousness and justice, but one notable thread throughout is the *relational* quality of righteousness. These texts know no dis-attached, individualised piety, but a particular responsiveness and attentiveness to one’s neighbour and the wholeness of our community.

Importantly, this isn’t just a feature of the New Testament readings but of the Hebrew Bible texts as well. Righteousness – *Şedaqah* – is expressed by a heart that is oriented towards, and reaches for the wellbeing, of one’s neighbour – especially the survivor of injustice and exploitation, but also, in a different way, the one to be held in contempt for their complicity in it.

Ask the congregation how they feel when they think of the state of our country today. Ask them how they feel about the state of our politics, the state of our hungry and conflict-ridden world more generally, and the birthplace lottery that means some children simply lack the basics they need.

Ask them to linger on their emotional response to these realities.

Ask them if it is fair.

Our scriptures give us the opportunity to spend time together in the questions these feelings evoke. How can a God-ordered world be so utterly unfair, unjust? Where is God in all of this anyway? And what is the right response to the Zacchaeuses of the world, the 'one percent' who apparently benefit on the backs of the poorest?

Simply the fact that our scriptures preserve long passages in the voice of bewildered humans interrogating an apparently absent God tells us something important. God honours this questioning.

All of these readings challenge us to create – or implore God's work among us to establish – communities of radical inclusion which we, in our own power, find simply impossible to create. Yet, though this is not 'our' work as such, God has chosen partnership with people as a way of revealing God's character in and to the world.

Holding space within our worship to let God speak is particularly important when grappling with difficult issues. Often silence (especially as we may be tempted to answer questions that in fact take a long time to answer through living faithfully) – so, instead of rushing and straying toward easy platitudes or soundbites – allow silence and space for reflection, or to feel the weight of the question. Hold a space for God to be known rather than heard (or perhaps that too) may well be wise.

Prayers

Prayers of approach, confession and supplication

Call to prayer

Be glad, because of Your Creator;

rejoice, because of Your king!

Praise God's name with dancing;

play drums and harps in praise of God.

(From Psalm 149 vs 2, 3)

Let us pray

Lord our God:
with the music of our instruments
and with the songs of our lips
we worship and praise You this morning.
For You are the creator who inspires our wonder
and the king who deserves our service.

What can we do for You, Lord God Almighty?
How can we respond to Your kindness towards us?
No gift could ever be enough to repay Your love
or to do justice to the good things that You have given.
We can but praise You with rejoicing voices
and with the silent adoration of our hearts.

Silence

Most gentle God:
we confess that we do not always feel like praising You.
We lose sight of Your wonder in the ordinary places
and we forget Your goodness when times are hard.
Forgive us when we dishonour You,
and help us when we find ourselves struggling.
Lead us gently onwards to brighter and to better places,
where we can regain a vision of Your glory.

Almighty God:
awaken us now to Your living presence
as we gather here within Your house.
Pardon our inadequate efforts,
and complete our offering with Your abundant grace.
Enable us to praise You with the music of worship
and also with the music of our lives.

We offer these and all our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who taught us to pray together, saying,
Our Father ...
Amen

Gathering

God - Creator, Word, and Spirit,
You call us together in our inadequate diversity
to reflect Your perfect community in our world.
Be among us today that we may express
the Most Sacred
in our ordinariness.

Confession

Almighty God,
our hearts are open to You,
our desires known to You,
and therein lurk the divisions and hostilities
that scar our world,
leaving millions of Your children
wounded, grieving, hungry.

Thank You that these are the very walls
Christ came to break down.
Thank You that You have already forgiven
and made possible a new community in Your Spirit.
Turn our thoughts from our own safety and security
to the glory of Your name
that it may be expressed in our living for the wholeness of society,
beginning here in this church.
Amen

Thanksgiving

Creator God,
Thank You that you made space for us –
for all created things –
within the Divine Communion.
Thank You for Your abundant generosity
as we name our blessings ...

All things come from You,
and of Your own we give You, as we commit again
to live as channels of Your peace
in a world marked by conflict.
Amen



Prayer for others

Healing God,
We pray for Your groaning world
and strain to hear Your groaning with us:
with those living with
poverty
war
oppression
sexual and gender-based violence
hunger
and the daily denial of their dignity as Your children.

Tune our hearts to Your pain
that we may recognise You even in the midst of great evil.
We pray for those with power and influence: *[you may wish to list some names here]*
We pray for those seeking to serve those at the margins
and in the most dangerous places.

We pray for those closer at hand suffering
from sickness
bereavement
loneliness
that they would know You close at hand,
and for those fearing the near end of life,
that You would grant them a perfect end.

From the Book of Common Prayer:

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son:
Look with compassion on the whole human family;
take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts;
break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love;
and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth;
that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony
around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing – Ephesians 5:1

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children.
Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.

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 1 – “The Lord is a home for all the oppressed” – God hears our cries and speaks of God’s righteous judgement.
- GWA 29 – “In ages past the mighty Lord” – a song of the Prophets, with a particular verse for Habakkuk.
- GWA 223 – “The kingdom of God is justice and peace”
- GWA 226 – “God of all comfort, God of compassion” – a song for justice covering many aspects such as poverty, marginalisation, equity.
- CH4 79 – “Teach me, O Lord, the perfect way” – a hymn based on the reading from Psalm 119
- CH4 160 – “Praise, my soul, the King of heaven” – a hymn of approach, expressing faith in the timeless care of God. Alternate non-gendered version can be found [here](#)
- CH4 200 – “Christ is made the sure foundation” – 7th or 8th C. (Tr. JM Neale)



- CH4 362 – “Heaven shall not wait”
- CH4 488 – “Teach, O loving heart of Christ”
- CH4 511 – “Your hand O God has guided” – a hymn to conclude worship reflecting on the Church’s distinctive and continuing purpose in the world.
- CH4 528 – “Make me a channel of your peace” – a hymn based on the prayer of St Francis and illustrating the way of self-giving to which we are called.
- CH4 566 – “When I receive the peace of Christ”
- CH4 572 – “So much wrong and so much injustice” – from the Arabic (Tr. John Bell). A classic Lebanese Good Friday hymn reflecting on the unjust death of Christ, through which we can reflect on injustice affecting Christ’s children in the world, and the truth of God with us in the midst of it. See the original as sung by Fairuz, here: [Fairuz - Wa Habibi - YouTube](#)
- CH4 625 – “O thou who camest from above”
- CH4 706 – “For the healing of the nations”
- CH4 720 – “There is a longing in our hearts”
- CH4 740 – “For all the saints, who from their labours rest” – a hymn to conclude worship, particularly apt for All Saints, giving thanks for lives of Christian service.
- “Things are not OK” – Jon Thurlow
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvcnNWJ7a6I>
- “The Kingdom of God is Justice and Joy”
[The kingdom of God is justice and joy — RSCM Hymn for the Day #84 - YouTube](#)
- “Away with our sorrow and care” – Wesley Tune: Uxbridge/Hymn of Eve
[Away with Our Sorrow and Care \(Charles Wesley\) - YouTube](#)
- “O Be Still My Soul” – Celtic Worship - Steph Macleod, Benji Cowart & Nathan Jess
[O Be Still My Soul \(Official Audio Video\) | Celtic Worship - YouTube](#)

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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