

## Fifth Sunday in Lent – Year B

**Sunday 17 March 2024**

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Steve Aisthorpe, Centre Director at Kilmalieu Christian retreat and environmental restoration centre, and former Church of Scotland Mission Development Worker, for his archive material from 2021 for the fifth Sunday in Lent.

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: <https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship>

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

An important element in my own reflection on scripture is to 'take it for a walk'. Pilgrimage has been called 'praying with the feet', but we don't need access to any special route nor the time for a protracted journey. There is something about the rhythm of placing one foot in front of another, the sense of space, the interaction with nature (even in an urban environment) and the ever-changing surroundings, that provide a fertile context for meditation. Walking provides an opportunity for curiosity, wonder and reasoning to work their digestive processes on Holy Scripture. When our mini pilgrimages take us through the communities in which we live and serve, ancient words find particular relevance and application as we carry our contemplations on ancient texts into encounters with contemporary people and experiences of local places.

As we wander and pray, the assorted voices of biblical writers combine and harmonies materialise. Ruminating on different passages enables us to notice points of connection and contrast. This week's passages, while different in many ways, are interlaced by powerful themes: hope and expectation, forgiveness and fresh starts, God's initiative in forging a relationship with God's people.

Within some Christian traditions, this fifth Sunday of Lent is 'Passion Sunday'. As such it marks the start of 'Passiontide', the final two weeks of Lent, ending on Holy Saturday. In some parts of Scotland and northern England, Passion Sunday is also known as 'Carling Sunday'. Traditionally a dish of parched peas cooked in butter, called a 'carling', was eaten on this day, a meal associated with the time when Jesus' disciples plucked and ate heads of wheat on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1).

This Sunday is also sometimes referred to as 'Care Sunday', but 'care' in the sense of suffering. This is the time when the suffering of the Lord Jesus becomes the focus of the church's attention. A week before Palm Sunday, we begin to meditate on the intense sorrow Jesus endured on His road to the cross and, shortly afterwards, to resurrection and victory.

As well as being an important stepping stone on the journey towards Easter, there are some days around this time that are recognised by the United Nations and may offer opportunities for making connections with things going on in your local community or advocating for important causes.

20 March is International Day of Happiness; 21 March marks the International Day of Forests; and 22 March is World Water Day. Information about these is available on the UN

website: [www.un.org/en/observances](http://www.un.org/en/observances). It is also 20 March is also Nowruz, the Iranian New Year, also known as the Persian New Year. 21 March is World Down Syndrome Day, and also the Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Might one of these have special resonance for some in your local church family or community?

### **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

The words “The days are surely coming” (v31) are packed with promise, brimming with hope. Nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible is the expectation of a new era more explicit. Jeremiah’s prophecies reach a climax here. The central theme, the assured “new covenant”, has (through the Latin language) brought us the name of the final portion of our Christian Bible: ‘the New Testament’.

These verses are like a portal between the two parts of our Christian scriptures. Centuries later, the writer of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah at length as a means of making sense of what has occurred (Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:16-17). In fact, this passage from Jeremiah provides the most substantial portion of Hebrew scripture quoted in the New Testament.

This ‘high watermark’ of Messianic prophecy looks beyond the immediate context of the Assyrian regime teetering on the brink of collapse and the superpowers of Babylon and Egyptian struggling for world domination. Jeremiah is used by God to provide one of the clearest glimpses of the radically different age that will be initiated in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

What do you think Jeremiah’s original hearers imagined? Could they have imagined how God would fulfil these promises? As Soren Kierkegaard observed, ‘Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.’ Wondering how those of the prophet’s own era (and Jeremiah himself) understood this prophesy should encourage humility in us as we wonder how God’s promises will work out. It should also foster deep trust and hope: here is an unconcealed reminder that God’s plans are revealed and God gives us good reason to hope and pray. “Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). See also John 15:15.

Having evoked hope of a new era, Jeremiah emphasises that this will not be just another renewal of the old covenant. What is envisaged here is deeper: dealing with the underlying issue, tackling humankind’s rebellious nature. The problem of the heart is at the heart of so much suffering – and that is where God intervenes. The new age Jeremiah foresees will be

fundamentally different, the outcome of an inside-out transformation. The intentions of God's law, the desire for a society rooted in love, will be 'written on hearts' (see Ezekiel 11:19-20, 18:31, 36:26-27 and 2 Corinthians 3). Some people have words or symbols they associate with people or causes they care about tattooed on their skin. This shows passion and commitment. But how much greater is that shown by God, who has not only "inscribed you on the palms of his hands" (Isaiah 49:16), but also "writes on our hearts", ensuring that God's character and priorities become part of us.

The final verse of this passage is striking because of its intimacy. A new society is born, where a deep regeneration leads to people drawn together in a loving family, where social status is irrelevant and all know the almighty Lord as 'Abba'.

### [Psalm 51:1-12](#)

Isn't it amazing what some people collect! While those who do not share their passion may fail to see the point or even ridicule the avid collector, we can see that, sometimes, a committed few have been responsible for preserving invaluable and inspirational collections for future generations. For example, we should be immeasurably grateful that among our ancient ancestors in faith there were some who collected Hebrew poetry. Some were poems of lament; others were outpourings of thanksgiving; many were hymns, composed to be sung in communal gatherings of worship, remembrance and celebration. In doing so they compiled what became one of the most cherished books of the Bible, the Psalms.

Regardless of their ancient origins and despite the fact that some of their Hebrew poetic style is inevitably lost in translation, the Psalms *speak* to us. They speak *of* our Almighty Creator and Sustainer. They also give us a language with which to speak *with* our Creator. So, while the Psalms contain words *from* God and *about* God, they also include words *to* God. They give us a vocabulary of praise, grief, doubt, trust, anger, thanksgiving, and much more. And in Psalm 51 we are offered the language of confession and penitence par excellence.

This psalm (along with psalms 6, 32, 38, 102, 130, and 143) is one of seven, commonly known as the 'Penitential Psalms'. From as early as the time of Origen (AD184-253), these psalms were set apart for liturgical use for the confession of sin and repentance and deemed as being particularly appropriate during Lent.

This psalm's association with David's confession to adultery and murder in 2 Samuel 12:13 adds to its power. Its phrases evoke a sense of our transparency before our Creator.

Abraham Lincoln was probably right when he said, “You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.” However, when it comes to encounter with the Living God, we do well to remember God’s omniscience; God is all-knowing. The apostles knew it: “Lord, you know everyone’s heart” (Acts 1:24).

Psalm 51 takes the prayerful reader on a journey from confession in its first half into a sense of rising anticipation of restoration in the latter verses. David’s transgressions are not named, but his reflections on his actions and omissions bring into agonising focus the resulting alienation from God. His excruciating realisation, “Against you, you alone, have I sinned” (v4) reminds us of the heart cry of the prodigal in Jesus’ story, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (Luke 15:21).

### [Hebrews 5:5-10](#)

This is one of those mysterious passages! Those entrusted with the responsibility of preaching can sometimes be viewed as ‘experts’ who can understand even the most enigmatic texts. It is important to foster solidarity in our wrestling with scripture by being transparent about how we grapple with difficult passages. Sometime more than a single walk is needed to mull over their meaning!

Melchizedek (mentioned just twice in the Old Testament: Genesis 14:17-24 and Psalm 110:4) is an archetypal Christ figure. His name means ‘King of Righteousness’ and he is also referred to as the ‘King of Salem’ (peace).

The fact that the priesthood of Jesus is “for ever” is a big theme in Hebrews (5:6, 6:20, 7:17-28). Having made an offering for sin ‘once and for all’ (7:27), He gives people salvation *forever* (7:23-28). We are treated here to a clear explanation of how the new era that Jeremiah glimpsed is possible: it is because Jesus “became the source of eternal salvation” (v9).

Another emphasis in this epistle is that Jesus Christ is ‘another’ priest – not ‘another’ as in ‘one more’ but ‘another’ in terms of a totally different order (heteros). Paradoxically (or it might seem so at first), this passage argues for both the superiority of Jesus *and* reminds us of His humanity. “In the days of his flesh” (v7) assures us that, just as we face temptation, so did He. Like us, Jesus experienced the process of ‘growing up’ (Luke 2:52), hunger, thirst and tiredness (John 4:6-8, 31). While being of ‘another’ order in His priesthood, Jesus is also

the one who better than anyone can empathise with the circumstances we confront and the temptations we face. Just as we need to cultivate a life of prayer and discern the will of the Father in heaven, Jesus needed to do that too.

I found meditating on this passage challenging: Jesus is described using the language of priesthood and He also says to the disciples “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). Is there, then, a sense in which *we* are all called to be priests? Peter’s first letter comes to mind: “But you are a chosen people, *a royal priesthood* ...” (1 Peter 2:9). Dutch missiologist Stafan Paas suggests that ‘priesthood’ is a key metaphor for understanding Christian living as a missional minority in contemporary secular culture. What might it mean in practice to be ‘priests’, in-between people, mediating between our communities and God; and between God and our neighbours?

### [John 12:20-33](#)

All eyes turn to the digital clock: ‘3, 2, 1’ ... then an eruption of ecstatic shouts: “Happy New Year!” Barring pandemics(!), it happens every year – thousands flood into city and town squares to experience the sense of anticipation and euphoria.

Within John’s gospel there is an ultimate countdown. It is not related to an annual occurrence, but to a once-in-eternity, never-to-be-repeated event. John, writing some years afterwards, has already let us in on the mystery: “the Word became flesh and lived among us ... full of grace and truth” (John 1:14:). However, it is worth remembering that, to those present at the time, the identity of this remarkable man came gradually – revealed sign by sign, claim by claim.

John, more than other gospel writers, explains how the miracles of Jesus were more than actions in history: they provided windows into the character of God and the identity of Jesus. Having just miraculously fed thousands, Jesus revealed Himself as the ‘bread of life’ (6:48); while healing a blind man, Jesus claimed to be ‘the light of the world’ (9:5); His encounter with the Samaritan women at Jacob’s well (4:29) revealed God’s omniscience and perfect knowledge, and Jesus’ intimate relationship with His Father. And throughout his gospel, John regularly takes us back to that ticking clock: Jesus was aware of the eternal plan in which He stood centre stage. To His mother at the wedding in Cana Jesus said, “My time has not yet come ...” (John 2:4); seven times we are told, “... a time is coming ...”; His persecutors could not touch Him because “His time had not yet come ...” (John 7:30); as the time approaches for Jesus to die and rise and consummate the hope for all generations He prays, “Father, the time has come ...” (John 17:1).

Today's passage makes sense when understood in the context of the divine countdown. The request of the Greeks 'is like an exploding fuse in the mind of Jesus' writes Bruce Milne (*The Message of John*, IVP, 1993, p.184). No more 'not yet'; instead, 'the hour has come'.

Throughout John's gospel the universal scope of the gospel is clear. Jesus has come not just as redeemer of Israel. God's love is for the 'world' (3:16) and the sacrifice, light and life of Jesus are for all (1:29, 4:42, 6:33, 8:12). With the coming of these Greeks, the hour has come for Jesus to be 'glorified' (v23), to be 'lifted up' (v32).

References to sacrifice and death make it clear that Jesus recognised the enquiry of these non-Jewish seekers as signifying that events were entering their final stages. If we are in any doubt about personal application here, an explicit link is made between the culmination of Jesus' own ministry and a tenet of 'life through death' for all who follow him – a theme developed throughout the epistles (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:31 and 2 Corinthians 4:11-12).

## Sermon ideas

Although today's readings span different eras and diverse genres, a number of big theological themes recur.

### The unfolding of God's purposes

Underlying the passages from Jeremiah and John is a sense of God's plans for the redemption of all creation unfurling in accordance with a divine timetable. Jeremiah gets a distant view of what is to come and the writer to the Hebrews later uses these verses to explain what has, by that time, already occurred. John, more than any other writer, conveys an exciting sense of events building over time to their eventual climax. This perspective raises questions of where we are now and what it means to be in step with the Spirit. What might it mean in your context to discern what God is doing and to join in? Are there ways in which you can invite people to share their insights into that as part of this gathering?

### The heart of the problem and the problem of the heart

All of today's passages speak to the way in which God has dealt with the alienation between humankind and their Creator. Jeremiah announces the coming of a heart-level transformation. Psalm 51 provides a vocabulary for personal confession and restoration. The passages from Hebrews and John provide important teaching on how a just and loving God has dealt with the problem of rebellion. It is always good to re-visit the heart of the Christian faith, to explore fresh perspectives on the way of salvation – and experience again the wonder of God's grace and the question of our faithful response.

### **Unless a grain of wheat ...**

The John passage makes the call to sacrificial service explicit and promotes the vital Kingdom principle of 'life through death'. These are appropriate themes for Passion Sunday. The reminder in Hebrews that Christ is our 'high priest' invites us to reflect on what growing into greater Christlikeness might look in terms of being part of a 'royal priesthood' – and what that means in practice in the neighbourhood we live in and in the networks we are part of (when it comes to application it is important to recognise that the communities many people inhabit are no longer only defined by geography).

### **Hope and expectation**

The Jeremiah and John passages in particular carry a sense of hope-filled anticipation: of a new era to come, an age of greater intimacy between creation and Creator; the climax of Jesus' life – in death and resurrection. What now are our hopes and expectations? What has God promised that we eagerly anticipate? How should these hopes inform our perspective on life and shape our priorities and lifestyle?

## **Prayers**

### **Approach to God / Call to worship**

In my mind the role of an opening prayer in public worship is to foster a sense of consciously entering into God's presence (yes, we're always in the Lord's presence, but we are inspired to worship as our awareness of that is refreshed or heightened) – and doing so *together*. That 'togetherness' includes both those we gather with (whether physically or online), but also Christian people around the globe. This consciousness of both God and one another needs to be reflected in the language we use.

The following prayer draws on today's themes from Psalm 51, Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 5.

God of boundless mercy and unfailing love,  
our creator, saviour and redeemer,  
as part of the body of Christ around the world,  
as people called to live for You in the families and communities  
and networks in which You have placed us,  
we gather together to worship You:  
to proclaim Your goodness and to offer our thanks and praise.

Meet us here, we pray.

Join our hearts in wholehearted worship.

Breathe Your word into our souls;

engrave Your covenant of grace into our minds and hearts.  
Cultivate Your character in us,  
inspire and shape us,  
unite and encourage us,  
that our lives may reflect Your love and justice to the world.  
Amen

Alternatively, the following is an adaptation of a prayer attributed to Saint Augustine (354-430AD) and is an appropriate opening prayer for this fifth Sunday in Lent. It can be read by one reader, but also lends itself to either pairs of readers or multiple readers:

**Look upon us, O Lord,**  
and let all the darkness of our souls  
vanish before the beams of Your brightness.

**Fill us with holy love,**  
and open to us the treasures of Your wisdom.

**All our desire is known to You,**  
O perfect what You have begun,  
and what Your Spirit has awakened us to ask.

**We seek Your face,**  
turn Your face unto us and show us Your glory.

**Only then will our longing be satisfied,**  
and our peace shall be perfect.  
**Amen**

### **Thanksgiving**

All our prayers are to be infused with thanksgiving, but, of all the kinds of prayers we include in public worship, those that *focus* on thanksgiving have particular potential to inspire and encourage – especially if we facilitate individual reflection and participation.

Why not remind people of the importance of thanksgiving and then invite them to bring to mind and then to pray that for which they are especially grateful. Throughout the Psalms and the Epistles, we are urged with great passion towards thanksgiving. We are designed for gratitude. C.S. Lewis wrote extensively about thanksgiving and praise and was convinced that ‘we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but

completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation' (*Reflections on the Psalms*, HarperCollins, 2017 reprint, p.111). That's quite a thought: without thanksgiving, our experience of all we receive is considerably less than intended; it is incomplete, unconsummated as a God-given gift.

Here are a few verses from Paul's letters, which could be used as a reminder of the importance of thanksgiving and a prompt towards praise:

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, *always giving thanks to God the Father for everything*, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:19-20)

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it *with thanksgiving*. (Colossians 4:2)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, *with thanksgiving*, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6)

You could give people time to reflect on what they are especially grateful for and then invite them to verbalise that in just a word or two. If people are gathering online, you may be able to use a chat function for this. In the context of a physical gathering, people can be provided with sticky notelets and a pen and invited to share their contributions for thanksgiving and praise by adding these to a length of paper. Depending on the numbers of people involved, these can be drawn together into corporate prayer by reading them out or by rolling them into a scroll and making a symbolic offering of these to God as part of a more general and all-encompassing prayer of thanksgiving.

Prayers that give thanks for the ordinary and everyday are great for drawing people together into a sense of shared gratitude. I love this one adapted from a prayer by Vienna Cobb Anderson in *Prayers of Our Hearts* (Crossroad, 1959) and posted on [www.BeliefNet.com](http://www.BeliefNet.com)

God of all blessings,  
source of all life,  
giver of all grace:

We thank You for the gift of life:  
for the breath  
that sustains life,  
for the food of this earth  
that nurtures life,  
for the love of family and friends

without which there would be no life.

We thank You for the mystery of creation:  
for the beauty  
that the eye can see,  
for the joy  
that the ear may hear,  
for the unknown  
that we cannot behold filling the universe with wonder,  
for the expanse of space  
that draws us beyond the definitions of our selves.

We thank You for setting us in communities:  
for families  
who nurture our becoming,  
for friends  
who love us by choice,  
for companions at work,  
who share our burdens and daily tasks,  
for strangers  
who welcome us into their midst,  
for people from other lands  
who call us to grow in understanding,  
for children  
who lighten our moments with delight,  
for the unborn,  
who offer us hope for the future.

We thank You for this day:  
for life  
and one more day to love,  
for opportunity  
and one more day to work for justice and peace,  
for neighbours  
and one more person to love  
and by whom be loved,  
for Your grace  
and one more experience of Your presence,  
for Your promise:

to be with us,  
to be our God,  
and to give salvation.

For these, and all blessings,  
we give You thanks, eternal, loving God,  
through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen

### **Confession**

With Psalm 51 among the lectionary readings for today, there is a powerful and ready-made liturgical resource at our finger tips. It is important to leave sufficient silence for everyone to apply the words to their own lives.

You could use the words of the psalm itself – with appropriate pauses (perhaps using a translation that is unfamiliar to those involved) or one of the many prayers inspired by this psalm. I like the simplicity of the following prayer, written by Rev Abi, and posted on *Long and Winding Road* <http://vicarofwadley.blogspot.ca/> and made freely available on <https://re-worship.blogspot.com>. Its brevity lends itself to incorporating generous gaps for personal reflection and application.

Merciful God,  
Have mercy on our souls,  
according to Your unwavering love;  
according to Your abundant mercy  
wipe away our sins and the guilt we have carried for so long.

Instead write on our hearts Your love  
Your boundaries for our lives  
Your salvation that sets us free from our sins.  
To live the abundant life You have for each of us.

Lord we would see Jesus,  
We would love Jesus,  
We would follow Jesus  
We would serve Jesus.

Lord,  
Create in us clean hearts,  
Renew Your spirit within us.

Do not turn us away from Your presence,  
do not take Your holy spirit from us.  
Restore to us the joy of Your salvation,  
and sustain in us a willing spirit.  
Write on our hearts, Your love, O God, Amen

### **Intercession**

Here's a prayer of intercession adapted from a prayer by Rick Morley, a priest in the Episcopal Church in New Jersey. It is based on Psalm 51, but also draws on themes from today's reading from John 12 and connects with the Lenten journey:

Have mercy on us, O God, according to Your loving kindness;  
in your great compassion, hear our prayers.

We pray for the whole church,  
all the people of God,  
all who respond to the call of Jesus, 'follow me'.

Wash us through and through,  
and cleanse us from our sin.

We pray for our nation, for all the nations of the earth,  
and for all who govern and judge.  
Purge us from our sin,  
and we shall be pure.

We pray for those who hunger, those who thirst,  
those who cry out for justice,  
those who live under the threat of terror,  
and those without a place to lay their head.  
May they hear of joy and gladness,  
that those who are broken may rejoice.

We pray for those who are ill, those in pain,  
those under stress, and those who are lonely.  
Give them the joy of Your saving help,  
and sustain them with Your bountiful Spirit.

Create in us clean hearts, O God,

and renew a right spirit within us.  
We pray for those who have been bereaved  
Give them Your comfort and peace.

We especially pray for... *(named individuals in particular need)*  
We pray for... *(particular issues in the news, community or church)*

Lord Jesus,  
You taught your disciples that unless a grain of wheat  
falls into the earth and dies it remains just a single grain,  
but if it dies it bears much fruit;  
as we prepare our hearts to remember Your death and resurrection,  
grant us the strength and wisdom to serve and follow You,  
this day and always. Amen

### **Blessing / Closing prayer**

A collect from the Methodist tradition for this Sunday sets the tenor and emphasis for  
Passion Sunday and its milestone on the road to Calvary:

O God, who by the passion of thy blessed Son  
hast made the instrument of shameful death  
to be unto us the means of life and peace:  
Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ  
that we may gladly suffer shame and loss;  
for the sake of the same thy Son our Lord.  
Amen

*(The Book of Worship for Church and Home, 1965)*

Another option, having made the link between the hope and expectation expressed in the  
Jeremiah 31 passage and its fulfilment in Jesus, would be to adapt Paul's prayer from his  
letter to the Ephesians:

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith;  
May you be rooted and grounded in love;  
May you grasp the full breadth and length  
and height and depth of the love of Christ;  
May you know that love, which surpasses knowledge;  
May you be filled with all the fullness of God.  
Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,

according to His power that is at work within us,  
to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus  
throughout all generations,  
for ever and ever. Amen

For those focusing on the significance of this being Passion Sunday, the following (adapted from a prayer of John Wesley, 1703-1791) may be preferred. It lends itself to a single leader and congregational response, but could also be used with multiple readers.

O Jesus, poor and humble, unknown and despised, let me not be ashamed to follow You.  
Have mercy on me.

O Jesus, hated and persecuted, let me not be afraid to follow You.  
Have mercy on me.

O Jesus, betrayed and sold like an object, let me be content to call You master.  
Have mercy on me.

O Jesus, accused and wrongfully condemned, teach me to endure false accusation.  
Have mercy on me.

O Jesus, clothed in mockery and shame, let me not seek my own glory.  
Have mercy on me.

O Jesus, dragged, scourged, and bloodied, let me not faint in the fiery trial.  
Have mercy on me.

O Jesus, crowned with thorns and hailed with hate,

O Jesus, carrying our sins and our curse on the cross,

O Jesus, insulted, injured, grieving and humiliated,  
O Jesus, hanging on the accursed tree of the cross,

Bowing Your head, giving up Your Spirit,

Conform my whole life to Your love.  
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.

A suggested playlist of [songs from CH4 for use during Lent](#) can be found on the Church of Scotland website.

- CH4 550 – “As the deer pants for the water” – although inspired by Psalm 42, this song by Martin Nystrom offers an opportunity for recommitment following a journey through Psalm 51 from confession to anticipation of forgiveness and restoration.
- CH4 557 – “O Love that wilt not let me go” – George Matheson’s (1842-1906) classic hymn (‘the quickest composition I ever achieved. It was done in three minutes. It seemed to me at the time as if someone was dictating the thought to me, and also giving the expression.’ <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/hymn/557-o-love-that-wilt-not-let-me-go>) provides a profound reflection on the ‘life through death, glory through sacrifice’ theme of John 12:20-33
- CH4 757 – “Come all you people” – an a cappella rendering of this simple chant offers the opportunity for worshippers to urge one another to join in praise and worship.
- CH4 776 or 777 – “Kyrie eleison” [Lord have mercy] – One of these or another version could be used as a response to Psalm 51 and/or prayers of confession.
- “Jesus Walks Beside us in Scotland” [Fischy Music] – a song celebrating the new relationship between God and God’s people foreseen in today’s passage from Jeremiah. It offers a fresh and contemporary affirmation of the Lord’s presence with us in daily life in Scotland. Commissioned by the Church of Scotland in 2016, the lyrics, chords and an audio recording are available here: <https://www.resourcingmission.org.uk/music/contemporary/people-way/jesus-walks-beside-us-scotland>

## 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

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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